

# ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN TAMILNADU – PROSPECTS & PROBLEMS IN THE CURRENT SCENARIO

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## Abstract

*Empowerment is a process which aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic method that marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections of the society. Empowerment can serve as a powerful instrument for women to achieve social and economic mobility and acquire power and status in society. The status of any section of population in a society is intimately connected with its economic position. The development strategy which neglects the need for enhancing the role of women cannot lead to comprehensive socio – economic development. Globalisation has introduced enormous economic opportunities for women, but they are associated with mounting threats. This paper will give an overview on the economic empowerment of women and its impact on Tamilnadu.*

## INTRODUCTION

The status of any section of population in a society is intimately connected with their economic positions which depend on rights, roles and opportunities for participation in economic activities. Any developmental strategy which neglects the need for enhancing the role of women cannot lead to comprehensive socio ó economic development. No country can progress if half of the population is left with residuary functions and subsidiary status in work participation. The past three decades have witnessed consistent awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity.

The contribution of women to a Nation's development is immense. But from time immemorial their services have gone unrecognized. The growing urbanization and modernization brought the educated

middle class women into the world of work. During the pre ó independence era women were predominantly employed in consumption linked service sector and not in production linked industrial sector. In general, women are outside the cash economy and denied control of money and land. The value of their work is also severely underestimated.

The post - Independence period witnesses emergence of women as partners and participants in economic development. In a century punctuated by unprecedented change, revolution and innovation, the most pervasive and lasting transformation has been the emergence of women as a major force in the world over.

India has one of the most forward ó looking constitution and large number of schemes and programmes have been initiated for

women's development. The Economic Development mainly depends on the proper utilization of resources. A work force without women is highly impossible. With the objective of achieving impressive economic growth within the framework of social justice, Tamil Nadu has been surging ahead mightily to become one of the most socially and economically progressive states in the country. Since the First Five year plan, various welfare and developmental schemes have been introduced to improve the living conditions of women and to increase their access and control over material and social resources.

This research paper intends to comprehend the process of empowerment taking place among women in Tamilnadu. Analytical methodology is followed to give a critical note on the contribution of women in various sectors for the socio-economic transformation of the state. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis is adopted to highlight the structural and cultural constraints that prevail in Tamilnadu.

### **Women Empowerment-Through Five Year Plans**

The introduction of Five Year Plans was to bring progress and achieve goals in India. The approach towards women's empowerment has been categorically monitored under different approaches namely- Welfare, Equity, Anti-poverty and Empowerment, based on their roles, involvement and contribution to the nation's welfare. **Welfare Approach** ó First Five Year Plan ó (1951-1956) to Fifth Five Year Plan ó (1975-1980) ó welfare is the earliest policy approach concerned with women in developing countries. Its purpose is to bring women into development as better mothers. Women are seen as passive beneficiaries of development. The policy makers aimed at providing adequate services in promoting

the welfare of women in order to enable them to play their legitimate role in family and community.<sup>1</sup>

**Equity Approach** ó Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) ó while the welfare approach treated women as beneficiaries or recipients of benefits, the development approach recognized women as participants in development and not as development targets.<sup>2</sup> **Anti – poverty approach** - Anti ó poverty being the second WID approach ensured that poor women increase their productivity. It recognizes the productive role of women and seeks to meet practical gender needs to earn an income, particularly through small- scale income ó generating projects. With this idea, Seventh Plan ó (1985-1990) emphasized on generating employment opportunities for women and initiated two new schemes- Support to training and empowerment programme (STEP) (for rural women) and awareness generation programme (AGP) (for poor women).<sup>3</sup>

**Empowerment Approach** - Empowerment through greater self-reliance is the most recent approach. It recognizes women's triple role, and seeks to meet strategic gender needs indirectly through bottom ó up mobilization around practical gender needs. On the basis of this approach Eighth and Ninth Plans (1990-2000) infused the concept of empowerment which would create an enabling environment where women would enjoy freedom not just in letter but in action<sup>4</sup>. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) and Women's Component Plan (30% of the funds to all sectors for women's development) were implemented. A commitment in the Tenth Plan was to Empower Women (2002-2007) approach and sustain with the major strategy of 'Empowering Women' as Agents of Social Change and Development<sup>5</sup>.

