

## STATUS OF WOMEN IN TAMILNADU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NAMAKKAL DISTRICT

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### Abstract

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. For the purpose of understanding the changing position of women in India, it is essential for us to acquaint ourselves with the status and position of women in the ancient times, from the Vedic period down to the Nineteenth Century AD. A historical study of women in India reveals that there were distinct stages of rise and fall in her status. Empowering women entrepreneurs is essential for achieving the goals of sustainable development and the bottlenecks hindering their growth must be eradicated to entitle full participation in the business. Apart from training programs, Newsletters, mentoring, trade fairs and exhibitions also can be a source for entrepreneurial development. As a result, the desired outcomes of the business are quickly achieved and more of remunerative business opportunities are found. Henceforth, promoting entrepreneurship among women is certainly a short-cut to rapid economic growth and development. Let us try to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus allow 'women' to be an entrepreneur at par with men. Empowerment is giving status and power to women.

**Keywords:** Make in India- Agriculture industry- Manufacturing- Service sector women- Empowerment- Self help group- Social welfare programme-Women Status

### Introduction

This makes us realize that self-help group for women, women welfare schemes, developmental program etc. should be implemented with vigour and on wartime basis. We understand that we have to go a long way to reach the goal of empowerment of women. From the statistical analysis of marginal workers and main workers, we can very well analyze that a lot more to be done for the empowering of women folk. Female marginal workers rate is very high when compared to men workers and female non-workers rate is also very high when compared to men. In a district like Namakkal, when this happen to be the plight of women, naturally, this work can go a long way to awake the Government, the people and the women alike towards the goal of empowerment of women.

### Vedic Period

During the Vedic period (approximately 4000-1000 BC), women in India held equal status with that of men. In ancient India, women occupied a very important position, in fact a superior position to men. "Shakti" means "power" and "strength."<sup>1</sup> All male powers come from the feminine. Literary evidence suggests that kingdoms and countries were destroyed because a single woman was wronged by the state. For example, Valmiki's Ramayana teaches that Ravana and his entire clan were wiped out because he abducted Sita. Veda Vyasa's Mahabharatha teaches that all the Kauravas were killed because they humiliated Draupadi in public. Elango Adigal's Sillapathigaram teaches Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas was burnt because Pandyan Nedunchezhiyan mistakenly killed Kannagi's husband on theft charges.

In ancient Hindu society women enjoyed equal status as was exercised by men in all aspects. Right from the early Vedic period up to 300 B C women were held in high esteem. Women were educated as boys and they participated in cultural, social, economic, philosophical and political activities.<sup>2</sup>The birth of a female child was equally welcomed, they educated as the boys were, and their education was considered so important that the Atharva Veda asserted that the success of woman in her married life depends upon her training during Bhrahmachariya period of celibacy and student life, for which both boys and girls were initiated alike.

Women took part in public life and entered the teaching profession. The age at the marriage of girls was between 16 and 17 years. Being educated and grown up, they had a voice in mate-selection. Matrimony

was not compulsory for woman, and no limitation was placed on her age at marriage. In the eyes of religion a man and woman had complete equality. The wife was an absolute necessity in religious services, and this circumstance helped to raise her status. In her home, her position was an honoured one, and monogamy was the role.<sup>3</sup>Widow remarriage was allowed, though it took place usually within the family with the younger brother of the deceased husband. Divorce was permitted. In Rig Veda one finds no reference to the practice of Sati. It has been established beyond doubt that through literacy and historical research the women held a position of equality with man during the Vedic period.<sup>4</sup>

The degradation of women started since 300 BC only. The patriarchal joint-family system, structure of property ownership, early marriage, self-immolation of widows (sati) or state of permanent widowhood, all became obstacles to the development of Women. Since late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the Common Era, several reformers fought against those aspects of the crud system that have resulted in the oppression of females. To them, women should labour under no dissatisfaction, not suffered by man. As the result of their efforts, independent India has adopted several rules and regulations to protect the rights of women and establish equal status.<sup>5</sup>

### **Medieval Period**

The women's life was unsecured and worst with the Muslim invasion in the country. During the Turks attack and Muslim period, Hindu society became more rigid towards women and the outsider attack was responsible for evolving and encouraging bad customs regarding women through which women status was degraded.<sup>6</sup>

During the Muslim period of history they were deprived of their rights of equality with men. They were compelled to keep themselves within the four walls of their houses with a long veil on their faces. This was definitely due to Islamic influence. Even today in some Islamic countries, women are not allowed to go out freely. For example, the conservative regimes of Iran and Pakistan, have withdrawn the liberties given to women folk by the previous liberal governments. Even in India the Muslim women are far more backward than their Hindu, Christian and Sikh counterparts<sup>7</sup>

### **Women in British India:**

In the mid of 18th century Indian came in vital contact with the British. At the dawn of British rule the position of women was in humbling state. On the eve of British rule, Indian women not only lost their independence but they were also not able to think of their own. At the age of 18th century no change occurred in the women's position. In the beginning of the 19th century also the condition was the same as the attitude of the British Government not to interfere with the religious sentiments of local people stopped all social reformers of the country.

### **Position of women in Tamil Nadu**

During the advent of British, like the rest of India, condition of Tamil women was in a very bad stage. In the early period of their administration of Tamil Nadu the British Government did not interfere in the social and cultural life of the natives for avoiding any kind of uprising against their rule. But with the introduction of English and western education, people became more aware and raised their voice against social evils like Sati, Devadasi, Dowry, Child marriage, female infanticide etc.

