

Empowerment of Women in Tamil Nadu with special Reference to Tamil Culture

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Abstract

In the history of culture and civilization, Tamil Culture carved its niche with its unique approaches. Tamil Culture has been developed on the ideologies of natural tendency, humanism and rationalism. The Maxim of “every down is ours of everyone is relative”, has laid the foundation of equality. The tendency of humanism accorded self-respect of self-esteem to women. Concept of equality to women is an inbuilt characteristic of Tamil Culture. Right from the age of Sangam, women development is progressive. Women folk of Tamil Nadu, have excelled in all walks of life. Women poets have contributed to the classical literature. The great poet Avvaiyar had the capacity to give advice to king *Adhiyaman. Karaikkal Ammaiyaris* known for her spiritual attainment. So, the process of women empowerment is a natural one in Tamil Culture. This article traces the origin and development of Women empowerment in Tamil Culture.

Key words: Tamil Culture, Tamil Literature, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Empowerment of women is one of the most important issues for the development of countries across the world. Tamil Nadu has a proud tradition of valuing women empowerment and has been doing so for many years¹. The contributions of authors and social reformers have a long history. Women's empowerment can be said to encompass five aspects: enhancing women's sense of self-worth; the right to make choices and decisions in matters that concern them; the right to access opportunities and resources; the right to have the power to control their own lives, both inside and outside the home; and the ability to influence their environment to ensure social justice and create an equitable social and economic order². Based on these, the Tamil Nadu Government has formulated several policies, developed targeted interventions, and launched several projects to fight poverty and provide education to the weaker segments of the society³. Moreover, Tamil literature is a rich source of evidence for the powerful role of women in Tamil culture.

Role of Culture

Tamil literature provides evidence for sharing equal responsibility in child rearing. It is the duty of mother to give birth to children and it is duty of father to make him noble. This is the idea of family⁴. This idea was propagated by women poet Ponmudiyar. The worship of mother goddess in Indus valley and *Korravai* in Sangam Period are classical examples of religious foundations for women equality. Bhakthi Literature of Tamils had the contributions of women. Shri *Andals bhakti* towards Lord Ranga is known through *Thiruppavai*. Religious practices of *Margazhi* worship before dawn have been.⁵

Values of Tamil Culture, Love and Valour provide foundation for freedom of love. Marriage practices in Sangam age consists of two stages, private life (*kalavu*) and public life after marriage⁶. Women had right in selecting her life partner. This freedom also inculcates responsibility. Thus, freedom and responsibility are the two sided of development. Government of Tamil Nadu provides reservation in govt jobs for love marriage couples⁷.

Tamil Nadu has been devising tailor made plans for the empowerment of women of these Direct Cash Transfer and *Puthumaip pen* are significant in its reach⁸. In India, Chennai is known for larger number of hostels for women. The three institutions that are involved in promoting gender equity are the Tamil Nadu state commission for women, Tamil Nadu Corporation for Department of Women and the Department of Social welfare.⁹ In pursuing empowerment of women, government of Tamil Nadu, provides 30% of reservation in education of employment for girls¹⁰.

Velu Nachiyar, queen of *Sivaganga* Kingdom is known for being the first Indian queen to fight against East India Company. She was trained in marital arts, horse riding and archery¹¹. She resisted the East India Company to expand its control over *Sivaganga* Kingdom. Kuyili was a devout commander of she fought against East India Company in 18th century along with Velu Nachiyar. Even though she belonged to unprivileged *Arunthathiyar* community¹². She immolated herself in the war against the East India Company. This shown the socio-cultural conditions of Tamil Culture. She played an important role in the *Sivaganga* expedition of the queen.¹³ Kuyili is known for suicide attack in 1780. While attacking a fort of East India Company, she applied ghee on her body, she herself ablaze and jumped into the armoury of East India company securing victory for Velu Nachiyar.¹⁴

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy was a pioneering social reformer and physician. She fought against Devadasi System and advocated for women's empowerment and education. *Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar* was a social reformer. She also fought against Devadasi System¹⁵.

