

## **IMPACT OF WOMEN SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMMES IN TAMIL NADU WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT – AN ASSESSMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In human societies, woman has been dependent upon man for her livelihood and for protection. Women all through ages have been given a secondary status of importance and on many occasions were least considered. But with the changed scenario, the thinking of people has been changed. Due to education, and awareness the problems of women are looked upon as the problems of social welfare. The term 'Social Welfare' can be defined as the organized system of social welfare institutions designed aid disadvantaged individuals and groups to attain satisfying standards of life and health. It aims at personal and social relationship which permits individuals to develop their full capacities and the promotion of their well-being in harmony with the needs of the community. With the emergence of Modern Governments, the policy of welfare was adopted in the promotion of the social welfare of women. India is a welfare state. The Ministry of Social Welfare in India seeks to collaborate with non-governmental organisation ensured various social welfare programmes in an effective way. On the footsteps of Central Government, the Government of Tamil Nadu has made so many attempts for the upliftment of women to ensure gender equality. Regarding the goal of women empowerment, Virudhunagar district is considered as one of the backward districts in Tamil Nadu.

**KEYWORDS:** Women vulnerable group, Empower women, Virudhunagar District, Social welfare, attempts for the upliftment of women to ensure gender equality.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social welfare is the general term for services provided to members of society's vulnerable groups (or individuals) for their welfare. Social welfare measures usually refer to various types of support and assistance provided by the Government to the underprivileged and needy.<sup>1</sup> It also refers to all the steps taken by the Governments to fight against social issues like poverty and unemployment. The primary goal of social welfare is to empower women to stand on their own feet.

Women, a weaker and oppressed section, are an important segment of Indian society. They belonged to the vulnerable part of the Indian society. Women constitute nearly half of the Indian population and constitutionally they enjoy equal rights and they occupy a place of primary in the national development programmes. A plethora of schemes and programmes have been announced regularly for fulfilling the aim of women's uplift and development. Yet Women still remain subservient to the male persons in a patriarchal society of India. Further, the rural women present a more deplorable picture than their counterparts in the urban areas.

### **VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Virudhunagar District belonging to Southern Pandyas Empire. It was once known as 'Virudhupatti' and 'Viruthuvetti' in early periods. The great personalities like Kamarajar, Kumarasamy Raja and Ramana Maha Rishi were born in this district. This part was ruled by various emperors like Chola, Pandya and Naickers. Srivilliputther Andal Temple is world famous and the Gopuram of this temple is the emblem of the state, Tamil Nadu. Jain sculptures and inscriptions found in this region shows that Jain religions was also followed in the virudhunagar district<sup>2</sup>. During the British period it was known as 'Virudhukelvetti'. According to the local legend around four hundred years ago a warrior, who was in possession of a number of flags in token of having conquered many others challenged the residents of this town. A resident accepted the challenge and in the ensuing fight, killed the warrior and seized the flags. From then onwards the town was known as 'Virudhukelvetti'. It was a part of Tirunelveli district before 1910. This place was once referred to as 'Virudhupatti'<sup>3</sup>. Later it became a part of Ramanathapuram district.

### **GENERAL PROFILE ABOUT VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT**

Virudhunagar District is one among the 38 districts in Tamil Nadu. It was carved on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1985 by trifurcation of the composite Ramanathapuram district.<sup>4</sup> It is bounded on the west by Kerala State, on the north by Madurai and Sivaganga district, on the east by Ramanathapuram district and on the south by Tirunelveli and Tuticorin districts. The

<sup>1</sup> Social Welfare Administration. N.p., Social work department, PSGCAS, 2013, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Jegannathan, N., *Virudhunagar Varalaru*, Virudhunagar, 2007, p.1

<sup>3</sup> The term 'Virudhu' means 'Award' in Tamil.

<sup>4</sup> G.O. Ms. No. 347, dated 8th March, 1985.

majority of the working population depends on agriculture. But the continuous failure of monsoon, reduction of agriculture and agricultural based operations, leads to sprout in growth of the small-scale industries.

### **CAUSES FOR LOW STATUS OF WOMEN IN VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT**

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. Regarding the goal of women empowerment, this district is considered as one of the backward districts in Tamil Nadu. Socio-economic factors are responsible for the low status of women in this area.

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. The problem arose in this area primarily because of attitudes of the society also. The parents of girl children were worried about the social custom<sup>5</sup> in which they have to bear the burden of bringing up their daughters, paying dowry and meeting the expenses of other socio-cultural expenses out of necessity.

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.<sup>6</sup> 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.

### **CLASSIFICATION OF WELFARE SCHEMES FOR WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU**

In Tamil Nadu State the Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Program Department includes the Department of Social Welfare, Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Limited, Tamil Nadu Integrated Nutrition Project, Department of Social Defense, and Department of Rehabilitation of the Disabled. The Department of Social Welfare was set up to provide required impetus for the historic development of women and children. Its primary focus is on women and children. The department provides a wide range of social and welfare services. They include protection, assistance, and treatment, care of people in need of protection, special forms of aid to children and families and elders who need assistance". The ultimate aim of the social welfare department is defined to promote people's economic and social well-being.<sup>7</sup>

This article critically analyses the social welfare schemes implemented by Tamilnadu pertaining to marriage, maternity benefits and child care in Virudhunagar District. It can be classified into two categories.