Many social reformers came forward to improve the condition of women. Prominent among them were Bharathiar and E V Ramasamy Naikar (Periyar). Christian missionaries and British Government also helped to improve the status of women by starting schools for girls. Gandhiji also worked for Tamil women during his visit to Madras Presidency. On Gandhiji's call many women came forward to participate actively in the freedom struggle. Some of them are Kaliammal, Janakiammal, Lakshmi, Akilandammal, Kuppamal, Pattammal, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Subbaklakshmi. Due to the efforts of these social reformers and freedom fighters, Indian constitution has given equal rights to women. After independence Tamil Nadu government has started many schools and colleges which have helped in increasing female literacy rate.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Beginning of Changes**

One of the fallouts of English education for the middle class during the colonial period was a change in attitude towards women. Through the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj, the Bengali middle class questioned the rigidity of Brahminical Hinduism. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy opposed Sati or the practice of burning the widow on the husband's funeral pyre. The government abolished it in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's crusade for widows led to the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856<sup>9</sup> Several decades of agitation led to the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929<sup>10</sup> that stipulated 14 as the minimum age of marriage for a girl. Girls' education through formal schooling was another major concern. An all India Women's Education Conference was held in Pune in 1927. It gave the stimulus to start a leading organization

in the movement for social changes. Women played a major role in the struggle for freedom from colonial rule. In 1917, the first women's delegation met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights. The Indian National Congress supported the demand. In 1949 independent India gave them their due by enshrining in the Constitution the right of equality for women.

Indian women have participated in large numbers in people's movements including those for land rights, environment, anti-price rise and anti-liquor agitations. India is a home for a diverse group of people characterized by different languages, customs, traditions, religions, life-styles or habits. Virtually each state has its own culture, which is very important in studying any aspect of this society (Davis, 1973) including the status of its women.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Present status of women in Namakkal**

The family in India, including Tamil Nadu, is largely patriarchal, in which the core of the family is the male and the women are brought as brides into the family. In Namakkal we can classify the people and of course their status into two. Among the enlightened and elite category residing in the urban area follows the nuclear family system and there is a certain degree of freedom for the women. In the rural area amongst the higher castes, extended joint families of several generations prevail, but this is less typical amongst the poorer people who lack the physical resources to maintain extended kinship structures. Life in joint families is highly segregated between men and women. A wife has little contact with her husband but spends a great deal of time with other women. The tasks of running the household are shared between the women with the youngest bride shouldering the heaviest burden. The older women are given the role of controlling the younger women and enforcing the qualities of docility, obedience and submissiveness. But nuclear families tend to bring little change in social relations - the overall influence of the joint family remains, but without the emotional support and companionship of other women. As a result, women can face increased isolation in a nuclear family situation. Women face considerable insecurity in the patriarchal family structure. Sent as a young bride into a strange household (in Tamil Nadu the average age of marriage is 20 years), contact with her parental home is discouraged. At the same time, a woman is never a permanent member of her husband's family - she may have to leave if she does not satisfy.

This fear frequently encourages a woman to relinquish her rights to a share (legal coparcenary rights) in the parental property in favour of her brothers in order to enjoy the 'affection' of the brothers and to ensure a welcome in case she has to fall back upon them if her marriage breaks down.<sup>12</sup>

The devaluation of women commences at birth itself with the preference for male offspring as the natural successor in the patriarchal family. The religious requirement of a son is an even more compelling reason for male preference, as a son alone is qualified to perform the rites of lighting the funeral pyre. The birth of a son is celebrated as the means of support in old age whilst the birth of a daughter is viewed as placing a heavy burden on the family to raise the necessary dowry for her marriage and for other functions. A daughter is considered 'another's property' and hence any investment in her development is regarded as fruitless. This leads to discrimination in the allocation of resources - nutrition, medical care, education, etc. - between the sexes. Even as adults, women frequently do not have equal access to food within the family but have what is left after the men have eaten, with consequent repercussions on their health and strength. These attitudes are in turn reflected in higher rates of mortality amongst female infants and young girls, whilst, female infanticide is not uncommon, in some pockets, and amongst some communities. The parental family undertakes the initial conditioning in acceptance of unequal status as young girls are taught to be submissive and docile while boys are given importance and status and full freedom to act in whichever way they like. The entire process of socialization of females is to internalize the concept of dependency and subordination to the will and happiness of others, with the emphasis on the development of roles rather than of personality.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst the dowry system has been legally abolished, in practice its prominence is more marked than ever, particularly in urban middle class society where the payments have increased substantially. The whole practice of dowry is a further reflection of the devaluation of women and their powerlessness. It devalues the girl's contribution and her input into home making and the family economy. In the commercial transaction, the girl as a person is a forgotten factor as she becomes a traded commodity. The problem of dowry is one of the most important issues in the women's movement in the country

As the demands for dowry continue to grow, so does the harassment of young brides by their husband's family for a continuous flow of gifts and cash and the inability to comply unleashes violence ranging from wife beating to resultant suicide and murder. It is, however, a difficult problem to tackle through the law as it relates to the domestic sphere and to the private lives of women and domestic violence

is treated as a family affair. The status of widows is even worse. Although they form a minority, in absolute numbers widows are a large group of women subjected to a great deal of suffering. Although allowed to remarry in the lower castes, very few actually do. Remarriage has also unleashed many new problems in most cases. The plight of widows is the product of an unsympathetic attitude of the society.

