CHAPTER - II

PROFILE OF THE PUDUCHEERY

UNION TERRITORY

Introduction

The profile of the women of the Union Territory (UT) of Pondicherry presents a demonstrable contrast to that of women of India in general. Conditioned by its geography, history and culture, Pondicherry reflects the South Indian world view in which the concept of femininity-motherhood is central to the way of life and education is perceived as the gateway for better livelihood. In the 20th century, especially, much attention was given to the social development of women especially under the influence of the Mother (Mirra Alfaasa) of Aurobindo Ashram-Auroville.

History

Legends associate old Pondicherry with the great Hindu sage Agastya. It is believed that Agastya established an Ashram there and the place was known as Agastiswaram. An inscription found near Vedapuriswara temple built and rebuilt many times lends credibility to this legend. There is also mention in the Bahur Plates of the existence of a Sanskrit University in the place during early times. Indeed, the place
was considered to be a seat of traditional learning and Vedic culture. Excavations in the region of Arikamedu, south of Pondicherry town, indicate that there was a Roman settlement there between 2nd Century of the Pallava Kingdom of Kanchipuram from about the 4th Century A.D. It came under the Chola dynasty of Thanjavur in the 10th Century A.D. and later under the Pandya kingdom in the 13th Century. Still later it came under the Vijayanagar Empire which controlled the whole of South India until early 17th Century. In the meantime, at the beginning of the 16th Century the Portuguese had established a factory in Pondicherry. The Portuguese had to leave when the Sultan of Bijapur came to have sway over Gingee in the 17th Century. Thereafter, the Danes, the Dutch and the French followed and set up their establishments/trading posts. It was in 1673 that the French Period of Pondicherry began. Francois Martin, the first French Governor developed Pondicherry into a flourishing port town from a small fishing village that it was. In 1693, the town transferred hands to the Dutch who fortified it. It was transferred back to the French in 1699 by the traite de Ryswick. Francois Martin who was appointed Administrator following the traite de Ryswick, brought stability to Pondicherry and developed the town further. Dumas, who succeeded him, followed in the footsteps of Francois Martin. In the Eighteenth Century Pondicherry was laid out on a grid pattern and it grew considerably. The French obtained Karaikal from the King of
Thanjavur in 1738 and Mahe from the ruler of Badagara in 1721. Yanam came into their possession in 1731. Under Governor Dupleix (1742-54), Pondicherry expanded further in size and became very prosperous. But, Dupleix was recalled to France when his hopes of creating a French colonial India were thwarted by Robert Clive of England.

In the course of the Anglo-French wars (Carnatic wars) Pondicherry was royed in 1761. Thereafter, over the next fifty years Pondicherry changed lands between the British and the French frequently in the course of wars and treaties. After 1816, the French obtained permanent control over Pondicherry. The next 138 years witnessed rebuilding of Pondicherry with significant developments in the areas of infrastructure, education and law. The French retained Pondicherry even after the British left India in 1947. In 1954, Pondicherry passed hands from the French to independent India and became a Union Territory with headquarters at Pondicherry. In May 1956, the treaty of transfer, was signed in Delhi. Several thousands in Pondicherry opted for French nationality at the time of independence. A large number of Tamil residents in Pondicherry still have French Passports, having chosen to remain French nationals. Today, nearly 20,000 Pondicherry people live in France and nearly 14,000 French nationals live in the Territory of Pondicherry. Many Pondicherrian French still look to France for their
future and direction. There are also some who feel that the French of Pondicherry are a kind of nowhere people, neither French nor Indian. Continued bonds with France and Pondicherry have made the Union Territory rather unique.

**Economy**

The Net State Domestic Product of the UT is Rs.3828 crore (2002-03). source of occupation in the UT. It forms around 25% of employment. The remaining 75% of the employment are predominantly from services and marginally from industries. In the rural areas more than a third of the population depends on agriculture. Rice, sugar cane, coconut, ground nut, pulses and cotton are the major crops. The total production of food crops is 3.27 lakh tonnes of which sugar cane accounts for 2.38 lakh tonnes, paddy about 60,000 tonnes and pulses about 4,000 tonnes. The status of employment of women in the UT is conditioned by these aspects of the economy. Over 80% of the net area sown in the UT is irrigated by canals and tube wells. In Pondicherry region, there are several artesian and semi artesian aquifers. The ground water is fairly intensively exploited. Ground water exploitation is Karaikal region is mainly done by deep tube wells and filter points, as water quality is not good at shallow depths. In the Mahe region, while ground water is accessible at fairly low depths, the problem of salt-water intrusion is encountered, especially
during summer months. In Yanam region, groundwater is accessed through filter points within a depth of ten meters. Agriculture in the UT is predominantly small holding based. The proportion of the holdings which are less than one hectare is 78%. The UT also lends itself for meaningful marine and inland fishery activities with 45 kms. of coastline, about 700 sq.kms. of inshore waters and some brackish water areas. While poultry development has not been significant, animal husbandry development tonnes. Majority of the industrial units are small scale enterprises. There are a few textile mills and sugar factories. Road connectivity which is very crucial for socio-economic development is 100% in the UT, compared to 78% in the country as a whole.

