

## Vocational training for women empowerment: Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara's vision

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### ABSTRACT

The present study attempted to describe the initiatives of Saint (St.) Kuriakose Elias Chavara on vocational training and women's empowerment. The study narrated the present condition of one of his vocational training initiatives known as "rosary-making," which is in vogue at Koonammavu Village in Kerala state, India. The study employed a multi-method research design approach to carry out the present study. It included historical, qualitative, and quantitative methods in sequence. In the historical method, the study employed document analysis of primary and secondary sources. As a part of the qualitative method, the study conducted a semi-structured interview with 10 rosary-making entrepreneurs in Koonammavu. As a part of the quantitative method, the study administered a questionnaire to 100 families who are actively involved in the rosary-making business. Document analysis revealed that St. Chavara's initiative on rosary-making vocational training for nuns was a contribution to women's empowerment. Narrative thematic analysis revealed 5 main themes and 10 subthemes in Chavara's contribution. Quantitative data revealed that rosary-making emerged as a livelihood, business, and source of income for many families. The study recommends future researchers focus on all the initiatives of St. Chavara in the realm of vocational training and women's empowerment.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The social conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Kerala were highly patriarchal [1], [2]. The women were economically and socially backward and never had been at the forefront in different walks of life [3], [4]. The social institutions were caste system, child marriage, widowhood, slavery, and dowry system, were part of the historical and cultural practices in some regions of Kerala which hindered the progress of the status of women in society [5], [6]. Social restrictions and evils like untouchability, unapproachability, and unsee ability were very high which disturbed the women, and debarred them from the mainstream of society and education was forbidden to them [7], [8]. Women's possibilities and economic freedom were restricted due to social constraints and the absence of educational institutions [9], [10]. For women, there was no official system of vocational training program.

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century society of Kerala witnessed remarkable social changes due to the emergence of various institutions and agencies [11]. The colonization process brought much alteration in the status of women. The various Christian missionary interventions and activities firmly indulged to change the structure of society and they launched a series of programs to raise the standards of women too [12]. The

central aspiration of Christian missionary activities was founding schools irrespective of caste, gender, and religion [13]. They tried to change the hierarchical structure of the 19th-century society of Kerala [14], [15].

Christian missionaries indeed played significant changes in the history of handicrafts and vocational training in Kerala [16]. In the newly established boarding school, London Missionary Society introduced new techniques and skills in handicrafts and vocational training irrespective of caste and gender [17]–[19]. They set up educational institutions that focused not only on academic subjects but also on practical skills and vocational training. This helped in the development of skilled artisans and craftsmen [20]–[22]. The girls were provided special attention in their school and taught sewing and embroidery [23], [24]. They emphasized handicrafts training for women and set up lace and embroidery industries and provided opportunities to earn a livelihood [25]. The extensive training in lace making helped women folk to raise their standard of living [26], [27]. This approach allowed women to balance their domestic responsibilities while engaging in income-generating activities.

The Christian missionary activities in the socio-cultural field had no popular effect, and it was concentrated only in some parts of Kerala [28]. At this juncture, the native missionary activities of the 19th-century society of Kerala brought tremendous changes in the life of women and society [29]. Saint (St.) Chavara was a pioneer among them [30], [31]. This study investigated the effects of St. Chavara's vocational training and women's empowerment initiatives. While previous studies have explored the impact of St. Chavara's educational initiatives on society and the educational field. The former researchers have not explicitly addressed the influence of St. Chavara's rosary-making vocational training initiatives on women's empowerment in Kerala society. Thus, present study proposes following research questions: i) whether the historical documents reveal rosary making as one of the St. Chavara's visions of vocational training? ii) whether St. Chavara's vision of vocational training of rosary-making empowered women in Koonammavu Village of Kerala? and iii) whether St. Chavara's vision of vocational training of rosary-making prevalent even today?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Huis *et al.* [32] propose theory of three-dimensional model of women empowerment, which guides the present study. They suggested empowerment of women demonstrated in three dimensions, micro, meso, and macro. The rosary-making industry at Koonammvu Village in Kerala provides an interesting context to observe the demonstration of individual, relational, and societal changes, particularly with regards to women's role and empowerment. Women participating in the rosary making vocational training unit acquire personal traits and qualities such as self-respect, self-confidence, self-efficacy, leadership qualities, and high level of financial independence which resemble those outlined in Huis' micro model development. The women in the rosary making unit attain dynamic relationships with partners, relatives and social networks and accomplish freedom of mobility and equal earning members in the family are similar to Huis' meso model of women empowerment. Women achieve economic and political involvement; social and gender equality and high levels of social status are related to the Huis' macro model of women empowerment.