Today not many men or their families approve of marriages with a widow. Where young brides have been married to older men, many widows can be quite young with young children to support. Widows traditionally suffer from a number of social indignities being debarred from public places and auspicious ceremonies, not allowed to wear good clothes or to eat normal food and made to observe lifelong mourning for their deceased husbands. The plight of many widows is not exposed where they remain part of their husband's family but are frequently neglected and ill-treated. Even widowers do not come forward to marry widows, however young, well behaved and responsible they are.

Thus, early marriage, preceded by a cheerless childhood, a grueling exercise of dowry system, adjustment with an unknown family, at the husband's home, anxiety to give birth to male children, curbs on freedom of eating, sleeping, talking and moving, the various intrigues among the women, the manipulation of males (sons) and pathetic old age and unprotected widowhood are the cruelty and injustice facing majority of women. Whether the experience is bitter or happy, it is largely made so by agencies other than her own will and outside of her control. Within the family, a woman is treated as a social and financial dependent, controlled by the family in every aspect of her life. Having had little or no education, her worth is measured in terms of her ability to produce male children or bring in money/assets. She no longer belongs to her father's family, whilst her position in her husband's family is conditional. Oddly enough, when the young women grow older, they become party to perpetrating the deep rooted the vicious customs.

Whilst the way a woman lives, may seem to have changed a little over the years, there is some evidence that the manner in which women have begun to perceive themselves and their surroundings is beginning to undergo a change. Some women are beginning to question if this is all there is to life. The cocoon that had sheltered and given security and comfort to previous generations of women can no longer provide them to the younger women in the present highly materialistic and changing society.<sup>14</sup>

### **Economic Role of Women**

The position of women in the social structure affects the way they are regarded in their economic roles as well. First, it has resulted in a pervasive sexual division of labour, which reinforces the notion of the male having more power and relegates low status occupations to women. Secondly, having defined women as solely responsible for family care, their incursion into the labour market, made inevitable by inadequate incomes of males or absence of male earners, is at certain levels seen as deviant behaviour. It results in the pervasive notion of the woman worker as a supplementary earner irrespective of the total resources contributed to the household or the time and energy spent. Thus a woman who earns as much as 50% or sometimes 100% of the household income is still regarded as a supplementary earner. Women are principally engaged in agriculture or in the unorganised sector.<sup>15</sup>

Although many families survive only through the contributions made by women to the family income, paradoxically women have little control over family income and expenditure decisions. As a rule, the men consider their wages as their own income and they give only a certain portion to the women for family needs. Wages for agricultural work, even when paid to the women, are usually taken over and controlled by the household men. The squandering of women's income by the men on liquor, etc. is a major concern for many women though it affects the family as a whole. The so-called breadwinners consider their income to be private property whilst women are left to manage the household as best they may. However, where the women have some control over the money they earn, they usually spend the bulk of it on the family's basic needs, especially food. Hence, the issue of control over household income is a crucial factor affecting nutritional level of women and children. Women, in addition, have virtually no control over the family assets. In the majority of cases land is in the name of the male head of the household.

In Namakkal district the women especially in the urban area have a great role in the economy. Education and globalization have many effects on the status of the women. Even in the rural areas because of the growth of SHG women are improving their status considerably.

### **Female headed households**

Female headed households are predominantly to be found amongst the poor where they constitute a much more marginalized group even amongst the 'poorest of the poor'. Women headed households are the result of widowhood, migration, desertion or illness, unemployment or the addictive habits of their husbands. They suffer a high incidence of poverty and occupy the bottom rung of society.

In Tamil Nadu, 15% of the households are headed by women compared with 10% in India as a whole. Amongst all the States, Tamil Nadu has the fourth highest percentage of female-headed households in the country. In Namakkal 20% female headed household are there from the findings of the Questionnaire. Because of the changes brought by the globalisation, the progress in the field of information technology, women now were shoulder to shoulder to men. But the impact of globalisation can be mainly seen on the lives of the urban women.<sup>16</sup>

Rural women are not much benefited from it. Many rural women are not even aware progress which has been taking place in the state. To improve the condition of the rural women, Tamil Nadu government implemented many schemes. One among them is starting and supporting of women Self Help Group. A group of ten to twenty person of similar economic class, generally poor, formed a possessive group to improve their social and economical position through collective action. SHGS are assisted by NGOs and Government. This scheme of the state has improved the condition of the rural women to some extent.<sup>17</sup>

### **Concept of Empowerment of Women:**

The empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. Tamil Nadu has a glorious tradition of recognizing the importance of empowering women over several centuries now. The contribution of writers and social reformers has been well documented. The Government of India has made Empowerment of Women as one of the principal objectives of the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) and also declared 2001 as the year of '*Women's Empowerment*'. These issues of gender equality are discussed in World Conferences, National and International Conferences, etc.