**Eleventh Plan (2007-2012):** For the first time the emphasis is qualitative, focusing on inculcating confidence among women; generating awareness about their rights and privileges and training them for economic activity. *Fivefold Agenda in the 11th Plan for Gender Equity are:* Ensuring economic empowerment, Engineering social empowerment, Enabling political empowerment, Effective implementation of women related legislation and Creating Constitutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming & strengthening delivery mechanism<sup>6</sup>.

The key strategies for women's agency in the **Twelfth Plan (2012- 2017)** have been identified as: Economic empowerment, Social and Physical infrastructure, Enabling Legislations, Women's Participation in Governance, Inclusiveness of all categories of vulnerable women, Engendering National Policies/ Programmes, Mainstreaming gender through Gender Budgeting<sup>7</sup>. The Twelfth Plan recognises the need to associate with the corporate sector in its fight against gender discrimination by making gender equity an integral objective of corporate social responsibility.

### Female Work Participation Rate (FWPR)

Work participation rate indicates the economic empowerment of women in the society to a greater extent. Education clubbed along with participation of women in workforce has been universally recognised as one of the most crucial indicators and serves as an empowerment tool. There has been a considerable improvement in the emergence of women in all sectors of employment in the State. The female WPR in Tamilnadu is the highest in the country. The Work Participation Rate for females rose from 26.52% in 1981 to

35.5% in 2005. The respective figures for males are 56.58% and 59.5%<sup>8</sup>. One positive aspect is that, the trend of WPR for women has improved favourably over the last three decades.

It is pertinent to note that the FWPR is high in the case of rural women than urban women. This is mainly due to their participation in agriculture and allied activities. According to the NSSO report of 2011 60.3% of rural males and 40.5% are females are employed. The corresponding proportion in the urban areas was 56.9% and 19.1% respectively. Of the total population although a close to half were females, yet they accounted only 30% of the total work force of India<sup>9</sup>. This proportion has to necessarily be improved for ensuring better and all round economic empowerment.

#### Work Participation Rate (%)

Year	Gender	Tamilnadu		
		Rural	Urban	Total
1981	Male	59.24	51.25	56.58
	Female	33.55	11.97	26.52
	Total	46.48	32.05	41.73
1991	Male	58.28	52.78	56.39
	Female	38.50	13.10	29.89
	Total	48.49	33.34	43.31
2001	Male	59.38	56.37	58.96
	Female	41.33	18.42	31.32
	Total	50.39	37.59	44.78
2004-2005	Male	59.7	59.3	59.5
	Female	46.1	24.1	35.5
	Total	52.8	41.8	47.5
2009-2010	Male	60.3	56.9	ô ô
	Female	40.5	19.1	ô ô

Source: Census of India 1981, 1991, 2001 and NSSO 55th, 61stand 66th round

## Women and Sectoral Employment Analysis

Participation of women in economic activity in Tamilnadu has normally been positively related to opening up of the economy. To explore the transition of women from weeding with a hoe to strengthening her to the level of decision making in the world of economy, it is essential to examine the struggle for ensuring their economic rights during the course especially after independence in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy of the state.

The primary sector includes farming, mining and logging. In the primary sector, agriculture is the major source of sustenance. From time immemorial, women in the villages have taken active part in agricultural labour, either on their own properties or as hired workers<sup>10</sup>. Women in rural areas are compelled to work in order to save labour costs and supplement the slender earnings of men. In fact, rural women contribute in multi ó dimensional ways such as workers, labourers, producers, traders and also as housewives performing all kinds of traditional/ non ó productive household duties.

### Primary Sector

NSS	1977 1978	1983 1984	1987 1988	1993 1994	1999 2000	2004 2005
Male	57.4	49.2	46.1	45.5	42.9	35.9
Female	73.2	70.4	65.8	67.3	62.8	57.6

Source: NSS 32<sup>nd</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 55<sup>th</sup>, and 61<sup>st</sup> Rounds.

Although women do not undertake the heavier tasks of ploughing the fields, they actively participate in harvesting, weeding, planting threshing and field irrigation and

also terracing. However, gender differentiation is prevalent here, where men predominate in the decision making and management of large ó scale agriculture while women continue to dominate in the food and subsistence sector. Although voluminous labour is spent by the long hours of work, the returns and remunerations are comparatively low. More than the half the female force in Tamilnadu are working as agricultural labourers. The proportion of female in the primary sector has decreased gradually 73.2 percent in 1978, 70.4 percent in 1984, 65.8 percent in 1988, 67.3 percent in 1994 and further decreased to 62.8 percent in 2000 and 57.6 in 2005.<sup>11</sup> In spite of the women's crucial role on agriculture and food production, their potential for acceleration has not often been well rewarded and appreciated. A distressing feature is that the highly unorganized nature of this work exposes them to exploitation, as they are not well protected by any law being enjoyed by the labour force in the organized sector. Further, discriminatory attitude and inherited bias in the agrarian development approaches have led to an inadequate perception of women's economic role.

