CHAPTER II

POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY

Women were considered inferior to men in practical life. But in scriptures they were given high position. Thus, in past, the status of women in India was not clear. It was theoretically high but practically low. Women were prohibited to take part in domestic as well as in external matter. They were under the influence of their parents before marriage and their husbands after marriage. Thus, the position of women in ancient India was inferior.

The position became worse even during the Moghul rule. They could not overcome the nasty Purdah system of the time. Further, there was the custom of Sati. Many women were forcibly sent to the funeral pyre of their dead husbands. There was no change in the fate of women even during the British rule in India.

The situation began to change when many national figures started a struggle for India's freedom. Mahatma Gandhi openly invited the help from women. Many women came forward. Among them were Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali and others.

Mrs. Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India. She became a very famous woman in the world. With her, the status of women in India increased a lot. It was proved that women are not inferior to men. Many women thereafter occupied prestigious positions in India. They excelled in almost all fields such as sports, politics, administration, science and arts.

There is a difference in the valuation of work in the State, with women’s work being valued less than that of men. In the service sector women are found more in low-end jobs such as domestic work, teaching, nursing and secretarial service, while the
high-end jobs like advertising, etc., are carried out by men. The Government of India has taken all efforts to abolish the difference between men and women. According to the Constitution of India, men and women are equal before law. The government is laying special emphasis on the education of girls. In the recent competitive examinations, women have done better than men.

Institutions such as family, marriage, religion, schools, market and State determine the gender based division of roles, responsibilities, resources and power. In Tamil Nadu the agricultural labour force is on the whole more ‘feminine’, while the labour force in manufacturing and services is more ‘masculine’. For example, in the manufacturing and service sectors, women constitute only 25 per cent of technical and professional workers (1991), a slight increase from 20.5 per cent in 1981. Among administrative and managerial workers, women’s share was 4.4 per cent in 1991, up from 2.3 per cent in 1981 (Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998). Agriculture is the main occupation of people in Tamilnadu. About 74% of the people are engaged in agriculture and others in construction, industries, trades, petty business etc. On the other hand, women constitute more than 50 per cent of the agricultural workforce.¹

In Tamilnadu there are almost 80 lakhs (8 Million) of agricultural labourers who subsist on agriculture. Among those who are unorganized 66% of them are agricultural workers who remain the poorest of the poor in Tamilnadu. The proportion of dalit agricultural workers (80%) to the total main workers in the state is much higher than the non-dalits. Most of them live in villages and the vast majority of them do not own land. It is obvious that most of the dalits lead a precarious life as landless agricultural labourers.

¹ TN Human Development Report, Delhi, 2003, p. 95.
Agricultural operations are seasonal and during off seasons they migrate to urban centres in search of jobs. Thousands of poor migrant labourers were lured by unscrupulous contractors to toil for long hours at very low wages under inhuman conditions. The agricultural labourers continue to live in extreme poverty and their very struggle for daily existence is so grim and exhausting that it squeezes out every bit of their energy and sentiments. Being dispersed and unorganized, agricultural labourers have minimal bargaining power to demand a rational wage structure.

Due to their low social status in the rural hierarchy and alarming economic problems such as the inadequacy of employment opportunities, poor security of tenure, low income and the inadequacy of the diversification of economic activity, the situation of agriculture labour is indeed quite bad. – (Tamil Nadu Social Service Society (TASOSS), Chennai.)

The same is true of manufacturing where women are found in lower jobs such as beedi manufacturing, manual labour in cotton textiles, garment making, cashew nut processing, fish and food processing and in the match industry. Women are mostly engaged in temporary jobs at extremely low wages or working on their own account with uneconomical returns. In the case of daily wage-workers, exploitation, in the form of long hours, unsatisfactory work conditions and health hazards, is common because supply of labour far exceeds demand. Significant examples are sub-contracting to women at home in the beedi and match industries.

Beedi rolling is one of the most popular amongst unorganized industries specially, in some parts of the country. Women constitute a very high percentage of labour force in the industry. The reason for this is, firstly, the work is done generally at home and women can do it while attending to their children and other household

\(^2\) Ibid.
chores; secondly, their deft fingers are more suited to the work of beedi rolling, besides, women are considered to be more sincere and hardworking.