Our Constitution has conferred and guaranteed equality before law, universal adult franchise and equal opportunities for men and women as fundamental rights. The imperative of gender partnership in matters of development has been recognised. In order to give a fillip to empowerment of women and appropriate institutional mechanisms and interventions have been consciously built into the development design. Separate institutions for women and child development, departments at the Central and State levels, creation of the National Commission for Women and also State Commission for Women in several States are some of the important developments for the betterment and prosperity of women. The launching of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Indira Mahila Yojana, Mahila Samridhi Yojana, reserving of one third of the number of seats in Panchayats and the local bodies are programmes launched with a view to improve and empower women socially, economically and in political frontiers.<sup>18</sup>

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources - material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money - and access to money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain 'power'. According to the Country Report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power".

The process of challenging existing relations and gaining greater control over the forces of power may be termed as empowerment. Empowerment of woman may be integral part of the sustainable human development. The goals of woman empowerment challenge the patriarchal ideology to transform the structure and institution that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality to enable woman gain access to and control of both material and informational resources.

Empowerment of woman should embody several factors like equality of work and wages, expansion of girls education, autonomy over reproductive life, access to ownership of land and property, training and technology, access to bank credits and markets, safe water sanitation and energy. Among the various determinants of women's empowerment access to bank credit is one of the crucial factors.<sup>20</sup>

### **District Social Welfare Office [DSWO]**

District Social Welfare Officer at Namakkal carried on various schemes announced by the Tamil Nadu Government's Social Welfare Department successfully. These schemes acted as awakening force in the society. They were helpful to cross cultural lure. They gave protection to women and financial help too. It gave financial help to encourage inter - caste marriage. There were two plans existed in this category. First plan included marriage between FC and SC, BC and SC and MBC and SC and provided a financial help of Rs.20, 000. Scheme second encouraged marriage between FC and BC and FC and MBC and offered a monetary assistance of Rs.10, 000. For these financial help, the couples should applied within 2 years of their marriage.<sup>19</sup>

Another scheme encouraged widow remarriage. It gave financial assistance of Rs. 10,000 to the couple. They should apply within 6 months of their marriage. E.V.R. Maniammal Memorial Scheme helped

the daughter of poor widow to get financial assistance for her daughter. It offered Rs. 10,000 to the girl. She should have applied 10 days before the marriage. For orphaned girls also marriage monetary assistance was given. She should to apply 15 days before the marriage with all the required certificates to get the monetary assistance of Rs.10, 000.

For widows, those who were separated from the husbands and before 40 years of age, physically handicapped women who belonged to scheduled caste who were all below poverty - line were given sewing machine freely. For the children of widows who were below poverty line, textbooks and notes were given free of cost from I to XII standards. For the parent who were below poverty line, if they did not have male child, got sterilized in a Government Hospital and had given assurance that they won't adopt a male child, children were given financial help of Rs,22,000 for having only one female child. The same would be deposited in a bank in the name of the child. If they had two female children Rs. 12,000 would deposited in the name of children in the bank.<sup>20</sup>

### **Employment In Social Welfare Department**

The policy of the Government Tamil Nadu was that, all the higher ranks in the Social Welfare Department must be, as a general rule, held by women only. And most of the postings in the department were to be filled in by women. Only a few men were seen in these offices. The importance given to women acted as a healthy influence on women who visited the offices. Further, they could mingle with them freely and got things done for them without hesitation.

It was impressive on seeing women working as busy as bees By 2004, in the offices of Social Welfare Department, the posts of the Project Officer of *Mahalir Tittam*, the Project Officer of District Project Nutrition Office and the Project Officer of District Social Welfare Office were all held by women.<sup>21</sup>

### **Strategies Adopted by Government of Tamil Nadu for Women Empowerment**

It was recognised that the main obstacles to empowerment has been the low level of educational attainments as well as poverty among women. Taking into account this fact, the Government of Tamil Nadu have framed various policies, designed specific interventions and implemented many programmes to eradicate poverty and to provide education to the vulnerable sections of the society.<sup>22</sup>

### **Education of Women:**

Education to women is the most powerful instrument of changing their position in the society. Education also brings about reduction in inequalities and also acts as a means to improve their status within the family. In order to encourage education of women at all levels and to dilute gender bias in the provision and acquaintance of education, schools, colleges and even universities were established exclusively for women in the State.

To bring more girl children, into the main stream of education, Government has been providing a package of concessions in the form of free supply of books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for hostilities, mid-day meals, scholarships, free bi-cycles and so on. The Mother Teresa Women University has been established for the development of Women Studies and to encourage higher education among women and their social mobility.<sup>26</sup>

### **Periyar EVR Nagammai Scheme**

Periyar EVR Nagammai Free Education Scheme has been implemented in the State from 1989-90 to women students irrespective of caste, creed and community to encourage their education and to reduce dropout rate. As per the scheme those students' whose parental annual income is less than Rs.24,000/- are exempted from payment of tuition fees in under - graduate courses. During 2005-06, 8936 women students were benefited under this scheme. In 2006-07, a sum of Rs.65.00 lakhs has been allocated for this scheme.<sup>23</sup>

### **Free Coaching Exclusively for Women Students:**

To encourage and enable the women students to appear for the IAS/IPS examinations, the Government established two free coaching centers -one at Queen Mary's College, Chennai and the other at Arulmigu Meenakshi Government College for Women, Madurai. In each center, 60 women students are being given free coaching. During the current year, the government has provided a sum of Rs.1.00 lakh for implementing this scheme.