### Secondary Sector

NSS	1977 1978	1983 1984	1987 1988	1993 1994	1999 2000	2004 2005
Male	19.7	23.1	24.6	23.6	25.7	31.9
Female	16.2	16.4	20.4	19.0	20.7	26.12

Source: NSS 32<sup>nd</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 55<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> Rounds

The secondary sector consists of all factories ó those that refine metals, produce furniture, or pack farm products such as meat. Women are also engaged in traditional household industries like hand spinning, hand weaving, Oil processing, rice husk threshing,

leather work, tobacco processing, gem polishing, painting, papad and pickle making and so forth. The contribution of women to the secondary sector also shows a low profile, contributing 16.2 percent in 1978, 16.4 percent in 1983, 20.4 percent in 1988, 19 percent in 2000 and 26.12 in 2005<sup>12</sup>. Though some attempts were made during the International Women's decade to bridge the gap in attainment of disparity between men and women, it has only resulted in widening instead of narrowing.

### Tertiary Sector

NSS	1977	1983	1987	1993	1999	2004
	1978	1984	1988	1994	2000	2005
Male	22.9	27.6	29.3	30.8	31.4	37.91
Female	10.6	13.1	13.8	13.7	16.5	22.46

Source: NSS 32<sup>nd</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, 55<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> Rounds.

The tertiary or service sector encompasses a wide range of activities. The role of women in this sector covers the complex problem of services, clarification of data, identification of man power problem in general and women's hidden economic role in particular. Though progress is felt in this trend with regard to services, the major avenues that absorb women are teaching, nursing and clerical services besides domestic service. The development of service sector is partly due to major changes in agriculture and industry and partly due to their heterogeneous production and consumption characteristics. The result has effected employment of women on main services which include trade, transport, banking, tourism, catering etc. The tertiary sector absorbs 22 percent of the state's Female labour force. The two important areas of absorption of female

workers in this sector are construction and service<sup>13</sup>. In the field of construction, women workers are generally preferred for operations involving manual work. Women constitute only 25 percent of technical and professional workers (1991), a slight increase from 20.5% in 1981. Among administration and managerial workers, women's share was 4.4 percent in 1991; up from 2.3 percent in 1981<sup>14</sup>. A significant feature in service sector is the increased women's employment in the IT industry which is considered to be 'women friendly'. Although the contribution of this sector to employment as per the NASSCOM estimates have risen from around 285,000 in 1999-00 to more than 1 million in 2004-05. The number of women working in the IT-BPO sector grew 6.7 lakh in 2008, as per a survey on gender inclusivity conducted by HR consulting firm Mercer and IT association Nasscom. Out of the 400 million workforce, around 30-35 percent are female, and only one-fifth of these women work in the urban areas, the survey pointed, at a compound annual rate of 28.5 per cent per annum, the sector shows clear signs of labour market segmentation by gender, where women are engaged in low paid and less skilled occupations, there by reinforcing or aggravating the existing gender inequities in the labour market<sup>15</sup>. An analysis of the sectoral distribution of the total work force reveals that Primary sector accommodates (As per NSS 61<sup>st</sup> Round-2004-05) and absorbs a large portion of 57.6% of women labour force. Around 26.12% are engaged in the secondary sector and 22.46% is found in the tertiary sector in the Economy of Tamilnadu<sup>16</sup>.

### Self Help Groups

Besides their contribution in various sectors, women now enter into the arena of self-employment through SHGs. SHGs are the modern financial institutions, which are

owned, managed and used by a group of members. They are viewed as an important strategy for achieving financial inclusion and social capital. Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of women (TNCDW) has brought out qualitative change in the lives of women through its definitive interventions over the last few decades. Mahalir Thittam is based on Self Help Group (SHG) approach and is implemented in partnership with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community based organizations<sup>17</sup>. The Corporation implements Mahalir Thittam, IFAD assisted Post Tsunami Sustainable Livelihoods Programme and also Swarna Jayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), a major anti-poverty programme meant for self employment of rural poor, to bring about greater synergy and better coordination in implementing various schemes for Self Help Groups<sup>18</sup>. Government of India has restructured SGSY as National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) which is implemented in our State as Tamil Nadu State Rural Livelihoods Mission (TNSRLM) from 2012-13. TNCDW has been designated as the nodal agency for implementation of TNSRLM. As per the current statistics 5.56 lakhs SHGs have been formed in Tamilnadu having 85.69 lakhs women members with a total savings of Rs. 3,700 crores (2013-2014)<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, women are empowered through SHG mostly in the areas of participation and access to financial resources. However regarding welfare, levels of knowledge and skills and awareness among the members of SHGs on Government schemes, no substantial improvement among the members of SHG are shown.