The present study draws input from theory of Bandura's [33] self-efficacy. According to Bandura, self-efficacy encompasses one's belief in their capacity to excel in particular situations or effectively accomplish tasks. This study demonstrates how vocational training in Koonammavu enabled women to effectively connects their specific skills. A strong sense of self-efficacy can significantly influence the women in the rosary making scheme in Koonammavu, motivating them to effectively tackle their goals, tasks, and challenges. The external experiences and self-perception are one of the influential factors in the rosary making scheme in Koonammavu defined by Bandura [33]. The rosary making programs in Koonammavu are designed to progressively enhance the social persuasion and self-efficacy of women, empowering them to succeed in their chosen crafts. Through the combined influences of social persuasion and self-efficacy, these women are motivated to increase their daily earnings and achieve greater economic independence. It helps to improve their self-confidence, enabling them to conquer everyday life challenges and overcome their financial imbalances.

## 3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Globally women are construed as feeble and are weak physically, psychologically, and financially than men. Women do not have access to financial resources and are less likely than males to acquire the education, information, and skills necessary for economic growth. Inadequate gender norms and traditional stereotype create barriers to women empowerment [34]. Various studies prove that vocational training programs help women overcome prejudices and traditional barriers by giving them the information, abilities, and real-world experience they need to thrive in a variety of fields [35], [36]. By providing women with

employable skills, vocational training programs can effectively tackle these issues by empowering them to find respectable jobs and make steady earnings.

Rosaries are considered as a sacred prayer tool made of beads looped together and the Catholic Church's devotional traditions are deeply ingrained in the rosary [37]. Rosary making has a long history that dates back to the early ages of Christianity. The Dominican Order's founder, St. Dominic, is credited for popularizing the rosary's use in the 12th and 13th centuries to counter heresy and encourage devotion to the Virgin Mary [38]. Rosary-making evolved into an artistic technique, with talented artisans employing materials like wood, metal, glass, and precious stones to create elaborate rosaries [39], [40]. Rosary-making is still a beloved tradition today, with craftspeople all over the world creating rosaries in a variety of forms and patterns to support believers in their devotion and spiritual journey.

#### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

As a social reformer, St. Chavara played an invaluable role in advancing the cause of women and dedicated to women's empowerment. His impact is especially evident in Koonammavu village, where his efforts to improve women's status through vocational training initiatives continue to make a difference. This study aimed to explore extend of St. Chavara's contributions to women's empowerment through vocational training programs. Hence the objectives of this study were to: i) to describe the initiatives of St. Chavara on vocational training and women empowerment, ii) to capture the vocational training received and success stories of rosary-making entrepreneurs at Koonammavu village, and iii) to describe the socio-demographic details as an indicator of women empowerment.

#### 5. METHOD

The present study employed multi-method research design. The study aimed to explore the idea of vocational training for women as conceived by St. Chavara leading to women empowerment. The study employed historical, qualitative, and quantitative research methods and are described below.

##### 5.1. Historical method

The critical objective is to explore St. Chavara's initiatives on vocational training and women empowerment. The study describes how St. Chavara initiated "rosary making" vocational training in Koonammavu. There are numerous writings and researches on St. Chavara. The researcher visited libraries, museums, and archives to investigate the origin and spread of vocational training, particularly rosary making initiatives introduced by St. Chavara in Koonammavu. The study employed historical analysis [41] on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are letters, chronicles and literary works of St. Chavara. There are more than 13 primary sources related to the life and activities of St. Chavara. Among these, the researcher selected 3 primary sources related to the vocational training initiatives of St. Chavara. Secondary sources are books, research theses, and published articles of researchers on the contributions of St. Chavara. There are more than 80 secondary sources on St. Chavara. Among these, the researcher selected 10 secondary sources related to the present study. The study employed document analysis [42] on selected 3 primary and 10 secondary sources. The researcher sorts data from primary and secondary sources.

##### 5.2. Qualitative method

Under the qualitative method, the study employed narrative thematic analysis [43]. There are more than 30 rosary-making entrepreneurs in Koonammavu. They are successful businessmen in rosary making. By using purposive sampling method, the researcher selected 10 rosary-making entrepreneurs from them. The researcher allocated pseudonyms P1, P2, ... P10 to identify the interviewees and to continue confidentiality. Table 1 represents the demographic details of the interviewees.