### **Entrepreneurship Awareness Programme (EAP)**

In order to empower women, Science city has been organising Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) and Entrepreneurship Awareness Programme (EAP) to bring out the talents of women and to make them stand on their own feet. To ascertain the status of women scientists, Science city has embarked upon the task of creating a data-base of women scientists in the entire State of Tamil Nadu. To encourage the women scientists, Science city has instituted Life Time Achievement Award and Young

Women Scientist Awards. During 2005, five women scientists were awarded the Young Women Scientists Award.<sup>24</sup>

### **Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women**

Tamil Nadu Corporation for development of women was established in 1983 which aims at the socio-economic empowerment of women. As a prelude, the Corporation is implementing the Mahalir Thittam among poor rural women to promote saving habits, nurture entrepreneurial skills and aptitudes, promote, exposure to banking transactions and to free them from the clutches of local moneylenders. The scheme is being implemented in partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Banks. Under the scheme, SHGs are formed and monitored through NGOs affiliated with the Tamil Nadu Corporations for Development of Women, Ltd.<sup>25</sup>

### **Capacity Building and Skill formation**

In order to improve the entrepreneurial ability and skill of the women, Government has been imparting various types of training designed to promote self and wage employment.

### **Skill Up-gradation Training Programme**

Provision of skill training to women in SHG has been given recognition so as to enable them to start their own income generating activities. The duration of the training and the cost depends on the nature of the trade selected by the members. Till March 2006, 60957 women have been provided skill training. The Government has proposed to train another 23000 women in 2006-07.

### **Entrepreneurship Development Training Programme for Women (EDP)**

EDP training is conducted by TNCDW to expose the SHG women to various business opportunities and to motivate them to start economic activities. Up to March 2006, the Corporation has trained 6,34,991 women in co-ordination with other Government departments such as Rural Development, Agriculture, Industries and Commerce, Backward Classes, TAHDCO, Slum Clearance Board, etc. In 2006-07, 22000 more SHG women will be provided EDP Training by TNCDW. Family is the area in which the role of women is traditionally the most prominent.

Indeed, women had practically no role outside the home in traditional middle and upper class families and their whole life had been spent within the family. The family and the home still hold their position as the focus of their activities though considerable numbers of women both employed and unemployed have outside roles. Any change in their position will be reflected in their activities within the family and it will affect all the other members of the family. So the family provides the most suitable area for examining the changes in women's status brought about by their employment. By comparing the activities of employed women with those of the unemployed, we will get the indications of levelling of the status. The employment women will be at a more advantageous position due to their employment or work role than their counterparts remaining at home.

It is a generally accepted fact that the participation of women in employment outside home has greatly changed their family lives. Perhaps the most far-reaching effect has been the economic independence attained by working women. Another possible effect is the redistribution of work within the family so that the employed women can still participate in their work while continuing many of their traditional obligations to the family. The modern families tend to preserve a satisfactory division of labour. The tasks previously assigned to the wife are being assumed or shared by the husband and wife jointly so that the wife can have near equal responsibility for earning the family living.

Thus employment of women may be viewed as a cause for a decrease in the differentiation of gender roles in a tradition-bound society, man is the head of the household and he makes most of the decisions. But this predominance of the male has been considerably undermined due to the employment of women. The employment and education of women have given them resources which their unemployed counterparts do not have. The salary income of a working woman is a substantial contribution to the family income which would be expected to her greater interest in financial decisions and greater respect from her husband and other members of the family. The participation of the women in the activities of the outside world through her job gives her contacts with fellow workers, which lessens dependence on her husband for emotional support and increases the knowledge and skill she brings to decision making. Such factors have made them resourceful and competent decision makers.<sup>26</sup>

Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Limited was established in the year 1983 with the prime objective of socio-economic development and empowerment of rural women. The Corporation was under the administrative control of Social Welfare Department from inception till mid 2006. In July 2006, Vide G.O. Ms. No. 81 dt. 20.7.2006, the Corporation was brought under the administrative control of

Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department in order to bring about greater synergy and better coordination in implementing various schemes for Self Help Groups

The Board of TNCDW was broad based and reconstituted vide G.O.Ms.No:148 Rural Development & Panchayat Raj (CGS-II) Department dated 12.10.2006 to include representatives from Industry, NGO sector, Banks and specialists who can provide valuable guidance to the Corporation.<sup>27</sup> Tamil Nadu is the eleventh largest, seventh most populous and fourth highest state having female headed households in the country with 67 % of population living in rural areas. Agriculture is the principal economic activity for the people. The agricultural sector has stagnated and its contribution to domestic product declined from 40% in 1970-71 to 25% in 1985-86. In this background, Government of India negotiated with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for financing a development project focusing the needs of women in selected district of Tamil Nadu State.

The project is mandated to assist 62,500 rural women over a period of seven years from 1989-90 with a project outlay and Bank loan components of 94.86 crores and Race 35.13 crores respectively. The principal objective of the project is empowerment of rural women.<sup>28</sup> This Government spearheaded the Self Help Group (SHG) concept in the country by forming SHGs in Dharmapuri district with the assistance of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as early as September 1989. Later this scheme was extended to the erstwhile Salem and South Arcot districts in the year 1991-92 and further expanded to include Madurai and Ramanathapuram districts in the year 1992-93.