The sectoral movement in women's employment in Tamilnadu reveals the fact that the secondary sector rejected women.

The service sector did not expand sufficiently and the primary sector is overcrowded. As a result, un-remunerative, unrecognized occupations remained with women in the midst of growing poverty. The intensification of this process caused high female mortality and subsequent decline in sex ratio. From the available statistics it is revealed 27.3% contribute to organized sector and 73% of the female force in Tamilnadu contributing to the unorganized sectors of the economy which was highly invisible and underestimated. While both men and women in Tamilnadu are found to be more in the agricultural sector than in manufacturing and services, the agricultural labour force on the whole is more 'feminine'. The labour force engaged in the field of manufacturing and services is more 'masculine'. However we could witness the transition in the economic progress of women who started identifying themselves in different fields.

Women's role in the family have remained unorganized even at the international level and it could be attributed to the fact that women are not in the control of the administration and management sectors but are confined to sectors involving physical labour. The United Nations report estimated that women's participation was less in management and administration<sup>20</sup>. The ILO studies reveal that technological progress pushes away women even from the meager income generating activities. Because of lack of skill, women voluntarily accept jobs containing lower activities. Women generally accept family taboos to forego employment opportunities. At the same time, it has to be accepted that in India, women have entered into almost every profession<sup>21</sup>. But this participation has not left any adequate dent in the desired socio ó economic transformation of the women's role in development.

## **Stumbling Blocks for Women in the Economy**

The modern educated women want to utilize her intellectual abilities and do something which would give her satisfaction and secure her with an identity in the family and society. The new role of productive, economically independent woman has given her a new confidence and freedom. Despite this, in the current scenario women encounter certain obstacles and barriers that keep them from workplaces as well as challenges and hazards within the workplace. Although women make tremendous contributions to the economy as stated supra, women's contributions are not valued in the same way as that of men's. This is, in part, due to constructed ideas in the society about the value of women's independence ó economic and otherwise. As a result women consistently find themselves at a lower economic status than men. This was further substantiated at The 2009 Bangkok Declaration for Beijing +15 which expressed the concern that "women continue to bear major responsibility for unpaid work, particularly care-giving work and this contributed to weaker labour market attachment for women, weaker access to social security benefits and less time for education/training, leisure and self-care and political activities"<sup>22</sup>.

Following are the main barriers in the career of working women: Women workers in all countries require special treatment obviously because they need more protection than men in their working arena in view of the tenderness, sensitiveness and influence at home including reproductive function and in upbringing future generations of the country.

**Sexual Harassment** - At work place affects millions of women regardless of

their profession, but legal systems offer them little protection. Even when they do have legal recourse, the fear of being penalized or else a promise of much wanted promotion keeps many women at bay.

**Inequality in Access to Income** - Most of the working women, inspite of their economic independence are not truly independent. Neither do they have any control over their own income nor are they allowed to take important decisions in their lives independently. However, as women become career oriented, these differentiation in men and women is undergoing a serious manifestation.

**Wage Discrimination** - Throughout the economy, women tend to hold lower-level positions than men even when they have sufficient skills to perform higher level jobs. Female agricultural laborers were usually paid 40 to 60 percent of the male wage. Even when women occupy similar positions and have similar educational levels, they earn just 80 percent of what men do. The public sector hires a greater share of women than does the private sector, but wages in the public sector are less egalitarian despite laws requiring equal pay for equal work.

**Legislations** - The basic enactment regulating the working conditions of women workers employed in the different sectors of the economy are The Factories Act, 1948, The Mines Act, 1952 Plantations Labour Act, 1951, Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 etc. Under the Factories Act, women are prohibited to work during night hours and the Mines Act prohibits women from working underground<sup>23</sup>. Welfare facilities such as improved sanitation, maintenance of crèches in factories employing more than 80 women etc. are also provided under these Acts. These rules though laudable in their objectives have reduced the opportunities of employment for

women in reality. Most of the companies, factories, firms and concerns prefer to restrict the number of women below the stipulated limit so that they can avoid the obligations and requirements laid down by the Government. The existence of these legislations for more than three decades has made little or no impact on the employment of women.

