

Women Welfare Schemes in Virudhunagar District; Tamil Nadu –A Study

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ABSTRACT

Welfare is the provision of a minimal level of well-being and social support for all citizens, sometimes referred to as public aid. The Oxford American Dictionary refers Welfare as the health happiness and fortunes of a person or group or the statutory procedure or social effort designed to promote the basic physical and material wellbeing in need. Women are the most precious human being in any society. Indeed, the growth of a society can be measured by the regard and respect given to the women of that society. They are the key indicator to measure the extent of modernization and traditionalism of the nation. But they have been dependent upon man for her livelihood and also for physical protection all through the ages. Keeping this in view and in order to highlight women's rightful place, the Tamil Nadu government formulated many plans, policies and innovative programmes for the upliftment of women in the field of training, employment, income generation, welfare and supportive services. Further the State of Tamil Nadu has taken strenuous efforts through various welfare schemes exclusively designed for uplifting women. The success of these implemented programmes lies in achieving its goals and determining its effectiveness. The main aim of this paper is to explore the role of the Government of Tamil Nadu in reducing poverty and inequality through increasing the capabilities of poor women in Virudhunagar District.

Keywords: Women, Welfare, Tamil Nadu Government, Virudhunagar District, Gender equality Upliftment,

INTRODUCTION

India is a welfare state. But women are the vulnerable section in society. At earlier time they were getting equal status with men. But they had faced some difficulties. Many a time they were treated as slave. From early twenty century (national movement) their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. After then, independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demand equal social position of women with men. Today women occupied the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely freed some discrimination and harassment of the society. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today.

History of Women Welfare Programmes

The Madras Presidency was a pioneer in the promotion of welfare of women among the Indian states since pre-independence period and was the first among all Indian states to provide voting right to women in 1921. The Presidency also took the responsibility of establishing Women's Welfare Department as early as in 1947.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was started in 1953. The Government of India extended its support by allocating funds to the Government of Tamil Nadu for the welfare of women in the state.

The Social Welfare Board of Tamil Nadu executes all the Centre-State sponsored schemes in Tamil Nadu for the welfare of women with the prime objective of uplifting women and children from economically and socially weaker sections in the society.

Virudhunagar District - A Profile

Virudhunagar is situated in the south western part of the state. It is landlocked on all sides with no direct access to the sea. It is located on the north of Madurai, north east of Sivaganga, on the east of Ramanathapuram and on the south of Tirunelveli and Tuticorin district. Virudhunagar is the headquarters of Virudhunagar district. It is famous for its business. It consists of nine taluks. They are Aruppukottai, Kariyapatti, Rajapalayam, Sattur, Sivakasi, Srivilliputtur, Tiruchuli, Vembakottai, Virudhunagar. Virudhunagar is forefront for all taluks. It is a first grade municipal town. It covers an area of 4432sq.km. It consists of 59 revenue villages and 58 panchayats. It is located on the NH47 from Madurai to Kanyakumari. It occupies the fifteenth rank among the districts of the State of Tamil Nadu with regard to its size.

The district consists of two distinct regions the eastern slopes of Western Ghats with an average elevation of 1500m. It is a black soil area. It does not have perennial river. The Vaippar, Arjuna, and the Gundar river flowed here to make the region fertile. It is a semi-arid region. April, May and June are the hottest months of the year. It receives scanty rainfall. The bulky rainfall received during North East Monsoon.

It is one of the industrial cities in Tamil Nadu. The Industrialist of Virudhunagar plays an important role in price fixation. Hence there is a popular saying “Virudhunagar produces nothing but controls everything”. The notable transactions performed in this block are chillies, chicory, coffee seeds, coriander, cardamom, ground nut oil, and edible oils which are produced in Virudhunagar and exported in a large scale. Another important thing is one of the cement plants of Madras Cements Ltd is located in RR Nagar near Virudhunagar.

