

## **WELFARE AND EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN: THE INITIATIVES OF THE DMK DURING 1989-1991**

**J. JOSEPH AMIRTHARAJ**

Professor, Ph.D. - Research Scholar (Part-Time), Department of History, Annamalai University.

**Dr. R. PANNEERSELVAM**

Associate Professor, PG & Research Department of History, Government Arts College (Autonomous), Salem.  
E-mail: pannirselvam2014@rediffmail.com

### **Abstract**

The twentieth century Tamil Nadu witnessed several significant changes and development. A political party emerged from a social reform movement attracts scholars when it realizes its ideology of the movement through the system of political power. Though the party has its own ideology and principles, the working of the state should be confined to its constitutional limits. With its antique language and culture yielding to the historical necessity of connecting to rationalism, a political party was organized to mobilize the Tamils with other linguistic minorities in Madras State then. Along with the empowering of the Dravidians it well included the section of women significantly. To examine these issues, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam remains a relevant source of study. This paper explores the women empowerment initiatives and achievements in Tamil Nadu during the time of the government led by the DMK during 1989-1991. These years signified a solid base for women empowerment for the rest of times to come.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Women Welfare, Social Justice, Women Quota, Equality

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the history of human progress the concept of right and equality assumes greater significance throughout the world. Men had the opportunity to get these privileges naturally or guaranteed by state through constant efforts. Women followed this path somewhat later, however, not equal with men. As the idea of right and equality are often discussed, empowerment is also discussed sufficiently by the scholars. They anonymously believe that women empowerment refers to strengthening women's position in social economic and political power structure of the society. It also implies capacity building. They also believe that empowerment is a multi-dimensional process, which ought to empower women or gathering of women to understand their full personality and power in all circles of life.[1] Most of the developing countries have rich traditional values and foundations. Modernization tries to giving up of some of traditional practices that are harmful to women. Countries like India witnessed reformation of such practices. At the same time it retains the age-old practices which are considered to be good for the human life. British rule in India and the English educated Indians, and the freedom fighters argued for more rights to women which ultimately expanded a space for actualizing their potential. Providing education for girls became its starting point of their empowerment. In India, women empowerment has been more visible since independence. The social reform movements and the national movement in the nineteenth and the twentieth century respectively paved way for enacting various laws for women rights and protection in India. The legal

framework also paved the way for their liberations from the social evils and religious taboos some extent. During the British rule, the Act of Sati (abolish) 1829, Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1856, the Child Restriction Act 1929, and Women Property Right Act, 1937 were enacted due to the constant pressures from the social reformers.[2] India's independence brought a new dawn for the womenfolk and the Constituent Assembly discussed the women issues adequately. The founding fathers of the constitution very much supported the women rights and their advancement. Accordingly the Constitution of India included all those provisions recommended by the founding fathers. India has come a long way to formulate the idea of gender equality and the practice of women empowerment in its governance. Right from the formulation of the Constitution the principle of gender equality is included in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. [3] The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels. Tamil Nadu has a long history of social justice in broader perspective. Within that framework the idea of women empowerment assumes significance. Right from the efforts of the Justice Party and the Self Respect Movement, women rights and equality were much discussed. The ideological evolution of Dravidian Movement includes women rights and equality as well. It has a modernist agenda to free women from traditional social evils and injustice. The views of Perivar E.V. Ramasamy are always remembered for providing new ideas for women empowerment. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) initiated and implemented several programmes and schemes of women empowerment during its tenure. [4]

## **DMK AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Women question has been given due importance throughout the development of Dravidian Movement in Tamil Nadu. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) founded on 17 September 1949 has played its part well in empowering women during their rule. The founder C. N. Annadurai, a writer, orator and social reformer was attracted to the rationalistic ideas of Periyar E.V.Ramasamy. Annadurai explained the vulnerability of women in his writings and speeches. His scripts used for drama and films also depict the pathetic position of women. he stood for women liberation and their empowerment. He organized the anti-Hindi agitation. He linked his political ideas with Tamil language and culture. Empowerment of weaker section including women is one of the agenda of the social reforms of the new government formed by the DMK. When the DMK came to power in 1967, it was for the leadership to consider the ways and means to practice its ideological promises through legislation and governance. Annadurai took important decision during his tenure from 1967 to 1969. His government passed an order to validate the self-respect marriages already promoted by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy. In order to motivate the inter-caste marriage, gold medal is awarded to the bride.[5] The State Social Welfare Board was re-constituted in December 1968.[6] Consequent on the demise of Annadurai on 3 February 1969, the Governor appointed Karunanidhi on 10 February 1969 to act as Chief Minister.[7] Karunanidhi was well aware of the fact that education should occupy

the crucial role in empowering women. Reservation or quota for women in education and employment comes next.