**Domestic Care and Share** ó The prevailing attitude is that most women do not even expect their men to share in with the domestic work. The main requisite is that they themselves do not realize that what is required is not mere adjustment or occasional help but a regular sharing of domestic responsibilities with no inhibition. This kind of openness in attitude can help women reach greater and newer heights in their career. Consequently, working women are no doubt doubly enslaved as they try to give satisfaction both to their professional life and also in her family life. There are a number of appropriate technologies to relieve women from household drudgeries to save their time and energy. Nevertheless, they are not a substitute for role sharing. Further, poor women could not afford to own these modern appliances. Several research attempts made on this study reveal that impact of technology for women has been negative.

**Contentedness at Will** - The analysis of career mobility of working women has elicited that most of the working women prefer to work at a place nearer to their place of residence. They are ready to accept a low salaried job, but will not like to go over to a place far away from their homes. Further they prefer such an occupation or profession which is unlikely to disturb their marital and family life. Thus, family obligations do not permit substantial occupational mobility amongst women. The other factors arising out of spatial

immobility, transferable nature of husband's job and educational deprivation, also force women to confine themselves to stereo ó typed, low paid, less prestigious and insecure jobs.

**Superiority Complex** - In this social set up, it was quite acceptable in a man ó woman component that the man was a superior and the woman, a subordinate. But in rare cases, the higher occupational positions of wife generate a feeling of jealousy in the minds of the husband. The motive is that the husband may favour the wife's working but disfavor her aspirations for career growth. Consequently in most of the cases to maintain harmony in the family, she accepts her husband as the one wielding power and authority and plays a subservient role to him. Therefore, one must recognize that the winds of change are fast occurring.

## Conclusion

From the above analysis women in the economy of Tamilnadu, it is ascertained that women, as professionals, no doubt inculcate scientific temper and create awareness of physical, social technological, economic, cultural and aesthetic environment in Tamilnadu. There is argument that, although much progress has been made in Tamilnadu, many gaps remain unfilled and challenges unfulfilled regarding improvement of economic condition of women and women's participation in the economy. These gaps and challenges are closely linked to the achievements, reflecting the fact that, although much progress has been made since Independence, the road to real achievement remains to travelled further and that, even in the areas where the most progress has been achieved, significant pot holes remain. Keeping in view the present day needs of the society and giving due consideration to the socio- cultural factors, the Directorate General of Employment and Training,



Government of India brought out a very useful publication entitled "Careers for Women". However there is a clear indication of job aspirations among women coming from different strata of society. Their outlook for various kinds of employment also differs. Regional disparities among the districts of Tamilnadu also exist. Hence, the following strategies are suggested here.

Women must be viewed as critical agents in achieving economic development rather than beneficiaries of the welfare programmes.

The right of women to employment should in no way be considered subordinate or secondary to that of men. The patriarchal society must emerge out of the cultural taboos imposed on women.

Women will have to be absorbed towards skill related categories of work in order to extract economic and productive employment which would enhance the level of National Income of the state. Helping women cope up with the impact of new technologies through training programmes particularly on the women in rural areas.

Promoting entrepreneurship by encouraging and supporting the successful setting up of micro enterprises by women both in rural and urban areas will give rise to revelation of their managerial and administrative capacities.

Equal sharing of household responsibilities by the male partners without any inhibitions will result in immediate and widespread impact on the quality of contribution by women.

Women must break the nutshell to face the world with new challenges. It is pertinent to note that the rural women have progressive self-confidence when compared to that of the urban women.

Women should have mental strength to oppose the slights of men at work place. She can learn Martial arts which would give self confidence and further encourage her to fight against any injustice at work place and not hamper her progress towards prosperity.

A change is expected in decision making responsibilities and participation of men and women in various family related activities. The pressure of dual role leaves the wife/woman physically exhaustive, the husband help in auxiliary work such as shopping, bringing milk, groceries or lending a helping hand in extra work will enhance women to involve her in decision making activities with much vigour.

New directions and new modes to manage the external and internal barriers are needed through redefining the roles of women. The number of women organizations and families responding to such change on women's role, status and position are few. However, a small beginning is made and it needs to be carried forward with a greater momentum and mobilization by the culture, society families etc.



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