**Languages, Religion and Culture**

The main languages spoken in the Union Territory of Pondicherry are Tamil (in Pondicherry and Karaikal), Telugu (in Yanam) and Malayalam (in Mahe), apart from French which continues to be spoken by many. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam co-exist in Pondicherry. The Hindus have scores of ancient temples in Pondicherry. Famous among them being Varadaraja temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu, Villianur temple dedicated to Thirukameshwara and Thirunallar temple dictated to Planet Saturn, Sani. Karaikal is the Gateway to various places of worship in the eastern coast of Tamil Nadu. Velankanni and Nagore the two famous
places of pilgrimage for Christians and Muslims respectively are near Karaikal. For the Muslims, Masthan Saheb Darga (dedicated to Masthan Syed Buhari, a Sufi aint) is very sacred. The Christians have half a dozen famous churches. Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Church of the Immaculate Conception, the Notre Dame des Anges and the Villianur and Ariankuppam Churches. The typical Hindu way of deifying the woman power (Sakthi) is reflected in the worship of various forms of ammans. Muthumariamman, Angalamman, Draupadhi Amman etc. The Hindu festivals also are reflective of the deification of the woman. Thiraiyattam, dedicated to Goddess Bhagavathi, the Mangani festival dedicated to Karaikal Ammaiayar (believed to have been a Shaivite Saint elevated to the status of Goddess), the Kandoori festival dedicated to Karaikal Durga etc. are examples. During festivals, fire walking and Sedal (devotees piercing their body and tongue with silver hooks and Vels) are practised by some in the belief that these practices lead to self purification. There are hosts of Saneeswara (Lord Saturn), Women and Matrimony. The Saneeswara (Lord Saturn) temple at Thirunallar is believed to be the only one in the country dedicated to this God. Those who are troubled by vicissitudes in life and wish bright future go on a pilgrimage to pay obeisance to Lord Saturn. Often, those afflicted by Sade Sathi (seven-and-a-half-year affliction), especially girls, around the time desired for the conduct of their marriage are taken to this temple. More
than two thousand pilgrims visit this temple everyday. The Sani Peyarchi festival is the Kumbh Mela of Pondicherry, attracting lakhs of devotees, other festivals, famous among which are Masquerade (Mask) festival (of French tradition) and the International Yoga festival. Shri Aurobindo Ashram was founded by Shri. Aurobindo in 1926. The spiritual tenets of the Ashram combine Yoga and modern science. The offshoot of the Ashram, the Auroville was inspired by the evolutionary vision of Shri. Aurobindo and founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfaasa, known as the Mother. It was meant to be an experiment in international living where men and women could live in peace, progress and harmony with each other, remaining above all creeds. Pondicherry is also reputed for its Shaiva Sidhanta (Shaivite philosophy) tradition. The French institutions of research in Pondicherry are home to a collection of 11,000 manuscripts concerning this philosophy. An Indo-French Project in collaboration with the government, s National Mission for Manuscripts is now under formulation. Aayi is believed to have been an exemplary woman of Pondicherry in the 16th century. The story about her is that she razed her house to the ground to construct a reservoir for soldiers to quench their thirst. It was also from this reservoir that Napoleon’s men quenched their thirst 300 years later. It is said that Napoleon, charmed by this story, ordered construction of a monument for her. The Aayi Mandapam at the centre of the Government Park in Pondicherry is said
to be this monument. The old French colony has retained its Indian character, but the French influence in Puducheri, as it is called now, can be found in the red kepis (military caps) of the police officials, French spelling on signboards and traffic signs and some buildings and old stones. Streets are referred to as rue. Married women are addressed as Madame and men as Misieur. Creole food, basically rice and non-vegetarian preparations, is characterized by French restraint. The status of women in Pondicherry has been considerably influenced by the teachings of the Mother. She believed in the equality of sexes and wanted same education and training to be given to boys and girls. Subramanya Bharathy (1882-1921) known as Mahakavi (Great Poet) Bharathiar who lived in Pondicherry since 1908 worked tirelessly for the freedom movement and emancipation. He also espoused the cause of women's freedom. Panchali Sapatham (Draupadi's vow), one of the Mahakavi's work was a poetic semi-political reflection on greed, pride and righteousness inspired by the Mahabharata. His eventful life, though short, hugely impacted on the people of Pondicherry.