Population below Poverty line in Virudhunagar District

The total population according to the 2011 census report, of which 36, 25,308 (78%) were in rural areas. The population density was 1172 people per square kilometer, and the sex ratio was 946. The district of Virudhunagar has 187 Gram Panchayats and 17 blocks. The urban population is 980273 constituting 50.47 % of the total Population, the remaining 49.53% ie. 962015 is rural population. SC population is 399831, ST Population is 2294. As a woman occupies a subordinating position in the society; she has little control over family income and expenditure.

Objective

- To study the the role of the State Government in the process of development of poor women through Welfare measures in Virudhunagar District.
- To analyze the socio-economic status of women in Virudhunagar District.
- To highlight the welfare schemes implemented in Virudhunagar District
- To examine the ongoing approaches and intervention strategies of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

METHODOLOGY

It is analytical in nature and descriptive in form. It attempts to discuss the methodology adopted for the present study. Further an attempt has been made to describe the profile of the study area. Interpretation of data and critical analysis are carried out in a systematic manner.

Virudhunagar District – Causes for the Low Level of Women Development

Though Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu provides ample employment opportunities in farm, handloom, match, fire and printing industries to people in general and adolescent girls and women in particular, but the pace

of women development in Virudhunagar District is found to be relatively slow. The unfavourable parental attitude towards girl child education is one of the major factors that force children to take up remunerative employment in hazardous areas. This child labour scenario, poverty and low standard of living condition are some of the reasons for the stagnation in the development of women folk in Virudhunagar District. Considering this, the Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu had declared almost the entire district as an industrially backward area. Hence, incentives are provided for the progress of rural women in this district.

Tamil Nadu Government Innovative Women Welfare Programmes in Virudhunagar District

The Socio-economic inequalities and disabilities of the women in this region necessitate the welfare measures aiming at the uplift of the poor. A pressing need of the time is therefore undertaken by both the central and State Governments in implementing various types of welfare schemes.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has established the department namely Social welfare department which implementing the welfare schemes for women. There are so many welfare activities and programmes have been taken up in this district. Some of them are highlighted here.

D) Marriage Assistance Schemes

Marriage to a girl is considered as most significant responsibilities of a parent. It brings perceptible changes in her life style. However due to poverty, parents are unable to get their daughters married in time. Government keeping this problem in mind has taken steps to render financial to support economically weaker parents while conducting marriage to their daughter.

The Department of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment of Tamil Nadu is the nodal department of this scheme. The main objective behind launching this scheme is to provide financial assistance for the marriage of the poor girls/women in the state. Marriage Assistance Schemes are implemented to help the daughters of poor parents, orphan girls, widows who re-marry, widow's daughter's marriage and inter-caste married couples.

The selection committee is comprised of either the Director of Social Welfare or District Collector or District Social Welfare Officer of the concerned area who is responsible to register date of the application for every scheme. The concerned officers thereafter issue an acknowledgement to the application indicating the serial number of registration and delivers assistance to the beneficiary at the stipulated time. In Virudhunagar district five types of Marriage Assistance Schemes are functioning under the Social Welfare Department.

1. Poor Widows' Daughter Marriage Assistance Scheme (or) E.V.R. Maniammaiya Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme

A major responsibility of many poor widows who does not have an adult member to support them financially wading through their life found very difficult and struggled hard to get their daughter married. Realizing their hardship, the Government of Tamil Nadu introduced a scheme known as E.V.R. Maniammaiya Ninaivu Widow's Daughter's Marriage assistance in 1982 in Virudhunagar district.

Maniammai was the widow of the great social reformer of Tamil Nadu E.V. Ramasamy who was responsible for the Self Respect Movement. Thus, this scheme has been evolved and enforced to help the daughters of poor widows. As per the scheme, financial aid of the daughters of poor widows. As per the scheme poor Widows' daughters will be given a Rs. 1000/- for their marriage, provided the following norms are satisfied. There are six norms fixed to determine the eligibility for the aid they are:

- a) The widow's annual Rs. 6,400/- income should be within
- b) The bride should have completed 18 years of age.
- c) There should not be any earning male in the widow's family.
- d) Only one daughter in the widow's family shall be eligible for the aid.

e) The application is to be submitted to the District welfare officer before the marriage.

