

16. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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.

Concept of Empowerment of Women:

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*".

Status of Women in Tamil Nadu: Demographic features:

Tamil Nadu's population growth has been stabilized and growing slowly over the years, thanks to the 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 given in Table -1.

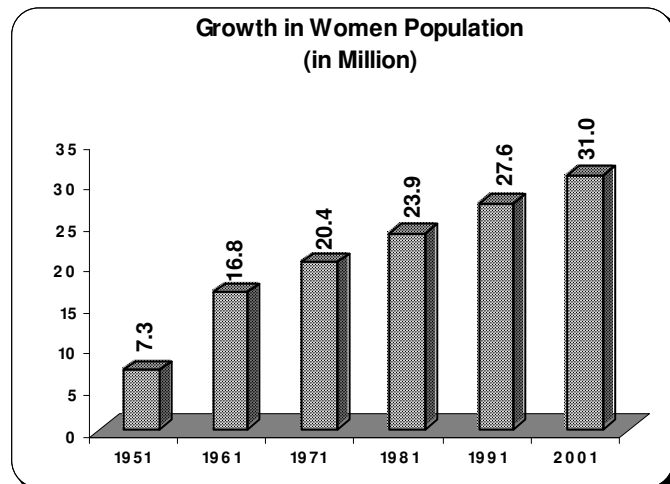


Table -1: Growth in Women Population

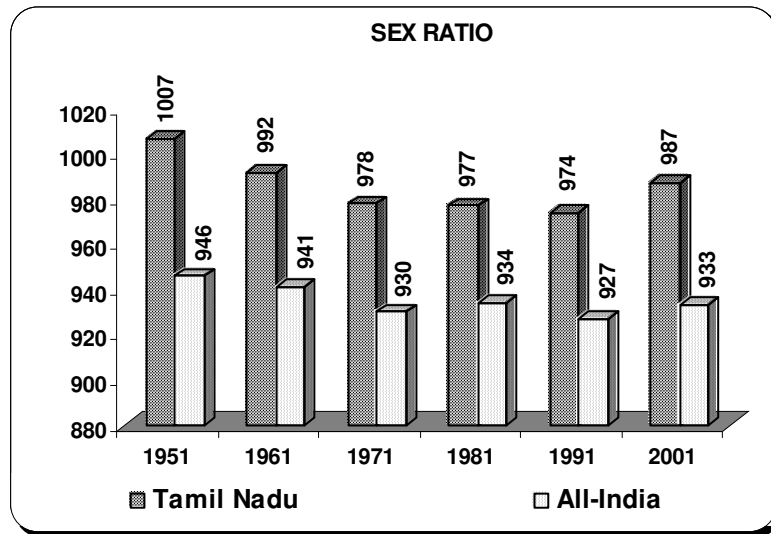
(in million)

Census Years	Tamil Nadu			All India		
	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female	Persons
1951	22.8	7.3	30.1	186	175.6	361.1
1961	16.9	16.8	33.7	226	212.9	439.2
1971	20.8	20.4	41.2	284	264.1	548.2
1981	24.5	23.9	48.4	353	330.0	683.3
1991	28.3	27.6	55.9	439	407.1	846.3
2001	31.4	31.0	62.4	531	495.7	1027.0

Source: Directorate of Census Co-operations, Tamil Nadu.

Sex Ratio:

Sex ratio, (i.e.) the number of female per thousand males - is a significant indicator of the status of women. In Tamil Nadu, the ratio has registered a continuous decline except in 2001. According to the 2001 Population Census, the sex ratio for the State stood at 987 as against 974 in 1991 Census. The rural sex ratio is relatively favourable at 992 compared to 981 in urban areas. It may also be noted that sex ratio in Tamil Nadu was consistently better than all-India average. The following table depicts the sex ratio in Tamil Nadu and All - India.

**Table -2: Sex Ratio in Tamil Nadu and All-India**

Year	Tamil Nadu	All - India
1951	1007	946
1961	992	941
1971	978	930
1981	977	934
1991	974	927
2001	987	933

Source: Director of Census Operations, Tamil Nadu.

Life Expectancy At Birth:

Life expectancy at birth tends to be a good summary measure of women's health status. Normally women outlive men. In countries with high income women on an average live longer by six years than men. In countries with lower income they live only two years longer. The life expectancy at birth for female has shown a steady increase in the State, from 39.74 years in 1961 to 69.75 years in 2001-06 reflecting the achievements made in health sector.