### **WOMEN'S WELFARE AND EMPOWERMENT DURING 1989-1991**

After the termination of the DMK government in January 1976 and more than a decade of the AIADMK government, the DMK came to power in 1989. The DMK government initiated several welfare schemes and women empowerment programmes during its short period of less than two years. In the field of education, Tamil Nadu reached near 100 percent enrolment under the age group 6-11 and 80 percent under the age group 11-14. The rate of dropouts in primary school level drastically came down. Girls performed better than the boys.[8] A separate Directorate was also formed to look after the Welfare measures of Most Backward Classes and Denotified Communities in 1989. 20 percent Reservation of seats in admission was provided to the MBC and DC students. It was also applicable to employment. [9] Muthulakshmi Reddy Ninaivu Magapperu Udavi Thittam was implemented from 3rd June 1989 for providing cash support to the women from poor households in the last two months of pregnancy and immediately after two months of the delivery of the child. [10] Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme was named after the renowned social reformer Ramamirtham who fought against the Devadasi system. It was launched on 3 June 1989 to help poor parents in getting their daughters married and also to promote the educational status of poor girls. The scheme was initially applicable to girls who studied up to eighth standard and attained the age of 18 years. [11] Subsequently, the educational qualification for availing of this assistance was raised to tenth standard, so as to improve the educational status of the girls. Unfortunately, the scheme was discontinued during the AIADMK in 2002, but it was revived when the DMK came to power in 2006. This marriage assistance scheme was also extended to the Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu from November 2009.[12] E.V.R. Nagammaiyar Memorial Free Education to Women Students was introduced in 1989 for all girls irrespective of their caste and creed with parental income limit. Under this scheme girl students are exempted from the payment of tuition fees for undergraduate courses.[13]

### **WOMEN QUOTA IN RESERVATION POLICY**

In the past, women did not have a separate quota in education and employment. Reservation was provided on the basis of caste and class. Since the time of the Justice Party, caste and class based reservation has been in practice. After independence the reservation policy is protected by the constitutional provisions. In 1989, the DMK government introduced 30 percent quota for women in each category of caste and class reservation.[14] When the DMK came to power in 2021, the quota for women further increased to 40 percent.[15] When the DMK was in power in Tamil Nadu, the union government led by V.P. Singh introduced 27 percent reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) on 13 August 1990, based on the recommendations of the Second Backward Classes Commission, better known as Mandal Commission.[16] This development further helped the women aspiring for education and employment in union government institutions.

## PROPERTY RIGHTS TO WOMEN

In 1990, the Hindu Succession (Tamil Nadu Amendment) Act, 1989 was enacted. The Act conferred the same rights on a Hindu daughter as a son has in a Hindu joint family, so as to achieve the Constitutional mandate of equality by suitably amending the said Act, and also made in applicable to daughters married before the date of the commencement of the proposed amendment Act and to a partition which had been effected before the date of the commencement of the proposed amendment Act.[17]

## SELF-HELP GROUPS

For the first time under the Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project, women self-help groups (SHGs) were introduced. Socio-economic development and empowerment of women is sine qua non for the holistic development of society. The Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of women (TNCDW) established in 1983 implements Mahalir Thittam and anti-poverty programmes for self employment of rural poor. The Self Help Group movement which was started in a small way in Dharmapuri District in the year 1989, has now grown into a mammoth movement covering all districts of the State targeting poor families and the marginalized sections of the society. TNCDW which has been spearheading the SHG movement has brought out qualitative change in the lives of women through its definitive interventions over the last two decades.[18]

## CONCLUSION

Women empowerment schemes directly target the women groups to improve their educational, economic and political status. The benefits of welfare schemes go to both men and women. The DMK initiated several welfare schemes and women empowerment schemes in which the Dravidian ideology, the names of Dravidian personalities remembered. The government of India remains a partner in its financial support to continue the schemes. Though they have their own political implications, the visibility of welfare and empowerment cannot be ignored. The DMK government during 1989-1991 provided a solid base for empowering women. It also became imperative for the successive governments to carry out the measures and further to expand the welfare and empowerment measures for women.

## References

1. Esther Duflo. Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, 2012. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17702>
2. C.S. Lakshmi. Women in Society, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984.
3. Government of India. Constitution of India, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India, New Delhi, 2000.
4. Marguerite Ross Barnett, Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1976.
5. K.R. Rajaraman, ed. Tamil Nadu State Administration Report, 1968-69, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1970, p. 5.

6. Ibid, p. 354.
7. Ibid, pp. 7-8.
8. Tamil Nadu State Administration Report, 1989-90, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras,
9. Ibid, p. 55.
10. Ibid, p. 360.
11. Ibid, p. 364.
12. Policy Note, 2010-2011, Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2010.
13. Ibid
14. <http://kalaignar.cmk.in/1989-1991>.
15. The Times of India, 14 September 2021.
16. Annual Report, 2021-2022, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, p. 135.
17. Tamil Nadu Act 1 of 1990, TNAR, 1989-90, p. 267.
18. Policy Note, 2009-10, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2009, p. 62.