The home based system is very convenient to the employer too since, a factory system would mean regularization of the conditions of work and payment of minimum wages and other benefits as per the law; it also involves substantial expenditure on premises for the work. Apart from that, at the factory sites, chances of workers collecting and interacting are much more which could mean demands and collective action by the workers. This could cause problems to the employers. In the home based systems, the employer could reduce the production cost, deny proper wages and benefits to the workers and also keep away from the possibility of any collective action by the workers. In both the formal and informal sectors, sexual harassment is prevalent, but it is higher in the informal sector. Studies indicate that poor women either succumb to the pressures of the employer or lose their jobs. In rural areas, women labourers from Scheduled Caste communities are harassed more.3

Rural poverty is associated with lack of access to productive resources, land in particular. The poorest men and women in general have little or no land, yet socio-economic structures further reduce or inhibit access by women. Cultural traditions also inhibit women’s access to other productive resources and services. Lack of education, especially among women, is correlated with high birth rates; the resulting population pressure contributes to environmental degradation, as increasingly marginal land comes under cultivation; environmental degradation is characterized by soil erosion, declining yields, even desertification; declining agricultural productivity leads to further expansion and to out-migration, which increases the burden on those family members remaining. Survival sometimes requires that even young children work in subsistence

3 Ibid., p. 96.
activities. This necessity, and/or the lack of resources to pay school fees, prevents children, and girls in particular, from attending school. Illiteracy prevents poor people from learning new skills and accessing information and services. Poor people, women especially, work long hours and have difficulty allotting time to rural development programmes.

Poverty is one of the most widespread reasons for the child labour system. Girl children are a significant part of the rural labour force. The 1991 census data reveal the presence of over 606,000 child labourers in the main and marginal worker categories, with a large majority being girls. The girl child in rural areas is more prone to child labour than her counterpart in urban areas. This is particularly true of girls from the Scheduled Caste community.\textsuperscript{4}

No state or national level statistics are available on the ownership of land. A study of land ownership amongst 161 households in Dindigul district carried out by M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai revealed that in 94 per cent of the households, men owned the land. Women who owned land were predominantly those heading households or the only child of their parents. The patrilineal (lineage and inheritance is from father to son) customary system of inheritance, patrilocal (women are brought as brides into the family of the male) system of marriage, the lack of knowledge of women of their legal rights and dependence of women on their male siblings for support in the event of marital conflict all come in the way of women claiming their rights.\textsuperscript{5}

There are no macro-level statistics on women’s control over their income or their family income. A micro-level study of 34 households carried out in three districts

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibid.}
by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) mission of the TAWDP in 1999 reveals that women’s control over the income they earn varies with their age, household headship, and nature of activity (IFAD, 2000). Women’s control over their income is higher when they are engaged in wage labour or where marketing is controlled by them (for example milk vending, flower vending, fish vending), and less so when marketing is controlled by the men. 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, health care and education, unlike their husbands. Moreover, the issue of control over household income is a crucial factor affecting nutritional levels of women (in particular pregnant women), infants and children, and the well-being of the family in general.\(^6\)

There is no macro estimate of the number of women in poverty vis-à-vis the number of men in poverty. Micro-level evidence from Madurai, Ramnathapuram, Dharmapuri and Dindigul districts indicates that the proportion of women-headed households (WHHs) in poverty is higher than the proportion of male-headed households in poverty. Tamil Nadu stands fourth in terms of the percentage of WHHs in India.\(^7\)

Women and girls in poor households experience poverty more intensely than men and boys within the same households. This is because of intra-household inequalities in access to food, health care, education and the rest. A study carried out amongst 161 households in Dindigul district indicates that gender difference in access to food prevailed in 60 per cent of the households. Gender disparities were also prevalent in access to primary health care and primary education, but to a less extent.