Women Literacy:

Education is a potent remedy for most of the ills of the society. Education is the main instrument for transformation in any society. The economic and social returns to education for women are substantial. By educating its women, a country can reduce poverty, improve productivity, ease population pressure and offer its children a better future. A *'package approach'* is required for developing female education.

There is a wide disparity between male and female literacy rates. As per 2001 Census, the literacy rate was 64.4 per cent and 82.4 per cent for females and males respectively in the State. There also exists a rural-urban gender divide in literacy rate across Tamil Nadu. The rate was 76 for urban female where as it was 55 per cent for its rural counterparts. Compared to urban female literacy rates, the rural rate was lower by

20.71 percentage points, where as the percentage point difference among males in urban and rural areas was only 11.82. The differences in the levels of literacy between males and females was significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas. This indicates that specific intervention may be required for developing the literacy rates of the female population especially (less privileged classes) in rural areas.

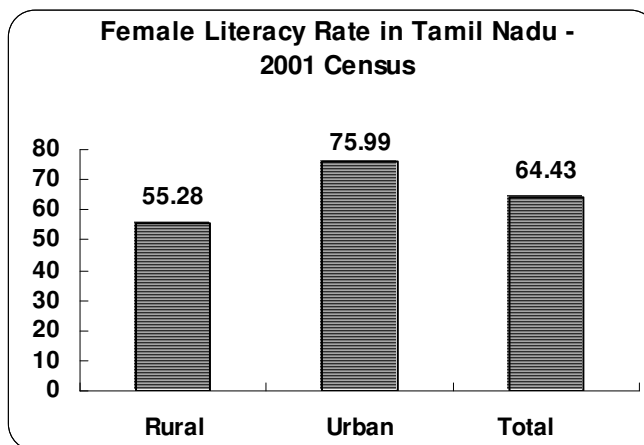


Table -3: Female Literacy Rate in Tamil Nadu - 2001 Census

Region	Male	Female	Persons
Rural	77.15	55.28	66.21
Urban	88.97	75.99	82.53
Total	82.42	64.43	73.45

Source: Director of Census Operations, Tamil Nadu.

Employment and Work Participation Rate:

The work participation rate indicates to a great extent the economic empowerment of women in the society. The status of women is intimately connected 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 recognised as an important element in the adoption of small family norms, which is essential for family planning. There has been a considerable improvement in the entry of women in all sectors of employment in the State. As per the Census results for Tamil Nadu, the Work Participation Rate for females rose from 26.52 per cent in 1981 to 31.32 per cent in 2001, the rate of growth has been faster than for males. However, the number of female workers accounted for 34.72 per cent in the total workforce of 278 lakhs in 2001. The corresponding figure for 1991 Census was 34.06 per cent. In the total population, nearly half were females but they accounted for only 34 per cent of the total workers. This proportion has to be improved for ensuring better and all round economic empowerment. Table-4 shows the Work Participation Rate as well as number of workers in Tamil Nadu.

**Table -4: Work Participation Rates and Number of Workers in Tamil Nadu
(Census based)**

Variable	WPR (%)			No. of Workers (lakhs)		
	1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001
Rural						
Male	59.24	58.28	59.38	96.7	108.2	104.0
Female	33.55	38.50	41.33	54.1	70.1	71.8
Persons	46.48	48.49	50.39	150.8	178.3	175.8
Urban						
Male	51.25	52.78	56.37	41.8	51.4	77.6
Female	11.97	13.10	18.42	9.3	12.2	24.8
Persons	32.05	33.34	37.59	51.1	63.6	102.4
Total						
Male	56.58	56.39	58.96	138.5	159.6	181.6
Female	26.52	29.89	31.32	63.4	82.4	96.6
Persons	41.73	43.31	44.78	201.9	241.9	278.2

Source: Census 1981, 1991 & 200, GOI.