Table 1. Interviewees' demographic details

Participant	Gender	Age	Number of workers	Business enterprise
P1	M	61	800	Rosary making
P2	M	58	350	Rosary making
P3	M	59	425	Rosary making
P4	M	55	260	Rosary making
P5	M	42	290	Rosary making
P6	M	51	150	Rosary making
P7	M	35	290	Rosary making
P8	M	43	215	Rosary making
P9	M	42	145	Rosary making
P10	M	62	90	Rosary making

The researchers developed a semi-structured interview schedule. The initial draft of the interview schedule included the items to get the scope and present condition of rosary-making industries in Koonammavu. The study obtained experts opinion for the final draft of the interview schedule. The items of the interview modified according to the expert opinion. The researcher designed a semi-structured interview schedule to explore the scope of rosary-making enterprises in Koonammavu. This schedule aimed to assess the current state of rosary-making, examine its reach among women, and evaluate its impact on their empowerment. It also included questions to determine the profitability of these enterprises and identify the primary beneficiaries. The items of interview schedule are given below:

- a. How many years have you been working in the rosary-making industry?
  - Is this business inherited from your ancestors?
  - If so, how many years did your ancestors work in this rosary making industry?
- b. How many workers do you have?
  - What is the breakdown of female and male workers?
  - How many rosaries do your workers produce per month?
  - What is the maximum income your workers earn?
  - Is rosary making the primary source of livelihood for your workers?
- c. Is this business profitable?
  - Can you increase your savings through this rosary making industry?
- d. Where do you source the raw materials for rosary making?
  - How do you collect the finished rosaries from the rosary makers?
- e. How do you market and sell your rosaries?
  - Is there demand for your rosaries in the local market/outside Kerala?
  - In which countries do you export your rosaries?
  - Do you utilize online services for selling your rosaries?

The researchers conducted face to face interview with 10 rosary-making entrepreneurs and obtained consent from them before collecting data. The researchers explained the purpose of the study and guaranteed the confidentiality of the collected data for all the interviewees. The researchers gave proper directions for the easy collections of data. The data encrypted in secured drives that only the researchers could access. The collected data analyzed with narrative thematic analysis. The results discussed in analysis part.

### 5.3. Quantitative method

Under the quantitative method, the researchers developed a questionnaire measuring the socio-demographic details of families pursuing rosary making as a business enterprise. The development of questionnaire included construction of draft items and subjected them to a panel of experts for face and content validation. After incorporating the suggestions, researcher conducted a pilot study on 10 rosary-making families of Koonammavu Village to understand the response type; the item analysis indicated a good reliability of the questionnaire. Researcher administered the questionnaire to 100 families who are actively involved in rosary-making business at Koonammavu Village of Kerala, India. The researcher approached the rosary-making families at Koonammavu Village and obtained data from the families who have readily consented be part of the study. The researchers explained the objectives of this present study and distributed the questionnaire. The researchers explained each question to the participants to obtain an accurate data. The study guaranteed the confidentiality of the collected data for research and publication only to the participants. Researchers saved the collected data in a password-protected file and the data is accessible only to the researchers. Researchers analyzed the collected data in terms of percentage [44]. Study presented the percentage analysis result in the result section.

## 6. RESULTS

The present study followed a multi-method research design; the results are presented in three sections. Section 1 dealt historical analysis. Section 2 dealt with the qualitative analysis. Section 3 dealt with the quantitative analysis.

### 6.1. Historical analysis

The important primary and secondary sources were gathered and analyzed according to the study's objectives. The primary and secondary sources' document analysis reveals how St. Chavara took initiatives to start rosary-making industry in Koonammavu convent and how he made arrangements for the same. St. Chavara brought trainees of rosary-making in Koonammavu convent. It reveals an accurate perception of St. Chavara's ideas of vocational training and women empowerment.