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\(^6\) Ibid., pp. 97 - 98.
\(^7\) Ibid.
Gender disparities existed in 60 per cent of households with respect to higher education. Disparities were also noted with respect to the workload of poor women and men. Poor women find no time to rest in a day, in contrast to at least two to three hours of leisure time for the men.\(^8\)

**Gender Specific Poverty and Malnutrition**

Women in Tamil Nadu, like elsewhere, get into poverty in gender-specific ways. Gender specific factors prevent them from coming out of poverty. Getting married into a poorer family for want of dowry and breaking down of marriage are two gender specific reasons for women getting into poverty. Women’s lack of independency rights to land, the gender based division of the labour market, their greater dependency on daily wage labour, lower wages as compared to men, lesser control over family income and lesser access to formal credit, all come in the way of their overcoming poverty. Women headed households not only face many of these constraints, but often also a smaller family size, lesser access to adult labour and a lack of social support, especially from their husband’s relatives.\(^9\)

Under-nutrition is a persisting phenomenon in Tamil Nadu and in India as a whole, in particular among women. In 1995, a state policy on nutrition was explicitly drafted with technical support from the United Nations Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF). Tamil Nadu is probably the first state to draft such a policy, following the 1993 National Nutrition Policy. This has been reformulated in 2002–3 as Policy for Malnutrition Free Tamil Nadu. The state policy, for the first time, explicitly recognizes that food alone cannot eradicate malnutrition. One of the obstacles to improvements in

\(^8\) *Ibid.*

nutritional status in Tamil Nadu is inadequate focus on the adolescent girl who is to be the future mother. This issue needs to be addressed.

**Literacy**

Even though the female literacy level in Tamil Nadu has grown considerably over the years, the gender gap between male (74%) and female (51%) in terms of literacy still remains. Similar gender imbalances can also be noticed in the employment sphere in spite of the back-breaking work with the women in Tamil Nadu are burdened, both at home and in agriculture, they have a very weak position in the organized sector.

According to Jawaharlal Nehru, men’s education is the education of an individual but women’s education is the education of the whole family.\(^{10}\) For the advancement of the family and in ultimate analysis, for the advancement of the Nation women’s literacy is very essential. Certain obscure social practices like child marriage, sati, isolation of widows etc has an adverse impact on increase in women’s literacy.

Historically, missionaries played a very important role in women’s literacy in Tamil Nadu. Establishment of a Department of Public Instruction in the year 1855 brought radical changes in women’s education. Alexander Arbuthnot, the first Director of Public Instruction\(^ {11}\) in Madras was instrumental in bringing changes in women’s education in the Madras Presidency. Establishment of the University of Madras in the year 1857 was a watershed in higher education in the Presidency. Enrolment of women in universities in India first started in the University of Madras in the year 1876.\(^ {12}\) Between 1907 and 1912, the University of Madras admitted female candidates to examinations, externally.

Annie Besant in her lecture ‘Wake up India’ emphasized the necessity to give every women literacy.\(^{13}\) The first women’s college, Queen Mary’s College was established in Madras in the year 1914. In the years 1936 and 1937, two Arts colleges for women were started in Trichinopoly. In the year 1937, nine Arts colleges for women were established in Madras Presidency.\(^{14}\)

Post Independent Tamil Nadu witnessed perceptible growth in women’s education. Under the Chief Ministership of K. Kamaraj, the government expanded primary education. The free education scheme gave a fillip to the growth of literacy in the state. Free noon-meal scheme also improved enlistment of more girls in the schools. Since 1960, State of Madras introduced a new scheme of compulsory education for the students in the age group of 6-11 in 3 stages, under a phased programme to all female children of school-going age.

In 1958, the Central Government appointed a National Committee to find out the ways and means to improve women’s education in the country. The committee recommended that the education of women should be given special consideration and special funds need be allocated for the purpose.\(^{15}\) Regarding the importance of women’s education in the country, Kothari Commission observed that for the full development of our human resources, the improvement of homes and for moulding the character of children during the most impressionable period of infancy, the education of women is of ever greater importance than that of men.\(^{16}\)

While the literacy rate of Tamil Nadu was almost comparable to the all-India position in 1941, the state has gone ahead of all-India percentage in the decades

\(^{13}\) Lakshmi Misra, *Education of Women in India*, Madras, 1966, p. 36.