**Human development**

In terms of the Human Development Index and Gender Disparity Index2, the UT holds the 6th and 5th ranks respectively (Appendix 1). Social sector expenditure in the UT is 37% as against the Central
Government figure of 15% (1997-98). Nonetheless, expenditure on women as a proportion of Net State Domestic Product is only 0.049% (2001-02). This proportion in the case of children is 3.5%. Per capita expenditure on women’s development is Rs. 18.94 and in the case of children it is Rs.1, 176.18 (2001-02). The per capita expenditure on women’s development has trebled between 1993-94 and 2000-01. It has also exceeded the Central expenditure in this regard marginally in 2000-01. The per capita expenditure on child development in Pondicherry has doubled since 1993-94. Since this year, it has all along been twice as much as the per capita expenditure at the Centre.

DEMOGRAPHY

Population

The population of Pondicherry (Census, 2001) is 9.74 lakhs. As the country total population, it is 0.09%. Women and men constitute exactly 50% of the population (4.87 lakh). The average annual exponential growth rate (1991-2001) of population is 1.87% as against 1.93% for the whole of India. The UT has registered significant reduction in population growth rate compared to the previous decade (1981-1991) which was 2.90%. Population growth rate in Pondicherry is also impacted by migration from Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.
Urbanization

Pondicherry is highly urbanized. Urban population accounts for 67% as against the All India proportion of 28% (2001). The average annual rate of growth of urbanization of the UT is 1.95% (1991-2001). Majority of the population of the UT resides in the districts of Pondicherry and Karaikal. In terms of the size of the population, ranking in the descending order is Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. There is no rural population as such in Yanam and Mahe. In Pondicherry district, the proportion of rural population is 31%. In Karaikal, it is 56%.

Density

The UT occupies the third rank in the country amongst States and Union Territories with a population density of 2,029 per sq.km. This reflects an addition of 346 per sq.km. compared 1991 when it was 1,683 per sq.km. Density in the UT is seven times that of India as a whole.

Scheduled Castes

Scheduled Caste population of the UT is 1.58 lakh, constituting 16.2% as against 16.5% in the population of the country as whole [Annexure Table 2(iii)]. Majority of the scheduled Caste population (77%) lives in Pondicherry district followed by Karaikal (20%). There are no Scheduled Tribes in the UT.
Health Infrastructure

Pondicherry has a health care infrastructure superior to that in existence in the rest of India. Despite the logistical problems that the UT has in facilitating access to medical services. The people live in habitations spread over 261 villages, many of them falling in the distant enclaves of Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam, located 130 kms., 650 kms. and 950 kms. respectively from Pondicherry. It has also been estimated that more than 40% of the patients accessing medical care in Pondicherry are from the adjoining States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.

Education

Access to education in the UT is of a high order, conforming to All India norms. As of year 2002, the UT had 187 habitations. Of this, 172 had primary schools within one kilometer of walking distance, 162 out of them being located within the habitations themselves. A large majority of the habitations (164) also have upper primary schools within 3 kilometers of walking distance. Average distance from habitations within which schools can be accessed. Source: National Commission for Women: Data obtained from Government of Pondicherry.

Higher Education
Pondicherry has, apart from a University, 33 higher educational institutions. 11 Arts, Science and Commerce Colleges, 5 Engineering, Technical and Architecture Colleges, 6 Medical Colleges, 5 Teacher Training Colleges and 6 other Institutions imparting education in Law, Management, Information Technology and Agriculture. Further, there are 10 Teacher Training Schools, 5 Polytechnics and Technical Schools. While the enrolment of the girls for higher education is more or less equivalent to that of boys (9,233 girls as against 9,691 boys), their enrolment in Polytechnics is much lesser. 674 against 1,118. Their enrolment in Teacher Training Schools is higher than of boys. 287 against 160.

**Expenditure on Education**

The per capita expenditure on education in Pondicherry is more than double that of the whole of India. Among the South Indian States, this expenditure is the highest in Pondicherry, though the proportion of educational expenditure to total budget is the lowest Covers expenditure on education by Education as well as other Departments. Source: Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Secondary and higher Education; Selected Educational Statistics (2002-03).

