

Tamil Nadu Government- a Tribute to Women Empowerment

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Abstract:

Women Empowerment is a concept of everyone in this world. It inculcates in all dimensions to portray the constructive activities for women's enhancement and advancement in the society, administration, education and financial status. It is proved that, work participation rate made its Positive impact to a great extent in empowering women in the society. Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept in which women gain greater contribution in controlling over all the resources. The status of women in Tamil Nadu with regard to population is related to their economic position. Women's political empowerment is constituted on 1) the equal status of life between men and women, 2) (b) Women rights to execute their active potentials and 3) Women rights to self-representation and self-determination. Many programmes were launched with a view to improve and empower women socially, economically and in political frontiers.

Key words: Women Empowerment, status, Political participation, Gender Equality Index, Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Women are recognized not merely as targets of welfare policies in the social sector but as critical group for development. The publication of the report on the status of women, the first highly comprehensive and informative report said that women are left out of the development process and greater effort is to be made to move women into the mainstream of development. Government is the major decision making organization in the society. It has a positive role to play to promote the cause of women. Equal participation of women in all areas and at all levels of employment is required for the development of nation too.

Concept of Empowerment of Women

Empowerment is nothing but a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women's empowerment is a process in which women gain greater contribution in controlling over resources - material, human and intellectual areas like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain the equal rights. According to the Country Report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power"

Status of Women in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu population growth has been stabilized and growing gradually over the years, because of the efforts and welfare measures taken by the Government. Female population constitutes nearly half of the total population in the State. The status of women with regard to population over five decades is closely related with their economic position, which in turn depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities. Education along with participation of Women in workforce has been universally accepted as an important factor in the adoption of small family norms, which is essential for family planning. It has been witnessed a tremendous development in the entry of women in all fields of employment in the State. The Census report of Tamil Nadu says that, the Work Participation Rate for females raised from 26.52 per cent in 1981 to 31.32 per cent in 2001, when compare with the growth of the male. However, the number of female workers accounted for 34.72 per cent in the total workforce of 278lakhs in 2001. The corresponding figure for 1991 Census was 34.06 percent. In the total population, nearly half were females but they accounted for only 34per cent of the total workers. This proportion has to be improved to ensure better and all round economic empowerment.

Political Participation of Women in Tamil Nadu

It is a need of an hour to discuss about Women and their Political Participations. Political equality to all children regardless of birth, sex, colour, etc. is one of the basic premises of democracy. Political equality includes not only equal right to franchise but also more importantly, the right to access the institutionalised centres of power. Thus, political participation of women means not only the right to vote but also the sharing of power, co-decision making and co-policy making at all levels. The active participation of women in political ground is an integral part to empower women and helps to build a gender-equal society as well as to speed up the process of national development. Women's political empowerment is constituted on three fundamental and non-negotiable principles:

- (a) the equal status of life between men and women
- (b) Women rights to execute their active potentials and
- (c) Women rights to self-representation and self-determination. Nowadays women have been increasingly coming forward and provide leadership at the grass root level. This has profound social implications which give a long way in addressing gender related discrimination in development.

Gender Equality Index (GEI) in Tamil Nadu:

GEI measures the human development attainments of females as a percentage over that of males. The Gender Equality Index for Tamil Nadu reflects that the status of women in Tamil Nadu had considerably improved between 1981 and 1991. Among the 15 major States in India, Tamil Nadu stood second in GEI in 1991 because of the huge investments in the areas of education and health sectors. It indicates that the gender bias in Tamil Nadu is very low when compared with all over India. 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 till 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 gender equality issues have been discussed in National and International Conferences. 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 are created. National Commission for Women and State Commission for Women in several States have paved way for the developments and betterment of women. The launching of Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Indira Mahila Yojana, Mahila Samridhi Yojana, reserved one-third number of seats in Panchayats and the local bodies. Many programmes were launched with a view to improve and empower women socially, economically and also in political frontiers.