\(^{15}\) *Report of the National Committee on Women’s Education*, New Delhi, 1959, pp. 1-20.

following independence. According to the 2001 Census Tamil Nadu has attained third position behind Kerala and Maharashtra among major states, both in terms of overall literacy, especially female literacy. While the overall literacy rate has gone up from 62.7 per cent in 1991 to 73.47 per cent in 2001, the male literacy rate has increased from 73.75 to 82.33 per cent. It is significant to note that the female literacy rate has gone up by more than 13 percentage points from 51.33 per cent in 1991 to 64.55 per cent in 2001. The ratio of male literacy to female literacy has come down from 1.4 in 1991 to 1.27 in 2001, showing the narrowing of gender inequality in the state.

The link between poverty, female literacy and the gender gap has been a subject of debate for quite some time now. A comparison of high and low performing states shows a definite link between poverty and female illiteracy. The logic can be extended to girls’ enrolment as well. Only 9.5 per cent of girls from the poorest 40 per cent of households complete middle school, while 85 per cent of boys and 80 per cent of girls in the top 20 per cent of households do so.\(^\text{17}\)

In order to promote girls’ education Government of Tamil Nadu has taken a number of steps. Schools have been opened to cater to the needs of girls. Position in respect of Government High and Higher Secondary Schools exclusively for girls and the No. of Co-Education schools in the State of Tamil Nadu are given in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Inst.</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Co-ed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>5055</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>3842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>5175</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>3933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid. p. 83.
The provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since India's Independence. Though these endeavours did yield significant results, gender disparity persists with uncompromising tenacity, more so in the rural areas and among the disadvantaged communities. This is not only a matter of national anxiety and concern, but also a matter of national conscience. It is with this concern that the Government of India launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult illiteracy. Since women account for an overwhelming percentage of the total number of illiterates, the National Literacy Mission is for all practical purposes, a mission of imparting functional literacy to women. Total literacy campaigns launched since 1988 under the aegis of the National emphasises on making efforts to:

- Create an environment where women demand knowledge and information, empowering themselves to change their lives.
- Inculcate in women the confidence that change is possible, if women work collectively.
- Spread the message that education of women is a pre-condition for fighting against their oppression.
- Highlight the plight of the girl child and stress the need for Universalisation of elementary education as a way of addressing the issue.

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Some of the significant ways in which the literacy campaigns have contributed to the promotion of female literacy and women’s empowerment are as follows:-

**Social Awareness**

Literacy campaigns have heightened social awareness among women regarding the importance of education, both for themselves as well as for their children. Large number of women has been participating whole-heartedly in the literacy campaigns as learners and volunteers. Because of the campaign mode and creation of a positive environment for literacy, women receive a social sanction to participate in the literacy programs. As women come out of their homes and take part in the campaigns with great enthusiasm, they acquire a heightened sense of self-awareness and desire to gain knowledge on host of women’s issues

**Enrolment in Schools**

The literacy campaigns have also motivated and encouraged women learners to educate their children, particularly girls by enrolling them in formal schools. An evaluation study of the literacy campaign in Birbhum District shows that the biggest achievement of the adult literacy program in Birbhum has been its impact on girls’ education. The confidence of the girls, as they perform drill or play football, is the result of the awareness among neo-literate parents that girls need to be educated and outgoing. The need to provide equal opportunity to both girls and boys has also had effect of generating greater demand for the quantity to both girls and boys has also had effect of generating greater demand for the quantity and quality of primary schooling. The literacy classes conducted under literacy campaigns have given women an opportunity to break the isolation which is socially structured into their lives, giving them a chance to meet other women and learn collectively- rather than learn singly as
individuals. The newly acquired literacy skills have enhanced their ability to solve family problems and learn new skills. Women are communicating how they have started to feel more confident, how their articulation has improved, how they have become more discerning and how they have learnt to function autonomously.

Total literacy campaigns have provided illiterate adult women, who have been denied access to formal schooling, with a great opportunity for reading, writing, increasing awareness levels and skills training. Literacy campaigns have thus actively promoted gender equity and have sought to empower them as to decision making about themselves, their families and their communities. The impact of literacy on women’s life has often been dramatic. Experiences of Poddukuttai in Tamil Nadu (where women learnt how to bicycle and acquired ownership right in stone quarries) and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh (where a lesson in the literacy Primer inspired women to launch anti-arrack agitation that later engulfed the entire district and the state) have shown how women have been empowered, at individual and collective levels as a result of their participation\(^\text{19}\).