The overwhelming success of the IFAD Project paved way for the now popularly called "Mahalir Thittam" project, which was launched during 1997-98 with State Government funding in Villupuram, Dharmapuri (Krishnagiri), Namakkal, Cuddalore, Ramanathapuram, Madurai, Theni, Karur, Virudhunagar, Salem, Tiruvarur, Thoothukudi, Vellore and Tiruvallur districts. During 1998-99, due to great demand it was extended to Tirunelveli, Tiruvannamalai, Erode, Pudukottai, Sivagangai, Nilgiris and Tiruchirapalli districts.

In 1999-2000 the scheme was further extended to the districts of Kanniyakumari, **Namakkal**, Dindigul, Kancheepuram, Perambalur (Ariyalur), Thanjavur and Nagapattinam. Finally, it was extended to Chennai in the year 2001-02 to cover the entire state. Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women implements Mahalir Thittam in partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who form SHGs, train and monitor them. A small homogeneous group of poor women consisting of 12 to 20 members voluntarily formed to promote savings and mutually agreeing to contribute a common fund to be lent to its members as per the group's decision is called as "Self Help Group" (SHG). The members have to be in the age group of 18-60 years.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Moovalur Ramamithram Ammaiyar Ninavu Marriage Assistance Scheme**

This scheme was started with the objectives of helping financially poor parents in getting their daughter's married and to promote the educational status of poor girls. Rs.20,000/- was given to Girls belonging to Poor Families and below poverty line and the bride should have studied upto 10th Std. Only one girl from a family is eligible for this scheme.

#### **Annai Teresa Nivavu Orphan Girls Marriage Assistance Scheme**

An objective of the Scheme is to help financially the Orphan Girls for their marriage. An assistance of Rs. 15,000/- provided to orphan Girls. She has to apply 15 days before the marriage with all the required certificates to get the monetary assistance. For widows, those who were separated from the husbands and before 40 years of age, physically handicapped women who belonged to scheduled caste, who were all below poverty - line were given sewing machine freely. For the children of widows who were below poverty line, textbooks and notes were given free of cost from I to XII standards/4,

#### **Dr. Dharmambal Ammaiyar Ninaivu Widow Remarriage Assistance Scheme**

Objectives of the Scheme is to encourage widow remarriage and rehabilitate widows. An assistance of Rs.20000 /- (Rs. 10000/- as cheque and Rs.10000/-as post office deposit )to the couples is given within 6 months from the date of marriage.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Integrated Child Development Programme in the District.**

Since 1982, Integrated Child Development Scheme was being implemented in the Namakkal District. Five projects were started initially and there were about 26 projects at Namakkal with 1702 *anganvadi* centres carrying on the schemes throughout the district.<sup>36</sup> beneficiaries of this programme are 0 - 6 years old children, Pregnant mothers, Lactating mothers and Adolescent girls.<sup>31</sup> To create awareness about nutritious food and health, exhibitions were conducted, for adolescent girls, quiz programmes, oratorical competition were conducted and for women, demonstrations were conducted periodically. From

September 1-7, 2004 in all *anganwadi* centres, exhibition on nutritious food and health exhibition were conducted.<sup>32</sup>

### Upgraded Anganwadi Centres

In the Anganwadi centres the employment is reserved exclusively for women. The teachers, and the care takers (ayas) are women and this is providing a good arena for women and the development in the economy along with the children. In the *anganwadi* centres, for the children who were between 2-5 years of age, pre school education was given. By play way method of teaching, the five developmental growths of children were induced. Because of the ego problem, without bothering about their income, the villagers approached costly nursery schools.<sup>33</sup>

The *anganwadi* teachers followed double language formula; in English and Tamil, simple commands and rhymes were taught to the children, they further taught small words. The educational toys bought by the *anganwadi* centres were helpful for the five types of developmental growth. In the first phase, 200 *anganwadi* centres, in the second phase another 200 *anganwadi* centers and in the third phase 330 *anganwadi* centers, totally 730 centres were upgraded as nursery schools.<sup>34</sup> For the upgraded *anganwadi* centres as nursery schools, 40 new buildings were constructed under various development schemes by the District Rural Development plan, in the year 2003 – 2004.<sup>35</sup> For repairing and renovation of *anganwadi* centres upgraded as nursery schools, from the District Small Savings Incentive, Rs.30 lakhs was spent for the 107 centres in the year 2003.

Sending children to *anganwadi* at the age of 2 and 1/2 years was very much appreciated. The children adapted to the new situation quickly. Eating himself / herself developed mouth, hand and eyes co - operation; it further lead to fine muscle development' When he / she was send to kindergarten, reading readiness had developed In the peer groups of equals, the growth and development was fast and systematic. They adjusted to new ideas and habits easily. It further lead to her / his mental, physical, social and language growth. Finally, the *anganwadies* gave great relief to working mothers, who could concentrate on their work peacefully, leaving their children in safe hands.<sup>36</sup>

### The Central Social Welfare Board

It had started the Socio-Economic Programme (SEP) in 1958. In order to promote greater mobility for women in the employment market, the department launched a scheme of hostels for working women in 1973 to provide 'safe and cheap' accommodation to single workingwomen, who come to the towns/ cities for the sake of employment. There were three such hostels accommodated nearly 300 women at Namakkal.<sup>37</sup>

### Helpline Ideals

Render help with compassion, Upliftment of Women and Children. Provide relief to victims, Provide legal advice to women in distress, Provide self confidence to insecure women, Rehabilitate Women Criminals.<sup>38</sup>

**Helpline - Areas of Concern** Dowry Harassment, Domestic violence / Problems by in-laws, Alcoholic spouses, Prostitution Sexual harassment Problems related to love affairs, Problems related to promiscuity, Female infanticide, Problems arising out of Bigamy, Street fights, Missing Girls/Children, Child Harasment

To strengthen and give moral support to such women, Help Line gave a helping hand. Along with the police officials, individual well-wishers were also at their service. To rescue women, 2 jeep vehicles were allotted. About 20 Patrol Vehicles were going around the Corporation. Women help Line - 1091. phone numbers like 100, 1026, 300300 etc., the women-in-trouble could contact the officials and got rescued. Higher officials had given strict instruction to the field officials to give preference to such calls.