Women and Political Participation:

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 to the institutionalised centres of power. Thus, political participation of women means not only using the right to vote but also power sharing, co-decision making and co-policy making at all levels. The active participation of women in political sphere is integral to empowerment of 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 premised on three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: (a) the equality between women and men; (b) women's right to the full development of their potentials; and (c) women's right to self-representation and self-determination. In PRI women are increasingly coming to the fore and are providing leadership at the grass root level. This has profound social implications which gives 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 thanks to the huge investments in the areas of education and health sectors. This summary measure indicates that the gender bias in Tamil Nadu is very low compared to all-India and other major States (Table - 5).

Gender Development Index (GDI):

GDI is the touchstone of the position of women in society. The GDI (2001) for Tamil Nadu is 0.654. GDI values for the districts in Tamil Nadu vary from 0.766 in Chennai to 0.582 in Dharmapuri and Villupuram. The status of women was the lowest in Dharmapuri in terms of literacy rate, enrolment ratio and Life Expectancy at Birth which are reflected in low GDI (Table-6).

Table -5: Gender Disparity Index: Major States

States	1981		1991	
	Value	Rank	Value	Rank
Andhra Pradesh	0.744	2	0.801	3
Assam	0.462	14	0.575	12
Bihar	0.471	13	0.469	14
Gujarat	0.723	4	0.714	6
Haryana	0.526	12	0.714	6
Karnataka	0.707	6	0.753	5
Kerala	0.872	1	0.825	1
Madhya Pradesh	0.664	8	0.662	9
Maharashtra	0.740	3	0.793	4
Orissa	0.547	11	0.639	10
Punjab	0.688	7	0.710	7
Rajasthan	0.650	9	0.692	8
Tamil Nadu	0.710	5	0.813	2
Uttar Pradesh	0.447	15	0.520	13
West Bengal	0.556	10	0.631	11
All India	0.620	-	0.676	-

Source: National Human Development Report, 2001.

The table below exhibits the district-wise HDI and GDI values of the State.

Table -6: District-wise HDI and GDI Values, 2001

District	HDI Value	GDI Value
Chennai	0.757	0.766
Kancheepuram	0.712	0.710
Thiruvallur	0.654	0.651
Cuddalore	0.644	0.643
Villupuram	0.587	0.582
Vellore	0.658	0.655
T.V. Malai	0.612	0.608
Salem	0.626	0.625
Namakkal	0.636	0.631
Dharmapuri	0.584	0.582
Erode	0.658	0.656
Coimbatore	0.699	0.697
The Nilgiris	0.685	0.686
Trichi	0.671	0.671
Karur	0.647	0.641
Perambalur	0.596	0.592
Thanjavur	0.630	0.629
Nagapattinam	0.654	0.652
Thiruvarur	0.637	0.633
Pudukkottai	0.618	0.615
Madurai	0.661	0.661
Theni	0.628	0.628
Dindigul	0.641	0.638
Ramanathapuram	0.629	0.626
Virudhunagar	0.651	0.649
Sivagangai	0.640	0.635
Tirunelveli	0.658	0.656
Thoothukudi	0.703	0.703
Kanniyakumari	0.711	0.708
Tamil Nadu	0.657	0.654
All India	0.571	0.553

Source: Tamil Nadu Human Development Report, State Planning Commission..

The comparison between the two shows that if the GDI rank is less than the HDI value in a district, the position of women in that district is very poor compared to men. If the GDI is greater than HDI, there will be greater gender equality in human development. In terms of GDI Chennai is well placed, followed by Nilgiris, where the GDI is higher than HDI. In the districts of Tiruchy, Madurai, Theni and Thoothukudi, the HDI and GDI are found to be the same, indicating absence of gender inequality. In the district of Dharmapuri though the GDI is the lowest, in relative terms it is lower in Karur, Villupuram, Namakkal and Sivagangai, where the differences between HDI and GDI is higher. Compared to all-India, the gender bias is very low in Tamil Nadu.

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.

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, especially from marginalized BPL families, 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 by-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.

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.

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.

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.

Self Help Groups:

Self Help Groups are small homogenous groups consisting of 12-20 women from BPL families voluntarily organised to promote savings. 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;
- increase the total family income;
- fulfill the economic needs through self-employment of women;
- utilise bank loan and government welfare schemes;
- help the members to escape from the clutches of moneylenders; and
- mobilise financial resources.

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.1,127.89 crores in Tamil Nadu. The position of this vibrant movement is depicted below:

Table -7: Status of SHGs in Tamil Nadu

Particulars	Status
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.

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 have 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.