Literacy campaigns have played a significant role in improving the status of women within their own families. Whereas traditionally, women have little say in the family decision making, they, through participation in literacy programs, have begun to express their newly found self-belief in having a say both within and without the family.

Another area in which women’s equality has shown a major improvement as a result of adult literacy programs is the area of enrolment of boys and girls in schools. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lowered compared to the non-literate householders. Participation of women in literacy campaigns has opened several opportunities for neo-literate women to step out of the households and involve themselves in some enterprise or a new vocation.

In almost all the districts, the literacy campaigns have gone beyond the transaction of mere literacy skills and have served to enhance knowledge and skills for better management of expenditure and improving earning capacities. In several districts, the women participants in literacy campaigns have begun to set aside their earnings not only in regular banks but also in specially thrift societies. Such societies, as for example in Dumka are run by the women themselves.

Literacy campaigns in most districts have taken up health and hygiene issues as an integral component of adult education programs. Literacy campaigns have helped to spread knowledge about health care and nutrition, thereby enabling mothers to keep their family in better health and to care better for their children. Literacy campaigns have also disseminated information for creating awareness about problems of early marriage, spacing and small family norms\(^\text{20}\).

**Public Health Care**

Public health facilities in rural Tamil Nadu are very important for women. Tamil Nadu is moving towards population stability and has managed to reduce maternal and infant mortality substantially over the last three decades. It has also established a widespread network of health institutions in the public sector, and equipped them to some extent.

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“As for as sanitation is concerned Tamil Nadu's performance is not something that one can boast of. In rural areas, 73.3 per cent of households are still resorting to open defecation while the figure is 16.2 per cent in urban areas. The overall coverage of piped sewerage remained low with 14.4 per cent. In urban areas, 27.4 per cent of the households are dependent on the sewerage and 37.9 per cent on septic tanks. The figures under the two sub-parameters for rural areas were 2.2 per cent and 14.4 per cent”. – *The Hindu, dated March 16, 2012*

Toilet facilities are available to only 23 per cent of the households in Tamil Nadu (1991), a situation which is not too good. Unlike in other parts of the world, pit latrines have not picked up in India at all nor in Tamil Nadu. Women squatting in public or in uncovered areas does not augur well for the dignity of women. Even in urban areas, less than 58 per cent of households have access to sanitation facilities (in 1991), as compared to about 51 per cent in 1981. The fact that there has not been any significant improvement over a decade is worrisome. Chennai has the highest coverage with 82 per cent and Tiruvannamalai, with less than 9 per cent of households having access to toilet facilities, the lowest. The rural scenario is even worse. Only about 7 per cent of the rural population has access to sanitation facilities (1991). According to 2001 census, the coverage is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toilet</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Toilet</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TN Human Development Report
Though the Tamil Nadu Government initiated steps for the construction of rural toilets in 1986–7, the programme did not succeed due to lack of water facilities.\textsuperscript{21} Therefore, in recent years, the emphasis is on the provision of quality community toilets with water facilities. Dry type latrines no longer exist in village panchayat areas.\textsuperscript{22} Concerted effort is required to disseminate knowledge and create awareness among people on sanitation and its impact on their health and environment. This can be accomplished by educating a target group, in this case women, which would in turn influence the families.

Studies indicate that there is a substantial difference between the desired and actual age of marriage by women. 50\% of women marry at or before 18 years of age, and have little choice in whom they want to marry. Twenty-five per cent of Tamil Nadu women marry their first cousins and at least 50 per cent of women marry some relative or the other. Post-natal mortality is higher among children born of marriages between relatives. Another concern is that 39.6 per cent of pregnancies in Tamil Nadu occur in the age group of 15–19 as per estimates for 1994 posing risks for both the mother and the child.\textsuperscript{23}

Fifty-six per cent of women in the 15 to 49 age group in Tamil Nadu have anaemia as against 22 percent in Kerala and 42 per cent in Karnataka. Anaemia, which is estimated to account for over 6 per cent of all maternal deaths directly, and which contributes indirectly in equal or greater measure, has to be tackled on a priority basis. The basic cause for anaemia is poor nutrition of the mother. Both poverty and intra-household gender inequality in the distribution of food play a role in this. Also relevant is the enormous burden of household and productive work borne by the mother in poor