**Literacy**
The Literacy rate that obtains in the UT of Pondicherry is 81.2% (88.6% for males and 73.9% for females). Literacy rates in Pondicherry are significantly higher than for All India, for both females and males. Pondicherry holds the seventh rank in India for literacy (2001) which it had in 1991 also. Between 1991 and 2001 the UT gained in literacy by 6.75 percentage points against the All India figure of 13.29 (Table 4.8 85 Annexure Table 4 (I)). There are still 1.59 lakh illiterates in the UT (0.47 lakh males and 1.12 lakh females). Majority of the illiterates are in Pondicherry and Karaikal districts.

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Work Participation**

Work Participation Rate (WPR) in Pondicherry is 35.2%. This is lesser than the figure for Tamil Nadu but close to the All India and Kerala figures. Female WPR in the UT (17.2%) is lesser than a third of the male WPR (53.1%). Among the districts, Pondicherry, Karaikal and Yanam have male WPRs which are close - 53.6%, 52.6% and 52.3% respectively. Male WPR in Mahe is 44.7%. Female WPRs in the districts are at significant variance. The lowest female WPR obtains in Mahe (8.2%) following Yanam (10.3%). The lower female WPRs in the latter districts are accounted for by the fact that they are urban areas where reliance on agriculture for livelihood is almost non-existent, while presence of
agriculture affords relatively greater employment. The high level of urbanization of the UT, low level of engagement in agriculture and the low WPR for females compared to India and in all the

Neighbouring States depress the work participation rates in the UT. Generally, the patterns of work participation in the different districts of the UT closely follow the patterns in the adjacent States Mahe District with its lowest WPR of 25% follows its neighbours in Kerala, and Karaikal with its highest WPR of 33.5% is in the direction of higher WPR of Tamil Nadu. Yanam, with 31.5%, is a reflection of its urban characteristic, and so is Pondicherry with 31.5%. The male WPRs range between 52 and 53% for three districts while it touches a low of 44.7% for Mahe. Lower work participation rates for females bring down the total work participation rates in all the districts and for the UT. [Annexure Table 5(i)]. The distribution of workers in the main and marginal category in the different districts of the UT is presented in Annexure Table 5 (ii). The total work participation rates have been gently rising for Pondicherry over the three Censuses periods from 1981. The male work participation rate increased between 1981 and 1991 even when there was a drop at the All India level, and the increase has continued between 1991 and 2001. The increase is lower for females compared to males. This is in contrast with the trend for All India, where the female WPR has increased
between 1981 and 1991 against the decline for males and more significantly than for males between 1991 and 2001. Total Work Participation is lowest in Mahe District (25%) and highest in Pondicherry District (36.1%) and the other two Districts of Yanam and Karaikal come between these two with the values of 31.5% and 33.7%; (26) 1 In the case of females also, the pattern of total WPR repeats with 8.2% and 18.5% respectively for Mahe and Pondicherry Districts; 1 In the case of males also, WPR is very low at 34.7% in Mahe District and highest at 53.6% in Pondicherry District; and 1 In all Districts, female work participation is low and significantly brings down the total work participation rates. 1 Another reason for low female WPR is the factor of higher level of urbanization of the UT and total urbanization of two districts namely, Mahe and Yanam. The proportion of marginal workers in the UT, both males and females has increased significantly between 1991 and 2001, reflecting the All India trend. The increase is very drastic in the case of males. It is a matter of great concern that marginal workers amongst women have increased very significantly in all the Southern States and at the All India level.
Child Labour

Despite high human development in Pondicherry, the practice of child labour does exist in the Union Territory. There are about 3,000 child labourers many of whom are girls. In the age group of 5 to 14, child labour population is 1.1% among girls and 2% among boys (1991). They are engaged in unorganized industries like building construction. They also work as contract workers in organized industries like glass manufacture. Incidence among them of occupational diseases like silicosis, respiratory diseases etc., has been reported. The Labour Department of the Government of Pondicherry runs 11 Child Welfare Centres - 7 in Pondicherry, 2 in Karaikal and 1 each in Mahe and Yanam. The objective of running these Centres is to give pre-school education to children below 5 years of age hailing from labour families in areas of work concentration. The children are also provided nutritious meals. This activity also helps working to go to their work places, leaving their children safely behind in the pre-school education institutions. The Department of Women and Child Development, inter alia, implements programmes for training of women for employment and for their income generation through the Corporation of Pondicherry. Training activities are undertaken by the District Industries Centres as well. It is reported that 2500 women have been benefited in terms of self-employment.