The Government of Tamil Nadu has allotted Rs. 35,000/- to this district the year 1989-1990 of a target of 35 brides. As initially during the launch Rs.1,000 was provided. As the amount was insufficient to conduct a marriage, it has been enhanced to Rs.2,000 in 1990. Since April 1997, the Government has enhanced the amount to Rs.3,000. Later, it has increased the amount to Rs.10,000 in 2004. Rs. 20,000 was provided in the year 2008 to perform the marriage of the poor widows' daughters. Rs.25,000 is provided in the form of cheque or demand draft as assistance under this scheme with effect from 17th may 2011. The criteria for availing the benefits under this scheme are: The annual income of the beneficiary should not exceed Rs.24,000, the minimum age limit of beneficiary should not be exceed 30 years and only one daughter of the poor widow eligible under this scheme.

2. Incentive for the Widow's Remarriage Scheme (or) Dr. Dharmambal Ammaiya Ninaivu Widow Remarriage Scheme

Widow Remarriage could never be thought of in a country like India where a woman could marry only once. According to Hindu customs, marriage is indissoluble even after the death of one's husband. The Tamils prescribed monogamy as an essential condition to preserve the chastity of women. Several restrictions were placed on widows. The Widow Remarriage Movement emerged in the 19th century. The British passed the Widow Remarriage Act XV of 1856 and removed all legal obstacles to the marriage of Hindu widows and declared the issues of all such marriages to be legitimate. However this movement failed to make an impact at the grass root level. Therefore the Government of Tamil Nadu, to support the most neglected and destitute section of the society, made an attempt to ensure that women like widows, deserted women and orphan girls are given a chance to lead a normal happy life. In memory of the philanthropist Dr.Dharambal, introduced the widow remarriage scheme in 1975.

This scheme was formulated to liberate women from social disabilities arising out of widowhood. The Government has fixed three norms to identify the beneficiaries under the scheme. The first norm is that the remarriage of the widow should have taken place after 03.06.1975. Secondly at the time of the remarriage of the Widow, her age should be between 18 and 30. Thirdly the person who marries the widow should be a bachelor. If all these norms are fulfilled the couple will be given a National Savings Certificate for Rs. 5000/-. At that time Vellakamu Ammal of Kottaiyur, Virudhunagar Taluk and Parvathiammal of Avvdayapuram in Virudhunagar are the two beneficiaries of this scheme. Due to the rise in cost of living, the Government has been increasing the amount periodically. The amount has been increased to Rs.20,000 (Cheque for Rs.10000 and National Savings Certificate for Rs.10000) from 20th November 2008 onwards.

Hence it is evident that poor widows are socially protected and rehabilitated through this assistance scheme.

In Virudhunagar district, 10% of the women in the total women population are widows and destitute. Thus it has been clear that through this scheme, the Government not only comes to rescue of young widows in leading a decent life but also bring social change.

3. Orphan Girls Marriage Assistance Scheme (or) Annai Therasa Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme

The government of Tamil Nadu has implemented another exclusive scheme to assist poor orphan girls in 1985, which grants them marriage assistance known as "Orphan girl's marriage assistance scheme". This scheme was named as Annai Therasa Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme for orphan girls in the year 1999. The financial assistance gave Rs.2, 000 to the orphan girl in one family who has completed 20 years of age and who has lost both her parents and is living under the custody of her guardian. The Government has enhanced the amount to Rs.3,000 in 1997. Again it raised the amount to Rs.5, 000 in 1999. Then the Government aids them with Rs.10,000. The financial assistance of Rs.1, 000 which was provided at the commencement of the scheme has been increased gradually, and the financial assistance of Rs.20, 000 is given to the beneficiary from 20th November 2008 onwards. Most of the beneficiaries of this scheme are orphan girls of Sathiya Ammaiya Ninaivu Government Orphanage of the district.