### 6.1.1. Results from primary sources

The selected primary sources are testament of a loving Father, Chronicle of Koonammanu convent and letters written by St. Chavara. As per the document analysis, the primary sources clearly show the commencement of St. Chavara's vocational training program especially rosary-making for women in Koonammavu convent. Testament of a loving father, written by St. Chavara in 1868 for his parish in Kainakary, provides greatness of labor. His enthusiastic spirit on vocational training is evident in the following passage from his book: "as girls reach twelve years of age, a period of extreme caution in their development, care should be taken to ensure that they are trained at home in some occupation proper to their age..." [45]. This sentence clearly indicates that he possessed a vision in which girls were encouraged to be courageous and attain economic independence through vocational training. *The Chronicle of Koonammavu Convent* narrates the daily happenings in the convent and also in society. This chronicle provides how much St. Chavara cared about women's empowerment. In 1866, he teamed up with Italian missionary Fr. Beccaro to set up a vocational training unit for women in newly founded convent in Koonammavu [46]. St. Chavara articulated the fundamental goal of this convent: "girls should be taught spiritual practices and handicrafts by nuns or other religious figures, potentially with the intention of preparing them for a life of religious service..." [47].

In order to achieve women's empowerment, St. Chavara arranged vocational training and craft works for nuns. He was sure that if the nuns of the convent of Koonammavu were given vocational training, they could be the trainers of the future pillars of the society. The Chronicle acknowledges that St. Chavara brought two European nuns from Fort Cochin to the Koonammavu convent to provide guidelines to the nuns in stitching, needlework, and flower making. The nuns had expressed gratitude towards the personal initiatives of St. Chavara in the training of handicrafts and recorded it in the Chronicle: "That day at 4 p.m. St. Chavara came to our convent, showed us how to make rosary and made us do it by ourselves..." "Again, came on the 7<sup>th</sup> day; then brought for us beads, tongs and metal wires for making rosaries..." Thus St. Chavara instigated vocational training to resolve the burning social issues and the chief beneficiaries of this scheme were not only the nuns but also the weak and destitute women of the neighborhood of Koonammavu convent.

One of the letters written by St. Chavara to Fr. Chandy Kattakayam highlights his strong desire to promote handicrafts and empower the women at Koonammavu convent. St. Chavara recognized the importance of providing the sisters with the necessary materials to create their handicrafts, including good quality printed pictures for scapulars. Additionally, St. Chavara's request for ten rosaries by the superior of the Koonammavu convent demonstrates his dedication to supporting the sisters and their work [48]. Throughout the letter, it is evident that the nuns were actively engaged in rosary making in the art of rosary making during Koonammavu in Chavara's era.

### 6.1.2. Results from secondary sources

The explanations from secondary sources supported the diffusion of vocational training especially rosary making project that envisioned St. Chavara in Koonammavu. Table 2 represents the significant secondary sources are interpreted and gathered the prominent concepts. Table 2 represents analyses on vocational training initiatives of St. Chavara from secondary sources.

Table 2. Analyses on vocational training initiatives of St. Chavara from secondary sources

Authors	Findings
[49]	St. Chavara founded a women's congregation to make women self-sufficient. To achieve this, he opened a boarding school with lessons in Malayalam, Tamil, English, and Latin, along with vocational training in stitching, cooking, music, rosary making, and flower decoration.
[50]	Through vocational training in Koonammavu, St. Chavara brought holistic changes in women's lives and focused on personality development, acquiring life skills and economic and socio-cultural development through the economic development of society.
[51]	St. Chavara's profound vision for women's empowerment exemplifies the transformative impact of the convent he established in Koonammavu, which emerged as a channel for impactful social work.
[52]	Despite the fact that the 19th-century society of Kerala was not pertinent to any institution to elevate the self-sustenance of women, St. Chavara envisaged that vocational training was essential to endorse self-employment opportunities for women.
[53]	This model of empowering women in Kerala was truly ahead of its time, and even had relevance to European society at the time.
[54]	St. Chavara diligently worked to teach the nuns handicrafts and foster their enlightenment, aiming to empower women in the community.
[55]	It is a crucial step towards gender equality and economic development, and his vocational training was a key to unlock the potential of women.
[56]	The techniques used by St. Chavara were highly modern in nature; he equipped the women as skilled laborers through vocational training.
[57]	It was astonishing to find out that more than 3000 families in Koonammavu Village make a living by crafting rosaries- a livelihood opportunity envisioned by St. Chavara 150 years ago, now a reality for the community.
[58]	The major aim of the convent's founding was the integral development of women; for this, rosary making was started in the convent.