Apart from this there are five Ail Women Police Stations in the district, AWPS Namakkal, AWPS, Namakkal East, AWPS, Namakkal West, AWPS, R.S. Puram, to cater to the needs of women. Women should find out what gave them happiness and work towards it. They should also strive to pursue their interests. In a district like Namakkal, when this happen to be the plight of women naturally, this Work can go a long way to awake the Government, the people and the women alike towards the goal of empowerment of women.

### Analysis of Data

questionnaire consisting of queries related to women's status, type of the family, economic condition, discrimination, awareness, family set up, education, decision making, awareness of their rights, marriage, dowry system, employment, etc, were prepared and administered. About five hundred persons from all categories were interviewed. Initially collecting particulars from the people in the village was very difficult. The analysis could not be carried out through these collections alone. Then, this has been slowly carried out by interacting with the people, asking questions in a friendly manner, after making proper

explanation among some people. The data collected through these questionnaires reveal have been formatted in the form of tables and charts as reproduced.

### Social Status

Care has been taken to include all the communities in the interviewing process. The major portion of the population interviewed is backward community 70% of the population is from the Back Ward Community. The remaining 30% of the representation comes from the Most Back Ward Community, Forward Community, Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes. The criteria on age group, educational qualification, employment and social status are the deciding factors of the quality of the study. Considering

<b>Social Status of the Respondents</b>		
<b>Caste</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Backward caste	350	70%
Schedule caste	35	7%
Most backward caste	60	12%
Schedule tribe	10	2%
Forward caste	45	9%
Total	500	100%

the importance and quality of the study, the questionnaire has been instrumental with utmost care and the outcome is analysed below.

The women were questioned thus "Are you aware that the empowerment is taking place and the status of the women is improving?" 70% of the population gave a positive reply to the above mentioned question. The awareness has come to them through Newspapers. T V/Radio, personal experiences, chatting with others and other information and communication Medias.

### Religion

#### The respondents surveyed were belonged to the following Religions

Religion of the Respondents

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Hindu	450	90%
Christian	30	6%
Muslim	20	4%
Total	500	100%

### Discontinuing Education Because of Marriage

One reason for discontinuation of studies is on the ground of getting married midway. It is admirable to observe that considerable number of women is desirous to pursue their studies after marriage. It proves better understanding and attitude towards women education and with time the society of Namakkal District has changed for betterment.

#### The Percentage of Women Discontinuing Education

<b>Description</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Education discontinued after marriage	175	35%
Education continued after marriage	325	65%
Total	500	100

### Empowerment of Women

As revealed in the survey a portion of women population in Namakkal District is well educated, well employed in offices, economically independent and empowered in life. At the same time a majority of women are found to be unemployed. Conclusion derived from the survey states that even now in Namakkal District, the education as well as career of women are not taken seriously by their parents and still they are following the traditional trend of patriarchal society leaving them to home makers only.

<b>Division of the Respondents into Employed and Unemployed</b>		
<b>Description</b>	<b>Numbers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Employed	130	26
Unemployed	370	74
Total	500	100

#### **Knowledge about the Status of Women Compared to Men**

The status of women in society is the greatest indicator of the discrimination as well as the development of women. The survey revealed an overall view of secondary (less important) status of women in society. The shocking information shows that even **after sixty** four years of independence women are still

<b>Knowledge about the Status of Women</b>		
<b>Compared to men</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Equal	47	9.5%
Better	0	-
Lower	444	88.7%
No idea	9	1.85
Total	500	100

deprived of their rights. The women **are yet** to get a bias free society where they will not be discriminated and the birth of a **baby girl** will be rejoiced.

#### **Percentage of the Knowledge about the Status of the Women**

#### **Distribution of Respondents by Type of Family**

Total 500		
Joint families 318		
Nuclear Family 182		
<b>Distribution by Family</b>		
<b>Type of family</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Joint Family	318	64%
Nuclear family	182	36%

#### **Awareness about the Discrimination of Women in Society**

Society plays a very crucial part in our life. Even in modern society's day to day life we feel the undercurrent of discrimination which reduces women to lead a life immune to discrimination. The experience of women in Namakkal District is also nothing new. Hypothesis derived from the survey states that the patriarchal norms of society are affecting women in the form of lack of education opportunities, early marriage, early motherhood and lack of any development skill.

Men have the freedom in society, the freedom of movement, the freedom to choose the particular path of life, the freedom to choose pleasure, the freedom to live life of his own and the freedom to be economically independent. It is only in the case of women, where the society wants to curb freedom. It is evident from a very high percentage of respondents that discrimination in society is very high.