4. **Inter-caste Marriage Assistance Scheme or Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Memorial Inter-caste Marriage Assistance Scheme**

In order to abolish caste discrimination and to eliminate dowry harassment of the Virudhunagar district, the Government of Tamil Nadu introduced a scheme to encourage inter-caste marriage by providing financial assistance. It was launched in the year 1967 and is now being implemented as Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Ammaiyar Memorial Inter-Caste Marriage Assistance Scheme. There is no income limit for availing of this assistance under this scheme. This scheme is implemented under two categories viz., Scheme-I and Scheme-II.

Under Scheme-I, a sum of Rs. 20,000 (Rs.10,000 in the form of Demand Draft / Cheque for marriage expenses and Rs.10000 in the form of National Savings Certificate) is provided with effect from second October 1997 to the newly married couple among whom one spouse should be from Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe and the other from a different community. Under Scheme-II, a sum of Rs. 15,000 (Rs.5,000 for marriage expenses in the form of Demand Draft / Cheque and Rs. 10,000 in the form of National Savings Certificate) is provided with effect from second October 2007 to the newly married couple where a forward community person marries a Backward Class or Most Backward Class person. The beneficiaries should avail the benefit within two years from the date of marriage. The benefit is to the couple who have married in other caste, one of them belonging to a caste being regarded as lower caste in the society.

As Virudhunagar district is a rural area, intercaste marriage is not common in the district. So the beneficiaries of the scheme are also low.

5. **Poor Parents Daughter Marriage Assistance Scheme (or) Moovaloor Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Memorial Marriage Assistance Scheme**

The government with the aim to promote educational status of women and also help poor parents in getting their daughters during marriage introduced a new scheme called poor parents' daughter marriage assistance scheme. It was introduced on 3rd June, 1989. Under this scheme, Rs.5, 000 was given to each girl living below the poverty line and whose annual income does not exceed Rs.12,000/-.The scheme was initially applicable to girls who studied upto eighth standard and attained the age of 18 years. Subsequently, it was raised to tenth standard, so as to improve the educational status of the girls. The annual income for availing of the benefit is below Rs. 24,000. The prime motive of this scheme was to enhance the level of education among the women. It promotes financial assistance to poor girls living below the poverty line, and to perform their marriage. Due to paucity of fund, the Government withdrew the scheme from 01.4.2002 onwards.

The scheme was revived from 3rd June 2006 with an enhanced assistance of Rs.15, 000/- per beneficiary. But the Government changed poor parents' daughter marriage assistance scheme as Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Memorial Marriage Assistance scheme in 2006. It was named after the renowned Social Reformer Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar. The level of support was further increased to Rs.20,000/- per beneficiary and also raised ceiling of annual family income beneficiary from then existing Rs.12,000/- to Rs.24,000/-. In 2010, the Government enhanced the quantum of assistance to Rs.25, 000/- per beneficiary with effect from 01.04.2010.

II) **Sathiyavanimuthu Ammaiyar Ninaivu Free Supply of Sewing Machine Scheme**

A scheme of supplying sewing machine for free of cost to widows, deserted wives, socially handicapped women and physically handicapped men and women whose income is within Rs.12,000. The main objective of this scheme is to increase the women's self-employment and the status of living in the society. The scheme is applicable for those women tailors have completed their age of 20 and the below age of 40. The details of the scheme in Virudhunagar district are as follows.

S.No.	Year	Expenditure in Lakhs	No. of Beneficiaries
1.	2015-17	10,24,850	515

2.	2017-18	3,10,000	350
3.	2018-19	5,23,000	387
4.	2020-21	4,95,000	365

III) Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyaar Higher Education Assurance Scheme