## 6.2. Qualitative analysis

The researcher interviewed 10 entrepreneurs through semi-structured interview schedule to understand the present condition of rosary-making industries in Koonamamvu. Employing a narrative thematic analysis, the findings are underscored as themes and subthemes. The interview results of 10 large-scale entrepreneurs are given in Table 3. This section discusses the important elements of the theme and subtheme evolved from narrative thematic analysis method from transcripts of interview schedule of 10 rosary-making entrepreneurs. The important elements evolved the key characteristics, meaning of themes and subthemes, text samples, and review supports.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes of qualitative data

Experience in rosary-making industry	Number of workers	Profitable business	Source of raw materials	Exports
New source of income	The number of rosaries per month	Savings	Agents of raw materials	Local/district markets
Inherited business	Incomes per month Livelihood of employees	Changing locality		International markets

### 6.2.1. Experience in rosary-making industry

Majority rosary-making entrepreneurs have more than 20 years' experience in this industry. One entrepreneur has 41 years of experience in this field and he has a huge network of business of rosaries. Four of them started this business in a small range; in the course of time, it became a large-scale industry and they have more than 10 years of experience. Two of them have more than 25 years of experience. All are delightful to be part in this profitable business. The youngsters are eager to invest in this business.

P2-[...] with 41 years of experience, I am fully satisfied and deeply fulfilled in this field ...

P5-[...] I have 29 years of experience in this rosary-making industry ...

#### a. New source of income

Most entrepreneurs opined that the demands for rosaries increased in foreign markets per year, prompting young entrepreneurs to express eagerness to venture into this business. According to them, it requires less investment and generates more income. Educated youngsters are particularly interested in investing in this business. They are eager to find out the new markets abroad. Their enthusiasm reflects the growing potential of this industry. As they continue to invest resources into this business, the rosary market is dignified to experience significant expansion and success on a global scale.

P3-[...] having completed my MBA, I find this business to be both profitable and less risky ...

#### b. Inherited business

Three entrepreneurs were inherited this business from their forefathers. They strongly believe that St. Chavara started this endeavor of rosary making handicrafts in Koonammavu convent soon after its foundation. They reminisce that, initially, he gave training to nuns, who then trained the women from the neighboring areas of Koonammavu convent. In course of time rosary making became a profitable business. All agree that the rosary making has become popular among all people in Koonammavu Village.

P1-[...] my grandparents' grandparents were started this rosary making ...

P4-[...] my grandma became active employee in rosary-making after getting married, she learnt it from neighboring women in Koonammavu ...

P6-[...] my great grandparents had 215 women rosary makers ...

### 6.2.2. Number of workers

The results of the 10 entrepreneurs' interview reveal 3,015 women are currently working in this rosary-making industry. All of the entrepreneurs unanimously agreed that the primary beneficiaries of this rosary-making industry are women and they spent most of their time for these handicrafts. The household women are utilizing their leisure time to craft rosaries, generating a supplementary income that help to meet their daily living expenses and fund education of their children. According to entrepreneur's manual labor is no longer a requirement to make rosaries, driving a remarkable increase in women involvement.

#### a. The number of rosaries per month

There are three categories among rosary-making employees, full-timers, part-timers and leisure timers. Most interviewers shared full-time workers have the capacity to craft 80 rosaries daily, yielding an

income of 8 to 10 rupees per rosary. The full-time workers produce over 1900 rosaries each month. The part-timers and leisure timers make rosaries 30 to 50 per day according to their convenience. The numbers of rosaries produced is depends upon the speed, demand and time allocation of the employees.

P2-[...] full-timers produce around 1700 rosaries each month ...

P3-[...] full timers produce around 1400, part-timers produce around 900, and leisure-timers produce around 400 rosaries each month ...

P9-[...] full-timers produce 1650 rosaries each month ...

#### b. Incomes per month

Full time rosary workers earn more than 18000 per month, depend on speed of production and the types of the rosaries they craft, whether wire or thread-based. The interviewers mentioned thread rosaries are easier to make than other types of rosaries, but they generate less income. Wire rosaries take more time to make, but they generate higher income. Part-time and leisure-time workers earn 6000 to 9000 per month.

P5-[...] full-timers earn 19000 incomes per month ...

P8-[...] full-timers earn more than 15000 per month ...

P10-[...] part-timers earn more than 9000 per month ...