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21} Tamil Nadu Human Development Report, Delhi, 2003, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 60.
\textsuperscript{23} TN Human Development Report, Delhi, 2003 , p. 99.
\end{flushright}
Among pregnant and lactating women, anaemia is prevalent in 54 per cent of the cases.\textsuperscript{24}

Women need to be healthier, nutritionally speaking, to improve their own physical conditions. This is also required in the interest of the next generation. Respiratory problems, reproductive health problems and cancer are higher amongst women than men, while heart ailments are higher amongst men than women. Part of these differences can be attributed to the gender-based division of work, and part to the lack of reproductive and sexual rights of women. Given the fact that women are responsible for cooking, and firewood is the single largest source of energy, chronic lung diseases and cancer in women are some of the common fallouts. Women working in the \textit{beedi}, lace and \textit{agarbatti} industries, are known to suffer from a variety of eye problems, and those working in \textit{beedi} making units, dyes and quarries also suffer from a variety of respiratory problems and skin diseases. In all instances, the vulnerability of pregnant women is higher than others, leading to chances of miscarriages. Amongst women, access to quality health care is lower than men.\textsuperscript{25} Estimates for the year 1992–3 put Tamil Nadu’s maternal mortality ratio (MMR) at 376. More recent evidence suggests that the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in Tamil Nadu is substantially lower. An analysis of the causes of maternal death in Tamil Nadu brings out the fact that a large number of these are preventable. While there are well identified direct and indirect obstetric causes for maternal death, socio-economic factors also play a crucial role—for instance, patriarchal attitudes, the enormous burden of hard toil and poor nutrition, the lacunae in transport and communication facilities, delay in accessing proper health facilities and the lack of and/or poor quality of essential and emergency obstetric services. Among the medical causes, haemorrhage, accounted for nearly 40

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 46.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., pp. 99 - 100.
per cent of all maternal deaths in Tamil Nadu in 1996. Possible errors in the estimate notwithstanding, this highlights the importance of availability of blood in saving maternal lives. Other major causes include pregnancy-induced hypertension and eclampsia, rupturing of the uterus on account of obstructed labour, puerperal sepsis and septicemia. Important indirect obstetric causes include anaemia, heart disease, jaundice and malaria.  

**Participation in Decision Making**

Analysis of trends of women’s participation to contest elections to the State Legislatures indicate that there is a gender discrimination which is responsible for poor representation of women in India. The recent sharp increase in the participation of women in grassroots democracy has paved the way for women’s increased mobility outside their homes, creating a space to voice their concerns. While there is still a long way to go for full participation, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, reserving one-third seats in local bodies for women, have facilitated women’s participation in the political process. There is a need for the state to develop sensitivity to women’s aspirations and priorities and to make them mainstream concerns.

Participation in the election process by voting is an indicator of participation in the democratic process. An analysis of the voting trends in the six assembly elections up to 2006 shows that the female voting percentage has been similar to the male voting percentage. While male voting percentages range between 65.3 and 74.3 per cent, female percentages range between 63.8 and 71.7 per cent. The overall voting percentage (for both males and females) declined from 1984 to 1991 but again increased between 1996 and 2006. The relevant data on voter turnout on gender basis in general elections in Tamil Nadu is given in the following table.

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Table – Voter turn-out- General Elections in Tamil Nadu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Women’s Participation in Parliament and State Assembly**

The share of women in elected offices such as Parliament or Assembly is an important indicator. The UNDP HDR stipulates that 30 per cent should be a minimum in such bodies. Very few countries have come anywhere near this minimum goal. In countries like Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, the 30 per cent threshold has been crossed either at the parliament or cabinet level.\(^{27}\)

The role of women’s participation in elected bodies should not be undervalued. Elections are significant in drawing the attention of the nation to the problems and needs of disadvantaged sections. Appropriate selection of candidates and representation of every important section of the society in an election is vital to serve the interests of all the sections of the population. Opportunities for participation at this level are crucial for the adoption of politics and measures for women’s development. Today reservation for women is being talked about because it would be difficult to enter into the corridors of power without reservation. The demand for reservation should not

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therefore be seen as either a gift or a privilege that women are seeking. For most women it is the last straw and a desperate measure to ensure their participation in the political mainstream.