Recently the Government launched a new pilot programme called the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyaar Puthumai Penn Thittam provides monetary assistance to girls and young women from economically disadvantaged sections enrolled in government educational institutions. It aims to improve the general well-being of female students and encourage them to continue their higher studies. It provides financial assistance to economically weaker families who cannot send their daughters to schools and colleges due to financial constraints. The “Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyaar Marriage Assistance scheme” has been transformed as the “Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyaar Higher Education Assurance Scheme”. On 5th September 2022, Tamil Nadu government introduced the Puthumai Penn (Modern women Scheme) in Chennai. The programme is run by the Social Welfare Department. The aim of the scheme is to empower girls, particularly those who attended government schools for classes six through twelve. The department has submitted a proposal announcing the start of the Higher Education Assurance Scheme and the effective implementation of the initiative in the state, benefiting 2.73 lakh people. Every recipient would receive Rs 1,000 per month to pursue further studies. Therefore, the enrolment percentage of girl students in higher education has increased by 34%. This change introduced would motivate women to pursue higher studies and bring in a transformation in women's education. So far this scheme has been successfully working on it will create a new pedestal in promoting women education in the district.

IV) Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Memorial Maternity Scheme (or) Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Ammaiyaar Ninaivu Mahapperu Udhavi Thittam

Health is now considered as the vital need next to food, shelter and clothing. As women form the fulcrum of the society, and women’s health is basis for the health of the family. Since the vast majority of women live in rural areas, women become victims of various diseases due to malnutrition, lack of clean and unhygienic conditions. The health status of the women is empowered in Virudhunagar district through Government initiatives like Primary Health centres (PHC) and various schemes. Considering the health status of pregnant women 19 % of the mothers has anemia (HB Level) <7 Grams).

The special scheme introduced to help pregnant and lactating mothers living below the poverty line is named after Dr. Muthulakshmi who devoted her entire life for the welfare of women. The Tamil Nadu Government honored her by naming the scheme as, “Dr.Muthulakshmi Ninaivu Magapperu Udhavi Thittam” and introduced this scheme on 3rd June, 1989. The purpose of the scheme is to provide for additional nutrition to the mother to prevent anemia and low-birth weight babies.

Under this scheme, an assistance of Rs.4000 per month for 3 months from 7th month of pregnancy is given to poor pregnant ladies in Virudhunagar district. The benefactor should have completed 20 years of age at the time of marriage and registered their names in the PHC. The assistance under this scheme is provided only to the first two issues under the condition that the family's annual income should not exceed Rs. 12,000 per annum. This cash assistance is given to every pregnant woman who avails all required Antenatal services during pregnancy in concerned PHC; mother who delivers in the Government institutions and completion of immunization for the child upto 3rd dose of DPT/Pentavalent/Hepatitis-B / Polip.

For the release of 1st installment during 7th month of pregnancy, the beneficiary should have minimum 3 AN visits at concerned PHC, beneficiary should have availed TT immunization, Blood grouping and typing, Hb% level Measurement, Weight Measurement, Blood Pressure Recording, One Obstetrics Ultrasonogram done (Scan) and Testing for HIV at the time of early AN registration. On every visit, weight, B.P., HB status should be checked. For the release of 2nd Installment, delivery should be in Govt. Institutions (PHC, GH. Govt. Medical

College Hospital in Tamilnadu). The 3rd installment will be given to the mother on completion of third dose of DPT/ Hepatitis-B and Polio / Pentavalent vaccine for the child as per the time schedule.

V) Cradle Baby Scheme

The western and southern parts of Tamil Nadu have registered higher incidence of female infanticide which made the Government of Tamil Nadu to initiate the cradle baby scheme. The Cradle Baby Scheme was launched first in Salem in the year 1992 by the Government of Tamil Nadu with the aim of eradicating female infanticide. This Scheme was later extended during 2001 to Madurai, Theni, Dindigul and Dharmapuri, as these districts were also found to be prone to this evil practice of female infanticide. Reception centres were started in the above districts with sufficient staff and infrastructure facilities including telephone, lifesaving medicines, lifesaving medical equipment, refrigerator and incubator. Cradles are also placed in the District Social Welfare Offices, District Collectorates, Government Hospitals, Orphanages, Railway Stations, Bus Stands, Primary Health Centres and Sub Health Centres in all the districts to receive the deserted / abandoned babies. These reception centres play an important role in receiving the deserted / abandoned babies and in protecting their lives. The children received in the Reception Centres are rehabilitated and handed over to licensed adoption agencies to enable the children to find a family and issueless parents to have a child. From the year 1992 to February 2010, 3622 babies (male 529, female 3093) were received under the scheme and were rehabilitated under the adoption programme. The District Social Welfare Officer is designated as the Coordinating Officer for this scheme. This cradle baby scheme helped the girl babies in two ways – in the first place, it is a kind of indirect warning to the people that what they do is a criminal offence. Secondly, it gives an assurance that girl babies will be protected at any cost. This novel scheme has won the admiration of people from all walks of life. In Virudhunagar district, female infanticide is in low level or nil. In the year 1995, 5 female children had been killed due to social cause.