#### c. Livelihood of employees

The majority women in Koonammavu depend on rosary making for their livelihood. They earn more than 15000 and spend it for their children's educational purposes and day-to-day affairs. College students are getting involved in rosary-making to manage their fees and meet educational expenses. Over 30 students buy raw materials from one of the entrepreneurs for this purpose. Most women continue rosary-making after they get married, teach it to family members, relatives and friends, and create a rosary-making group in their in-law's region. Women in the workforce depend solely on rosary making as their primary source of income, while some depend on it partially, and others use it to save for the future. It is inspiring to see how these women have become enthusiastic employees in their new regions and have attracted many people to become a part of this rosary-making network.

P3-[...] women spend their income to buy vegetables, dresses, Gold and meet educational expenses of their children ...

P4-[...] some women spend their income independently for marriage purposes of their daughters ...

P7-[...] women are self-sufficient to meet their day to day expenses ...

### 6.2.3. Profitable business

The demand for rosaries is rising in foreign countries, making it a lucrative business with low overhead costs and high profitability. The entrepreneur's comment there is no need huge machines, technologies, equipment, buildings, or large amounts of capital. There is not much need for greater manpower, literacy, or intelligence. Entrepreneurs can easily find workers within their locality. Even uneducated individuals and those with disabilities can make rosaries and earn an income.

P5-[...] compared to my expenses, capital investment, and manpower, my business is profitable ...

P10-[...] the demand for rosaries does not fluctuate, as they are used for religious purpose. So, it is a stable and income earning business ...

#### a. Savings

Interviewees reveal that the rosary making industry is an income generating business that enables them to achieve financial success. International relations and dealings contribute to increased savings and facilitate smooth operations at all business levels. These savings allow for business expansion and the training and recruitment of more educated employees in the fields of export and import.

P4-[...] I have savings through this rosary making industry than before ...

P6-[...] it is a profitable business and I can save the profits ...

P7-[...] this business help me to attain high social status and savings ...

#### b. Changing locality

The participants comment that Koonammavu become the hub of rosary making on the world map, exporting products worldwide to countries. The villagers call Koonammavu as "little Rome" from which they ship rosaries to different parts of India and beyond. The rosary-making industry has brought about a

significant transformation in the economy of Koonammanu. The shift from an agro-based economy to a rosary-making industry-based economy indicates the changing times. The rise in demand for rosaries, both locally and internationally, has boosted the local economy, making it self-sufficient.

P1-[...] Koonammavu is famous for the products of rosary-making ...

P7-[...] Rosaries produced in Koonammavu have a prominent role in the industrial map of Kerala ...

P8-[...] Koonammavu became self-sufficient village economy ...

#### 6.2.4. Source of raw materials

Most of entrepreneurs import the bulk of raw materials for rosary-making such as wire, twine, chain, cord, wood, glass, agate, quartz, opal, gemstones, beads, and medals from China and Varanasi. There are online booking services for rosary raw materials. Twice a month, agents import raw materials for entrepreneurs based on their bookings. The small size of rosary raw materials makes them easy to transport.

P9-[...] twice a month I visit China to purchase raw materials. I receive high-quality, varied and colorful raw materials ...

P10-[...] I import raw materials from China and Varanasi ...

There are many agents of raw materials work under each entrepreneur. These agents collect the raw materials from entrepreneurs and distribute it to the women workers. While some women work from home, others devote themselves to crafting rosaries in small, entrusted sheds arranged by entrepreneurs. The agents collect the finished products and entrust it to the entrepreneurs. They help in the packing and all process of exports.

P1-[...] I have 6 agents who help to distribute the raw materials and collect the finished rosaries ...

P8-[...] my agents have crucial role in the huge network of rosary business ...

P10-[...] I have 9 agents in abroad who facilitate the streamlined procurement of raw materials ...

#### 6.2.5. Exports

The primary markets for the product are abroad, making export and import units essential. Interviewees reveal that the agents and assistance are inevitable in marketing of rosaries. 16 well-educated boys between 23 and 28 are involved in this business's export and import section under one of the entrepreneurs. The younger generations are interested in investing in this industry and exploring new markets abroad. This indicates that the rosary-making industry has the potential for further growth and expansion.

P9-[...] my two sons have completed MBAs, and daughter-in-law has completed her degree in medicine. They handle the export unit of my business ...

##### a. Local/district markets

There are five rosary shops in Koonammavu where a significant portion of rosaries are distributed in all over Kerala. Retailers and wholesalers flock to purchase these rosaries, meeting high demands within Kerala's markets. The women of Koonammavu produce the rosaries available in these shops. The agents collect the rosaries from these shops and sell them at the main Christian pilgrim centres and shrines in Kerala.