#### **Percentage of the Knowledge about Discrimination**

<b>Awareness of discrimination</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very high	212	42.5
High	252	50.5
Low	24	4.8
Very low	6	1.1
No opinion	6	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100.00</b>

### Awareness about the Activities Against Women

The study confirms that the women are aware of the activities that are going against them as they get the knowledge through many sources/modes like TV/Radio, News Paper, and Chatting and Personal experience. The TV/Radio is the main media in bringing this awareness on the activities against them. The news spread through chatting among the daily labourers/farm or agriculturalists. While the newspaper has a major claim in the educated sector in some of the blocks, the awareness has come from other activities like cinemas/dramas also.

The Questionnaire confirms 70% of the population have awareness of the activities against women. The remaining 30% of the population, who are not aware of the activities against women, are from the remote areas and mostly illiterates. The next question posed was "Comparing the status of women in the past, do you think that there is an improvement in the status of women at present - if so, in what sector?"

The women population strongly believes that there is substantial development in the status of women in almost all the sectors. They agree that even in politics, the participation of women has improved.

Table 8. Percentage of the Awareness through Media

No. of people	Media	Percentage
100	Own experience	20%
250	Newspaper	50%
425	Chatting	85%
450	TV/Radio	90%

### Division of Respondents

In this survey the researcher tried to collect information from both rural as well as urban women of Namakkal. They are 28% Urban respondents and 72% from rural.

Table 9. Area-wise Division		
Division of Respondents Area-wise	Number	Percentage
Rural	360	72
Urban	140	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100</b>

### Age at Marriage of Respondents

Age at marriage of girls is also a very important factor which indicates the status of women in Society and her place in her family. In this survey it reveals that a considerable number of women from lower economic strata with very less education got married in early age on an average of 14 to 15 years, which is illegal and this practice of early marriage overburdened women with early mother-hood, spoiled her opportunity to get education. This in turn hindered the empowerment of women. This is a common feature in interior villages. However the positive sign in this survey is that a certain percentage of people got married in legal age of 18 years and it is welcomed that a greater number of people in Namakkal District encourage marriage only at legal age for their girls.

#### Percentage of the Age of Marriage of Women Below and Above Legal Age

Age at marriage	Number	Percentage
Below 18 years	160	32%
Above 18 years	340	68%

### Decision Making

As reproduced in the table the decision making in the family is mainly rests with the Husband and son. The mother and the daughter have less power in decision making.

**Decision Making of the Respondents**

Decision making	No. of	Percentage
	respondent	
Self	60	12
Husband & respondent	75	15
Husband	215	43
Son	125	25
Daughter	25	5

**Educational Qualification**

Nearly 70% of the population has basic education. 15% of the women are either graduates or post graduates. The evaluation reveals an interesting aspect on literacy. Of the sample interviewed, the percentage of illiterates in the age group above 50 is 40%. This has decreased to 25% in the age group of 30 to 50 and further decreased to 3% in the age group of 20 to 30. This indicates that the tendency of the interviewed women towards literacy.

**Categorisation of the Respondents by Educational Qualification**

Education	Numbers	Percentage
Upto 10th Standard	350	70
Upto Plus Two	150	30
UGC	72	14.4
PG	24	4.8
Illiterate	150	30

**Gender wise priority in general education**

Traditional deprivations of women are even now affecting the women of India which has its effects in Namakkal District also. There is preference for boys for education and parents are habituated to take their studies with more seriousness which is not in the case of girls. Even now preference for boys is existing which is a big discrimination and therefore affecting the status of girls. The reason for this difference as narrated by the respondents is that it is a societal norm that boys must become economically independent and even now families give more importance to marriage for a girl not to her education. When asked about the cause, some illiterate respondents opined that it was their parents negligence that they never had been to school where the same set of parents sending their sons to schools.

According to the respondents, their parents thought there was no need for the girls education. They even told that today they feel very ashamed that they were unable to help their small children in their educational pursuit. However, at the same time majority of women were standing for education of both and shown keen interest to educate their daughters. So there is a positive change at least amongst women in Namakkal District who are much more concerned about their daughter's education than their previous generation as is seen in the survey.

**Gender-wise priority in Education**

Gender-wise priority	No of persons supporting	Percentage
Boys alone	190	38%
Girls alone	0	0
Both (Boys and girls)	310	62%

**Custom of Dowry**

Dowry serves as the foundation on which explanation for discrimination against women has been built. Dowry system in society is the root cause for the direct or indirect effects women are facing the most cruel discrimination as well as crimes against them. Though prohibited by law from 1961, the extraction of dowry from the bride's family prior to marriage still exists.

According to the respondents the curse of dowry system is very high prevailing in the society of Namakkal. Arranged marriage without fulfilling dowry demands is even now an exception as seen more prevailing in the District. It is yet to get eradicated from the society.

**Percentage of Level of Opinion about Dowry**

<b>Opinion about the custom of dowry</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very High	343	68.5
High	117	23.4
Low'	27	5.4
Very Low	05	1.1
No Response	08	1.6

**Knowledge on the Existing Laws**

The awareness on the existing laws is very low among the respondents and they are not interested to know about the laws in a detailed manner. The major issue of allotting 33% quota for women are not fully within the knowledge of the population interviewed in a satisfactory manner.

Eve-teasing and dowry deaths are largely known and that too because of the fact that the deaths are brought to their notice through the medias like news papers, T.V/Radio, Women Police Station, discussions with neighbours and Self Help Group.

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