Today most of the political parties in India have initiated steps to ensure participation of women in democratic institutions and to develop their capacities. Most of the political parties have not yet developed any special programmes to meet the special requirements of women in urban or rural areas. Debates on the struggle of women and various actions by women’s groups and NGOs on local as well as national problems have forced the mainstream political parties to include women’s problems in their political programmes. The political parties have changed their attitude towards women which is reflected in their attitudes towards selection of women candidates.

Countries that hold regular elections show an improved recognition of women as a political constituency and parties and candidates tend to adopt pro-women stance and appeal specifically to women’s votes, especially at the time of elections. This becomes very evident in elections in India, wherein there is a growing consciousness of the need to woo the woman voter and the need to pay attention to the needs and issues of women, in the election manifestos of political parties. Since independence, Indian women have been showing increasing awareness about not only lack of rights but also their utility. A majority of illiterate rural women are also politically sensitive and aware of the various issues confronting them. Women get easily mobilised in the political processes by the political parties who approach women very often for party issues and for short-term goals by winning elections, but not for long-term goals of bringing about social changes and gender equality in political power-sharing. In all the elections held since independence, women had the voting rights. Voting by women in all tiers of Government has always been a feature of the Indian Polity since 1947. Due to the
paternalistic family and male dominated political structures which do not provide space for women in decision-making bodies, women constituted 3.1% of the total contestants in 1996 election and did not occupy more than 6.10% of the total seats in the state legislative assemblies and Parliament. The number of women contestants in Parliamentary elections has not increased significantly over the years. Political parties are still reluctant to field women candidates at national level. In the early days of the Indian Republic, the number of women representatives was a mere 22, which was a lowly 4.4% of the total seats in the *Lok Sabha*.

In the case of Tamil Nadu despite the fact that differences in participation in voting among men and women are not considerable, gender difference in achieving positions of power through elections is higher. The table given below reflects the trend over time with regard to female members in both the *Lok Sabha* and the Tamil Nadu Assembly. As seen from the table, the percentage of female members of parliament (MPs) has been consistently below eight per cent. The gender gap is inconsistent for all India with female percentages ranging between a low of 2.5 per cent (1996) to a high of just 9.09 per cent (1984). There has only been very few woman ministers at the Centre from Tamil Nadu in recent years.

Table-Participation of women in national elections (*Lok Sabha*)- All India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Total % of voting</th>
<th>Voting % of men</th>
<th>Voting % of women</th>
<th>Total Seats Contested by women</th>
<th>Seats won by women</th>
<th>% seats won of contested seats</th>
<th>Total Seats</th>
<th>% of women members</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>37.10</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
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<td>56.00</td>
<td>38.77</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>500</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>Total no of women who voted</td>
<td>% of women who voted</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Percentage</td>
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<table>
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<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>9.7</td>
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<td>245</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>7.3</td>
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<td>245</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td>245</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information at a glance: *Rajya Sabha 1952-2008*. 
### Table — Membership In Lok Sabha And Cabinet - All India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lok Sabha Members</th>
<th>Ministers in the Cabinet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
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<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table — Membership Of Tamil Nadu Women In Lok Sabha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of Tamil Nadu women contested in Lok Sabha elections</th>
<th>No of constituencies in which contested</th>
<th>No of constituencies in which women won</th>
<th>No of constituencies in which men won</th>
<th>% of win of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>39</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.69</td>
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</table>
Table given below gives details for the Tamil Nadu Assembly. While overall, the situation has been similar, the 1991 assembly had 13.25 per cent women or 31 female members. The percentage of female ministers has been higher than their membership on average, ranging between 5.56 per cent in 1989 and 7.41 per cent in 1996. In the 2006 elections out of 160 women candidates 22 have won. In the 2011 elections 17 MLAs are women which is a sharp decline from the previous election.

