Uniqueness of 'Kudumbashree' SHG in Kerala

What is the issue?

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- The 'Kudumbashree' women in Kerala played a significant role in the relief operations after the recent floods.
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- It is essential in this backdrop to understand how 'Kudumbashree' is effective and different from other Self Help Groups (SHGs).
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What is 'Kudumbashree'?

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- The 'Kudumbashree' SHG was started in 1998 by the CPI (M)-led government in Kerala.
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- The Kudumbashree groups are, however, not affiliated to any political party.
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- It was envisioned as a part of the People’s Plan Campaign and local self-governance, with women at the centre of it.
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- In its conceptualisation, it was markedly different from the self-help group (SHG) movements in many parts of India.
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- The thrift and credit activities at the grassroots level through the formations of saving groups is a common feature.
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- However, the structure and functioning of the Kudumbashree model largely differed.
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What is the governance structure?

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- Kudumbashree has a three-tier structure.
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- The first is the basic unit which is the neighbourhood groups (NGs).
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- There could be several such units within a ward and they are networked through the area development societies (ADS).
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- All ADSs are federated through the community development societies (CDS).
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- There are core committees of elected coordinators at all three levels.
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- There are at least five in each NG, seven or more at the ADS level and around 21 at the CDS level.
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- Unlike in other States, all the coordinators are elected in Kerala.
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- Each Kudumbashree member has a vote, and direct elections for the NG coordinators are held every three years.
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- These people, in turn, elect the coordinators of the ADS who elect the members of the CDS.
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- A majority of members of the coordinator groups have to belong to women below the poverty line or from comparatively poorer sections.
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- Besides, there is reservation for Dalit and Adivasi women.
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- At the district and State levels, employees/officers of the government are appointed on deputation to help the Kudumbashree groups.
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What are the other features?

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- The micro-enterprises undertaken by the women NGs in Kerala strengthen the community bonds.
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- The firms include that for organic vegetable growing, poultry and dairy, catering and tailoring.
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- The community farms run by Kudumbashree groups are now acknowledged

as a critical avenue for the rejuvenation of agricultural production in Kerala.
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- Kudumbashree training courses are also quite comprehensive, and include
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i. women’s rights
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ii. knowledge of constitutional and legal provisions
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iii. training in banking practices
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iv. training in skills to set up micro-enterprises
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- It has thus made a huge contribution in socially empowering the women of Kerala.
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How is it a unique model?

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- In other States, SHGs came to be dominated by women from better-off families or from powerful castes.
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- This led to unhealthy hierarchies in which poorer women and Dalit women were denied decision-making powers.
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- Over the years, women dropped out from these sections for a number of reasons.
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- Eventually, the social potential of the SHGs to challenge dominant structures of gender bias at the local level weakened.
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- But, the Kudumbashree model works with a socially representative leadership.
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- This secular composition acts as a facilitator for the secularisation of public spaces.
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- This ‘Made in Kerala’ model can be implemented across India, if it is done with the same secular and gender-sensitive spirit.
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Source: The Hindu

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