P3-[...] the rosaries purchase the retail and wholesale dealers and sold it to the shops of Kerala ...

##### b. International markets

The demand for rosaries is rising in foreign countries, making it a lucrative business with low overhead costs and high profitability. Koonammavu become the hub of rosary making on the world map, exporting products worldwide to countries such as USA, Jerusalem, Rome, Italy, England, South Africa, Namibia, Canada, Germany, U. K, Dubai, Mauritius, Malaysia, the East Indies, and Brazil. With over 20 agents in each country, rosaries from Koonammavu are reaching far beyond its boundaries. St. Chavara began the centuries-old tradition as a congregation-based initiative. It expanded as rosary merchants collaborated with village women and eventually passed on the rosaries to businesses for global export.

P3-[...] my customers are spread out in the U. K, Dubai, Mauritius, and Brazil ...

P6-[...] I export them to European countries, South Africa, Namibia, Canada and Germany ...

P7-[...] I export my finished products to Israel, Bangladesh, China, the Netherlands, Africa, the United States, the Middle East and European countries ...



### 6.3. Quantitative analysis

The investigator administered a questionnaire to 100 rosary-making families in Koonammavu. The results of the questionnaire gathered according to the percentage analysis. The results of which are discussed below. Table 4 presents the results of the percentage analysis conducted using the questionnaire. From Table 4, it is clear that, in the rosary-making industry in Koonammavu, 98% of workers are women, highlighting women as the primary beneficiaries of this endeavor. Most of the workers are over 40 (72%), some are between 30 and 40 (22%), and a few are under 30 (6%), highlighting how important rosary making is for them. About 66% of women view this income-generating program as a tradition passed from their ancestors, while 34% consider it a new source of income after getting married.

Nearly half, 48% of women can make around 1500 rosaries, 37% can make between 100 to 1500, and 15% can make below 1000, highlighting that this skill has become an integral part of their lives. Approximately 41% of women enjoy a monthly income exceeding 10,000, while 25% fall within the 7,000-10,000 range, and another 22% earn between 5,000 and 7,000. The remaining percentage represents women whose income is below 5000. The distribution of women's vocational training experience is noteworthy, with 26% possessing a remarkable 26 years of expertise, while 29% boast a substantial 20-30 years of experience. 34% exhibit a robust professional background spanning 10-20 years, emphasizing the considerable employability of women in this field. Of these women, 72% depend solely on the income derived from rosary making for their livelihood, while the remaining 28% partially rely on this source of income for their sustenance.

Table 4. The descriptive statistics of rosary-making families

Item No.	Demographic variables	Categories	N (100)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Female	98	98
		Male	2	2
2	Age group	Above 40 years	72	72
		30 to 40 years	22	22
		Below 30 years	6	6
3	Educational Status	Primary level	15	15
		Secondary level	68	68
		College level	17	17
4	Nature	Inherited	66	66
		New source	34	34
5	No. of rosaries per month	Above 1500	48	48
		1500-1000	37	37
		Below 1000	15	15
6	Monthly income from rosary making	Above 10000	41	41
		7000-10000	25	25
		7000 -5000	22	22
		Below 5000	12	12
7	Years of working in rosary making	Above 30 years	26	26
		20-30 years	29	29
		10-20 years	34	34
		Below 10 years	11	11
8	Rosary making as livelihood	Only livelihood	72	72
		Partially livelihood	28	28
9	Time of working	Full timers	65	65
		Part timers	24	24
		Leisure timers	11	11
10	Believers- St. Chavara as initiator of rosary making	Strongly agree	78	78
		Agree	15	15
		Disagree	7	7

## 7. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to deliver the initiatives of St. Chavara on vocational training and women empowerment and the present condition of rosary-making in Koonammavu. We found through the multi-method research design, St. Chavara initiated many vocational training programs, among which rosary-making initiative stand the icon of women empowerment. By using document analysis of the primary and secondary sources, the study revealed valuable insights into St. Chavara's vision for women's empowerment and how he sought to create economic opportunities for women through vocational training. The previous studies have also revealed through the practice of small business training, women can improve their economic status [59]. The content analysis of The Chronicle of a Koonammavu Convent correlated St. Chavara brought trainers and materials for rosary making in newly established convent in Koonammavu. At first, he taught how to make rosaries to the nuns in convent, in return the nuns gave practices to neighboring women in Koonammavu.

