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In Between Green and Blue: Women in Alleppey and the (Re) Imagination of Dreams

How big can a woman dream, especially if she is from a rural part of India? Dreams and aspirations are fundamental elements of human life, but for many, their ability to dream is often shaped by their surroundings and circumstances. While women in India dream of a job and higher education, the society they live in frequently determines whether they have the "permission" to pursue them. In such spaces, stepping out of their kitchens and homes becomes, for many, the ultimate dream.



When I met the women of the Multifunctional Office Associate (MOA) training program in Kayamkulam, 47 kilometers from Alleppey town, I saw enthusiasm and happiness on their faces. The community camp, designed to equip students with skills in the hospitality sector, had 18 participants, most of whom were married and mothers. For these women, life had not been easy. Many had abandoned dreams of higher education or professional careers because of family responsibilities post-marriage. This is not uncommon in Kerala, particularly in the state's rural regions. Despite Kerala's high literacy rate and notable social development, opportunities for women in rural areas to dream and pursue their ambitions remain limited. According to the [Periodic Labour Force Survey \(PLFS\) 2023–24](#), the female workforce participation rate in rural Kerala is only 36.2%.



Stepping outside the confines of their homes was not an easy task for these women. In a society that often prioritizes domestic responsibilities over financial independence, simply attending this program was a 'radical' act. As Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade argue in their influential book [Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets \(2011\)](#), public spaces are not inherently gender-neutral. They are contested spaces where women are often seen as intruders unless their presence is deemed "legitimate." Yet here, a group of married women left their homes in the morning to attend classes, traveled

alone on buses, shared tea and snacks at the bus stop, and walked freely on the roads, unbothered by societal prejudices. By participating in this training, these women were reclaiming their right to occupy public spaces, not as dependents, but as individuals.

What made their journey even more inspiring was the solidarity they found in one another. Through shared experiences of juggling family responsibilities, navigating societal expectations, and battling self-doubt, they discovered strength. “I was hesitant to join at first,” admitted Reshma, a mother of two. “But seeing other women like me made me feel less alone.” Their solidarity extended beyond the classroom. During breaks, they shared their struggles and future aspirations, encouraging one another with kind words and shared laughter—often over mispronounced English words. This sense of community created a safe space where they could express themselves without fear of judgment.



Najeela, one of the students, said with a shy smile, “Everything is okay, except English.” Her comment sparked laughter among the group. The fear of speaking English was a common concern, but their eagerness to overcome this barrier was curious to watch. The trainer would encourage them to speak in English, often giving small topics like self-introduction. All the students will go and stand in front of the class one by one and try to finish the task given by the trainer.

When I asked why they wanted to join the program, most of them shared a common answer: We always wanted a job, but responsibilities at home held us back. How long can we sit at home depending on our husband’s money? We need some kind of independence. For many of these women, this was not just a training program but a second chance, a chance to regain their sense of agency and self-worth.

By entering these spaces, the women of Kayamkulam were asserting their right to be seen, heard, and valued outside of their homes. They were not just gaining skills; they were gaining the freedom to imagine, to dream, and to create a future for themselves. Most importantly, they were building solidarity with one another. In a world that often emphasizes individuality, it was exciting to witness the emergence of a supportive community and the budding of female friendships.

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