VI) Mahalir Thittam

Tamil Nadu is one of the leading states of India in the promotion of SHGs. For implementation of Mahalir Thittam, district offices were established. The district levels PIUs (Project Implementation Unit) are headed by a Project Officer (PO) assisted by Assistant Project Officers (APOs) in the functional areas of training, livelihood, monitoring, administration and other schemes. Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project (Mahalir Thittam), project implementation Unit, Virudhunagar district, commenced as the 14th District under phase I, women empowerment on 17.11.1997. The mission of the Mahalir Thittam is multi-faceted like social empowerment, economic upliftment, and capacity building of poor women including widows, destitute, handicapped and SC/ST habitats in rural areas, through the promotion of Self Help Groups. At present there are 28 approved NGOS and 9 unapproved NGOS in the district.

It indicates the fluctuating trend in its growth rate. In the formation of SHGs, NGOs are playing a vital role in giving their support and co-operation. As a result, the growth of SHGs increased in Virudhunagar District. The rural women who are in Below Poverty Line (BPL) list have definitely benefited and improved their socio-economic conditions which lead to the economic development. The performance of Mahalir Thittam in Virudhunagar District reveals that there has been a commendable growth in respect of the number of groups formed and 111 women enrolled. In this process, Non-Governmental Organizations have been acting as a bridge between the government and the SHGs in order to achieve an empowered society.

CONCLUSION

The Government of Tamil Nadu took ample of steps to uplift the women in both social and economic fields. It made enormous help for empowerment of women in Virudhunagar district. Though this district, a backward rural district, various Social Welfare Schemes and have also been provided with innumerable opportunities and facilities to live a dignified life. It fares well-knit in terms of indicators such as female literacy, girl's enrolment, female life expectancy and women's access to basic amenities. The maternal mortality rate and total fertility rates are lower than the national average. This progress is possible only by the successful implementation of the welfare schemes. In this regard, the schemes have helped women achieve many things such as self-esteem, social networks, augmented income and agricultural production, community decision making.

The impact of Girl Child Protection Scheme and Cradle Baby Scheme is clearly visible in the district through its sex ratio. After the implementation of the schemes, the sex ratio of the district increases from 994 in 1991 to 1012 in 2001 and 1007 in 2011. The systematic implementation of schemes has enhanced the sex ratio and status of women in the district. Generally speaking, the district fares reasonably well in all the empowerment activities. But block- wise report shows that Narikudi and Thiruchuli blocks are not performing well in the indicators. Hence special attention is needed to develop these most backward blocks.

Following suggestions are made in this study for incorporating effective implementation of welfare programmes for women. The Government should render its support for the promotion of female entrepreneurship to a greater extent. Women must be viewed more as critical agents in achieving development objectives rather than as beneficiaries of welfare programmes. Frequent changes, in the names of schemes should also be avoided which leads to decrease in the number of women beneficiaries from these scheme. Awareness among women about available welfare, rehabilitation and awareness generation schemes, for them does not reach the grass root level adequately. Therefore, steps to popularize such schemes shall be carried out seeking help of voluntary organizations functioning in these localities. The realization can be created among rural women only through the means of effective communication. To conclude, effective communication is the bridge between the social welfare schemes and the target group of rural women. Therefore, women welfare schemes should focus on bridging the gap and reach the beneficiaries.

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