Table—Members In Tamil Nadu Assembly And State Cabinet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. elected as members</th>
<th>No. represented as ministers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Position of Women in Civil Services
Women’s participation in government services is an indicator of increasing decision making power and participation in governance. In the industrialised western countries, women constitute 13 per cent of government employees. Tamil Nadu Government has provided 30 % reservation for women in Government jobs since 1989 by amending general Rule 21 of the State and Subordinate Services. This has served as a big boost to leveling gender inequity in employment. Similarly concessions are offered to industries employing more than 50 % women is an incentive for employing women. Similarly 33% reservation for women in all the standing committee has become mandatory through a Government order. The percentage of women as Central Government employees has an upward trend from 10.34% in the year 1990 to 13.44% in the year 1998, which is comparable to developed countries. In Tamil Nadu Government, women employment is even higher. It was 17 per cent in the year1990 and was 24 per cent in the year 1998. Women employment in local bodies which was about 45 per cent in the year 1990 was over 59 per cent in the year 1998. These higher percentages in Tamil Nadu, are due to higher employment of women in educational institutions and welfare services. Thus, though men continue to outnumber women in government and quasi-government positions, the position is even better than the position in developed countries.

29 Sarla Gopalan, op.cit., p. 146.
30 Tamil Nadu Human Development Report, Delhi, 2003, p. 106.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Central Govt No of persons employed (in lakhs)</th>
<th>State Govt No of persons employed (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Local Bodies No of persons employed (in lakhs)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Fe male</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.45</td>
<td>4.34</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.50</td>
<td>4.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3.78</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>3.71</td>
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<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.99</td>
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<td>1997</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>4.11</td>
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</table>


Of about 357 co-operative societies in operation in Tamil Nadu, the overall elected membership is 3061 of which 1158 are women, which works out to 38 per cent. The position of one-third reservations for women along with the fact that some co-operatives are all-women societies are the reasons for this improved situation in favour of women. Some districts fare even better, namely Dharmapuri (56.76 per cent), Pudukkottai (68 percent), Nagapattinam (64.29 per cent) and Theni (52.86 per cent), which may be attributed to the reason that in these districts there are a number of special co-operatives for tailoring, weaning foods, etc. where a number of women are employed. About 21.15 per cent of office bearers of the co-operative societies are women.31

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So far when trade unions are concerned, they remain largely male-dominated. Out of a total membership of 1,636,042 in the 7035 trade unions, women membership is 289,949, which is only 17.72 per cent of the total. This can be due to the fact that women contribute a smaller share of the total industrial workforce as compared to men, and that there are barriers to working women becoming trade union members. It is also to be kept in view that, there is no reservation for women in trade unions.32

In the higher bureaucracy, on all-India basis there has been limited presence of women. A few eminent women have no doubt, occupied important administrative positions, such as Secretaries of Departments in the National Government as well as in Tamil Nadu State Government. It is only about 5.71% of the total number of persons in administrative services are women. It is noteworthy that within the premier Civil Services of India, the representation of women is not that encouraging.

TABLE- Women in Premier Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>% of females</th>
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32 Ibid.
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<tr>
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<td>567 501 66 11.6</td>
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Women are increasing their presence in other services such as the Revenue Services, the Railway Services, Telecommunication Services etc. In the year 1997, on all-India basis, women represented 13.8% of the employee strength in the public sector, as against only 8.6% in the year 1971.

One of the Gender Empowerment Measures is increasing the proportion of women at senior levels of government. In this context a study initiated in 1996 by the Department of Personnel and Training (DOPT), as part of a project ‘Capacity Building for Civil Services’, was a significant step. A survey was carried out across a cross section of the services, among men and women officers, to ascertain their views on issues of relevance. The survey questionnaire was formulated keeping in mind different areas of concern for women officers such as Gender Image in workplace and in the family and stress factors. Various government studies have been undertaken in the past on problems and issues related to the various individual services. Many issues, such as stress and motivation and sexual harassment in work places etc., were covered by the survey. A national level Project Steering Committee was set up for carrying out the
Capacity Building Project. A focal point was identified in the DOPT for examining the whole gamut of Women’s Issues in the Civil Service. The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) was designated as a consultant institution for developing a curriculum for Gender Sensitization Programmes and ten Regional Seminars were conducted at nine State Administrative Training Institutes.

Women in general are less corrupted. They utilise development expenditure more effectively. Women representatives are directed by their husbands or sons. Therefore many female members are unwilling to contest and get re-elected in the future. There must be representation of really eligible and energetic women from all section of the society so that empowerment of women could become meaningful.