- I. Marriage Assistance Scheme for Women
- II. State Specific Women development programs

#### **I. MARRIAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME**

In 1994 the government announced vision 2000 for empowering women. The primary objective of this initiative was to bring women into the mainstream of society and enable advancement. Policies apart from training, employment, income generation, welfare and supportive services, gender sensitization, schemes to financially help women for their daughters' marriage are also adopted in practice. They are known as marriage assistance schemes. In Virudhunagar district five types of Marriage Assistance Schemes are under process in Social Welfare Department. They are as follows:

1. Poor Widows' Daughter Marriage Assistance Scheme -1982
2. Poor Widow Remarriage Assistance Scheme -1975
3. Orphan Girls Marriage Assistance Scheme -1985
4. Intercaste Marriage Assistance Scheme- 1967
5. Poor parents' Daughter Marriage Assistance Scheme-1989

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<sup>5</sup> In Tamil society the marriage expenses have to be met by the bride's family and they have to send their daughters to the house of bridegroom with house hold articles and gold ornaments. They have to spend huge amount.

<sup>6</sup> Hellan R. Sekar, *Child Labour in Match Industry* (NODIA: Child Labour Cell), National Labour Institute, 1992, p.25.

<sup>7</sup> Banumathi, K., Impact of social welfare schemes on women through media communication with special reference to Tamil nadu (Unpublished Ph.d., thesis), Univeristy of Madras, Chennai, 2002,p.75.

➤ **E.V.R. MANIAMMATYAR NINAIVU POOR WIDOW'S DAUGHTERS MARRIAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME**

The scheme initiated in 1982 was with the objective to avoid delay in widow's daughters' marriage due to financial stress. The widows within the income ceiling of Rs.12, 000 are eligible to benefit through the scheme. In addition the bride should be within the age of 18 to 30. Rs.7, 000 is granted for only one girl in the widow's family.<sup>8</sup>

➤ **DR. DHARMAMBAL AMMAIYAR NINAIVU WIDOW REMARRIAGE SCHEME**

To encourage widow remarriage and uplift the status of women in the society, this scheme was initiated in 1975. Widows between 20 to 30 years are eligible to benefit through this scheme. Rs.7, 000 as National Savings Certificate and Rs.3, 000 as cheque or draft is given as the grant.<sup>9</sup>

➤ **ANNAI TERESA NINAIVU ORPHAN GIRLS MARRIAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME**

Under Annai Therasa Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme for Orphan Girls, the condition is that the bride must be an orphan. The scheme was initiated in 1985 with an objective to help orphan girls with Rs.7, 000 for their marriage. The bride should be between 20 to 30 years. Only one in a family is eligible to benefit the scheme.<sup>10</sup>

➤ **TAMIL NADU ARASU KALAPPU THIRUMANA UDABI THITTAM**

The scheme was which originally called as Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Memorial Inter-caste Marriage Assistance Scheme is named as Tamil Nadu Arasu Kalappu Thirumana Udabi Thittam. To encourage intercaste marriage and to benefit the couple who have married other caste which is regarded as lower in the society, this scheme was transferred from Adhi Dravidar welfare department to social welfare department in 1990.<sup>11</sup> Financial assistance of Rs. 10, 000 and Rs. 20, 000 in case of the spouse belonging to SC or ST is provided.

➤ **MOOVALOOR RAMAMIRTHAM AMMAIYAR MEMORIAL MARRIAGE ASSISTANCE SCHEME**

This scheme was initiated to help poor parents in getting their daughters married and also to promote the educational status of poor girls. It was launched in 1989.<sup>12</sup> 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 eligibility was that they should have completed 8th standard and above, 5th standard in respect of schedule tribes and the girl must have reached the age of 18.

In short, Under Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme, the financial assistance is provided to the family of the brides whose annual income falls below Rs.72,000/- if the brides fulfill the above eligibility criteria. Under E.V.R. Maniammayar Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme for Daughters of Poor Widows, the same criteria are applicable but the benefit is given only to the daughters of poor widows. Under Annai Therasa Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme For Orphan Girls, the condition is that the bride must be an orphan. The above conditions as applicable for Dr. Dharmambal Ammaiyar Ninaivu Widow Remarriage Assistance Scheme hold good for the beneficiaries of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Ninaivu Inter Caste Marriage Assistance Scheme also.

These five schemes are analyzed in the table for their impact on literacy, economy, health, livelihood/training, social security and others.

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<sup>8</sup> G.O. Ms.No. 673, Social Welfare Department, dated 20.02.1982.

<sup>9</sup> G.O.Ms. No. 352, Social Welfare Department, dated 09.05.1975.