Methods adopted by the Government of Tamil Nadu for Women Empowerment:

Government of Tamil Nadu has taken ample of efforts to make the women socially acceptable and economically balanced both in families and society. 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, the Government of Tamil Nadu framed various policies, designed specific interventions and implemented many programmes to eradicate poverty by providing equal opportunity in education, awareness programmes to meet the challenges in their lives, financial supports to establish self employment and encourage the enterprises to face the vulnerable sections of the society.

a) Education for Women:

Educating women is the most powerful instrument of changing their position in the society. Education also provides equal dignity both in family and social concerns. In order to encourage education of women at all levels, government initiated schools, colleges and even universities exclusively for women in the State. To bring more girl children, especially from marginalized BPL families, into the main stream of education, Government implemented a package of concessions in the form of free supply of books, uniform, boarding lodging, clothing for hostilities, mid-day meals, scholarships, free by-cycles etc. The Mother Teresa Women University was established for the development of Women Studies and to encourage higher education among women and their social mobility. 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.24000/- are exempted from payment of tuition fees in under - graduate courses. During 2005-06, 8936 women students utilised this scheme. In 2006-07, a sum of Rs.65.00 lakhs was allocated for this scheme. To encourage and enable the women students to appear for the IAS/IPS examinations, the Government established two free coaching centers in Queen Mary's College, Chennai and Arulmigu Meenakshi Government College for Women, Madurai. In each centre, nearly 60 women students were being given free coaching.

b) Entrepreneurship Awareness Programme (EAP)

There were numerous schemes organised for training and creating awareness among the women folk. To bring out the talents of women the Science city organised an Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) and Entrepreneurship Awareness Programme (EAP) to make them stand on their own feet. To learn 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 conferred life time achievement award and young women scientist awards. During 2005, five women scientists were awarded the Young Women Scientists Award.

c) Contribution of Tamil Nadu Corporation to Empower Women

To enhance the socio-economic power of women, Tamil Nadu Corporation was established in 1983. As a prelude, the Corporation implemented Mahalir Thittam among poor rural women to promote saving habits, nurture entrepreneurial skills and aptitudes, and 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 this scheme, SHGs are formed and monitored through NGOs affiliated by the Tamil Nadu Corporations.

d) Self Help Groups

Self Help Group is a team of members (15-20 members) voluntarily formed by inclining its special purpose like savings, credit and social involvement as a tool of empowerment Tamil Nadu corporation for Development of women (TNCDW) defines SHG as a small. Economically similar community group of rural poor, voluntarily formed to save and contribute to a common fund to be lend to its members as a peer group decision and for serving together for social and economic progression of their family and society. They are self-managed groups of poor women which primarily came into existence to mobilise financial resources through their own savings and lend the same amongst themselves to meet the credit needs of their members. The specific objectives of SHGs are to improve saving habits among women and increase the total family income to fulfill the economic needs through self-employment. The SHG movement has emerged as a powerful and vibrant movement spread over the length and breadth of the State. As on 30.6.2006 there were 3, 19,713 SHGs under Mahalir Thittam with a total savings of Rs.1,12789 crores in Tamil Nadu. The position of this vibrant movement is depicted below:

Table -1: Status of SHGs in Tamil Nadu

Total number of SHGs	3,19,713
Total number of Group Members (lakhs)	51.68
Number of Rural Groups	2,62,270
Number of Rural Group Members	42,68,195
Number of Urban Group	57,443
Number of Urban Group Members	9,00,067
Total Savings (Rs. in crores)	1127.89
Credit Linked Groups	2,29,562
Amount of Loan disbursed (Rs. in crores)	1837.61

Source: Policy Note, Rural Development Department, 2006-07.

e) Skill oriented Trainings

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 which enable the women 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 proposed to train another 23000 women in 2006-07. Entrepreneurship Development Training Programme for women (EDP) conducted various training programmes to expose the SHG women to motivate various business opportunities and start new economic activities. Up to March 2006, the Corporation has trained 6,34,991SHG members along with other Government departments such as Rural Development, Agriculture, Industries and Commerce, Slum Clearance Board, etc. Thus the present study focuses on women's development by the full fledged support of Government of Tamilnadu. As discussed earlier, Government has implemented various welfare schemes and funding for the betterment of women and a challenging aspect of emancipation in the midst of men dominated society.

As far as the welfare of the women is concerned one has to be extremely cautious of the cultural factors of the society. It has to be seen that the rival group of male members of the society is not generated in the reaction of unnecessary and avoidable criticism of them. Without hurting their male ego directly, one has to take their cooperation and support. The success of the

objectives regarding women's actual development depends to a great extent on the degree of acceptance of the modern values of social justice, equality and liberty.

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