The study found that by course of time rosary making became a huge business project empowering woman as primary beneficiaries. Similar findings are visible in a former study [60] which shows economic empowerment of women through household diary. Recent research studies also explored that vocational and handicrafts trainings help the womenfolk for their skill development [61], poverty reduction [62], and efficient in industrial work [63]. The proposed method in this study revealed that by equipping women with vocational skills, St. Chavara helped to break down traditional barriers and transform social attitudes towards gender and caste. This approach to skill development and economic empowerment is still relevant today, and it continues to inspire and empower women in Koonammavu and beyond.

The result of the questionnaire survey of 100 rosary making families in Koonammavu revealed that the women earn over 10,000 rupees per month through rosary making. Thus, women are the major beneficiaries of this industry. The study explored that the natives of Koonammavu strongly believe that this rosary-making was taught by St. Chavara to their ancestors soon after the foundation of the Koonammavu convent, and they inherited it as one of the primary means of earning income. Earlier studies have shown that through vocational training, women can achieve a high level of economic independence [64], self-sufficiency [65], and high level of social status [66]. We found that women in Koonammavu depend primarily for their livelihood from the incomes of rosary-making. They can find out the economical expenses for their children.

The present study found that the scope of rosary-making initiated by St. Chavara in Koonammavu is very wide. The interview schedule of the 10 rosary-making entrepreneurs revealed this is a huge profitable business. From the narrative thematic analysis, it is found that the substantial profitability of the rosary-making industry, with a notable aspect being the exportation of products to foreign markets. The rosary making industry has grown into a massive enterprise that supports the livelihoods of around 5000 families, irrespective of their caste or gender. It is seen in the previous studies, there women attain high level entrepreneurship [67], [68]. This is a testament to the success of St. Chavara's vision for women's empowerment and the enduring legacy of his efforts to break down traditional barriers and create new opportunities for women in Kerala society. It is visible in earlier studies that one can attain huge profit [69], through humble beginning like vocational training. This study correlates that St. Chavara's initiatives persistently contribute to the flourishing network of rosary making industries in the region of Koonammavu.

Worship material industry, particularly rosary-making has held a significant position in the industrial map of Kerala due to its exports. 21<sup>st</sup> century vanished most of the social and semi-social industries but the rosary making remind one of the major elements of economically sustainable entrepreneurship of Kerala. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of St. Chavara's rosary-making vocational training and women empowerment initiatives in Koonammavu, highlighting how these initiatives continue to thrive in the community today. However, further in-depth studies are necessary to fully explore and confirm the extent of the rosary-making industry's export potential and its impact on women's empowerment. Our study demonstrates the importance of future researchers focusing on all the initiatives of St. Chavara's vocational training and women empowerment programs and how these initiatives are transforming the socio-economic landscape of Kerala society.

## 8. CONCLUSION

St. Chavara, one of the earliest icons of the Kerala renaissance, contributed enormous historical, social, and economic essence towards Kerala society. This paper discusses one of the less debated women empowerment programs undertaken in his leadership, the vocational training program. This study mainly focused on two aspects, one is the ventures of St. Chavara's vocational training especially rosary making in Koonammavu, and the other is the present condition of the same. More than 5000 families are living with this job as their significant earnings in terms of livelihood. The rosaries produced in Koonammavu have gained international acclaim, reaching countries such as China, the USA, England, Jerusalem, and beyond. The major peculiarity of rosary making is still in the hands of women of that society, who contribute much to the family earnings. St. Chavara had never taken religion as a matter and qualification for empowerment. St. Chavara's farsightedness in vocational training programs touched every sphere of society, regardless of caste and gender. So many communities other than Christianity are pioneers in this field even now.

The study takes the rosary-making enterprise only as a specimen of the contribution of St. Chavara, and other contributions are equally or more important. The study recommends that business entrepreneurs have to take initiatives to improve the status of women through small- and large-scale vocational training enterprises. Women have to come forward and took initiatives to start huge businesses. The study confirmed that the principles developed by St. Chavara have been to inspire positive change in the lives of people at Koonammavu Village, even years after his time. It is nice to see the exact ventures of St. Chavara continue in the rosary-making unit at Koonammavu Village and women attain financial stability, which St. Chavara envisioned. The researchers agree that St. Chavara's vision is still relevant today. Researchers emphasize the

many more exploration of St. Chavara's vision might enlighten the present world. The business entrepreneurs have to take initiatives to improve the status of women through small- and large-scale vocational training enterprises.

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