In the process of empowerment, government of Tamil Nadu plays a pioneer role. Government of Tamil Nadu has initiated & plethora of schemes. Of these, *puthumaippen* and *Mahalir Urimaith Thogai* are appreciated for wide range of benefits *Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar* Higher Education Assurance Scheme (*Pudhumaipenn*) non only enhances enrolment of girls in higher Education it aims to bring about a behavioural change by reducing the incidence of early marriage¹⁶. This scheme emphasises particular focus on empowering girls. By alleviating educational expenses, financial resources of a family are utilised for livelihood expenses.¹⁷

Kalaiginer Mahalir Urimaith Thogai, recognises contribution of women for family upliftment¹⁸. This scheme ensures self-respect for women by enhancing their quality of life. Women dedicate themselves in all walks of life, with the roles of mother, sister, wife and daughter. Thus, empowerment is essential in helping them to realise their potential. Even though Rs.12000 per annum is a small amount, this is the token of distributive justice. Distributive justice leads to economic independence for women. Benefits of economic independence include increased autonomy, improved livelihood, enhanced self-esteem better health outcomes any increased participation in decision making¹⁹.

Objective of Scheme

Empowerment of women is vital for national development and equitable society. It promotes women's autonomy, self-reliance and self-respect. It enhances scope for their involvement in economic activities so that economic freedom may be realised. Women's participation in workforce and access to financial resources can reduce poverty and inequality. Self-help Groups in Tamil Nadu empower women through economic independence, educational collective action²⁰. Women education also creates space to share their issues and provides platform to celebrate women's contribution to society.

Cultural aspects play a vital role in shaping the empowerment of women. Cultural norms, Values and practices have both positive and negative impacts. Matriarchal societies accord significant power and authority to women²¹. Advanced with society, recognise women roles in child care, education and financial management. Reverence of female deities and icons inspire women empowerment, like Mother Goddess in Indus Valley, Sakthi Worship and *Navarathiri* Celebrations²². Monogamy is chief characteristic of Tamil Culture. Monogamy provides a sense of legitimacy and validation. Monogamy also ensures access to economic resources. Monogamic society strengthens relationship between family members and transfers healthy relationship to next generation of woman²³.

Economic empowerment is a paradise for women development. It is made possible by Entrepreneur Development Programme, which was introduced by Government of Tamil Nadu. Entrepreneur Development programme imparts skills to involve women in economic activity. Tamil Nadu state policy for women 2021 aims to increase the share of women to 40% in GSDP of Tamil Nadu²⁴ Entrepreneur Development programme may enhance Female labour force participation Role which in 35%. These initiatives are instrumental in transforming exploitation of women to empowerment of women. Skill development is potential for growth of manufacturing sector. Skilled women played a vital role in the development of Singapore. "In the early 1980s large corporations invested in computer manufacturing due to availability of female educated workers of a fraction of wages paid in the developed countries. For example, nearly 72% of those employed in the deforms production were female compared to nearly 43% in the rest of manufacturing sector"²⁵. In order to augment entrepreneur development of women, government of Tamil Nadu initiated micro finance programs (SHGS) vocational Training programme (Naan Mudhalvan) and Digated programs (Computer literacy Programme)²⁶.

Women entrepreneurs play a vital role in the socio-economic development of Tamil Nadu. They contribute to employment, innovation and inclusive growth. In Tamil Nadu, women-owned businesses, especially like healthcare, agriculture, handicrafts and textiles, play a major role in generating employment. Through their enterprises, women entrepreneurs provide employment opportunities not only to themselves but also to small business women²⁷. The Tamil Nadu entrepreneurial ecosystem benefits from the diversity and inclusiveness that women entrepreneurs offer. Their involvement in entrepreneurship and leadership positions improves gender equality and creates an equitable culture. Many women entrepreneurs are involved in the preservation and promotion of traditional crafts, arts and cultural heritage. They are essential for the revival of traditional crafts, handlooms, folk arts and indigenous knowledge systems that preserve the rich cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu and provide employment to artisans²⁸.

Conclusion

The world today needs more empowered women. Currently, women's empowerment is steadily increasing. The fundamental right of women is to be empowered. Each of them has an equal right to participate in all activities. In the case of Tamil Nadu, cultural norms, social structure and value systems are the main factors that determine the role of women and their position in society. Empowerment of women is essential for the progress of civilization. Despite the important role that women play in families and society, the advancement of women is needed in many areas including education, income, inheritance laws, partner selection, decision making processes, property rights, social organization and leadership positions in business, education or politics. Women's organizations bring about social change in the lives of women in Indian society. In making policy decisions related to women's empowerment, Tamil Nadu has its own unique social, economic, and political circumstances, which differ from global and national trends. Government and non-governmental organizations have played a crucial role in implementing women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is the combined result of various factors such as individual efforts, societal attitudes, initiatives of the Tamil Nadu government and the work of non-governmental organizations.

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