<sup>10</sup> G.O. (Ms.) No.807, Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department, dated 23.03.1985 & Tamil Nadu State Administrative Report - 1985-86, p.332.

<sup>11</sup> Evaluation study on 'Marriage Assistance Schemes', Government of Tamil Nadu, Directorate of Evaluation and Applied Research, Kuralaham, Chennai,pp.11-20.

<sup>12</sup> Government of Tamilnadu, G.O. (Ms.) No.368, Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department, dated 13.4.1989.

**Analysis of benefits derived from Marriage Assistance Schemes**

S.No.	Social Welfare Schemes for Women	Targeted aspects in Women Development					
		Literacy	Finance	Health	Livelihood /Training	Social security	Others
1.	E.V.R. Maniammatyar Ninaivu Poor Widow's Daughters Marriage Assistance Scheme	Nil	***	Nil	Nil	**	Nil
2.	Dr. Dharmambal Ammaiyar Ninaivu Widow Remarriage Scheme	Nil	***	Nil	Nil	***	Nil
3.	Annai Teresa Ninaivu Orphan Girls Marriage Assistance Scheme	Nil	***	Nil	Nil	**	Nil
4.	Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Memorial Inter-caste Marriage Assistance Scheme	Nil	***	Nil	Nil	**	Nil
5.	Moovaloor Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Memorial Marriage Assistance Scheme	**	***	Nil	Nil	**	Nil

\* - **Impact**      \*\* - **Moderate Impact**      \*\*\* - **High impact**

These above five types of Social Welfare Schemes implemented by the Government of Tamil Nadu in Virudhunagar district emphasize on Social security for women. However, such security is emphasized through increasing the economic condition of women. Among the five schemes the Dr. Dharmambal Ammaiyar Ninaivu Widow Remarriage Assistance Scheme emphasis widow's social security, which is more essential for social transformation. It can be seen that Annai Theresa Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme for Orphan Girls is the most beneficial scheme by providing this assistance several marginalized orphan girls are benefited. Under Marriage Assistance Scheme, the maximum number of beneficiaries was identified through Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Memorial Marriage Assistance Scheme. Totally 4169 beneficiaries had benefited in Virudhunagar District.<sup>13</sup>

**II. State Specific Women Development Programs**

The State specific women development programs are the supporting schemes for targeted group of women. Under this group there are five active schemes the characteristics of them are as follows:

1. Sathiyavanimuthu Ammaiyar Ninaivu Mahalir Free Supply of Sewing Machine Scheme
2. Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Higher Education Assurance Scheme (or) Puthumai Penn Thittam
3. Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Ammaiyar Ninaivu Mahapperu Udhavi Thittam
4. The Cradle Baby Scheme
5. Mahalir Thittam

➤ **SATHIYAVANIMUTHU AMMAIYAR NINAIVU MAHALIR FREE SUPPLY OF SEWING MACHINE SCHEME**

The Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department is implementing the Free Supply of Sewing Machine Scheme in 1996. Originally, the scheme was meant for widows' rehabilitation alone. Subsequently, it is being extended by including in the list of beneficiaries the scheduled caste women and women below poverty line, physically handicapped women and abandoned wives. To provide self-employment to the women of above categories sewing machines have been issued.

➤ **MOOVALUR RAMAMIRTHAM AMMAIYAR HIGHER EDUCATION ASSURANCE SCHEME (OR) PUTHUMAI PENN THITTAM**

To promote enrolment of girls in higher education, the Tamil nadu Government has converted the marriage assistance scheme named after social activist Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar into higher education assurance scheme in 2002.<sup>14</sup> It differs from previous ones in that it places an emphasis on financial aid, encourages female students to complete their education, and prohibits parents and guardians from allowing their daughters to marry

<sup>13</sup> Statistical report, Beneficiary details, Social Welfare and Women Empowerment, Virudhunagar, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Tamilnadu, G.O. (Ms.) No. 46, Social Welfare and Women Empowerment Department, dated 02.08.2022.

young. Female students who are pursuing education will receive an Rs 1,000 monthly financial incentive, regardless of their field of study. Generally female students are discouraged from seeking an education; this initiative boosts the confidence of young women. Undoubtedly, it will create a new era of innovation within the next few years.

➤ **DR.MUTHULAKSHMI REDDY MEMORIAL MATERNITY SCHEME (OR)**

**DR.MUTHULAKSHMI REDDY AMMAIYAR NINAIVU MAHAPPERU UDHAVI THITTAM**

Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy maternity benefit scheme launched by the Tamil Nadu government in 1989. The scheme helps to avoid the birth time complications to the mother and new born baby. In his scheme offering two time nutrition kit to the pregnancy mother it is full fill the nutrition balance increase the hemoglobin level and immunity level. . The main aims of the programme are to enhance the number of institutional deliveries, to provide cash assistance to poor pregnant women, to ensure the access to nutritional food and to compensate the wage losses during pregnancy. The amount has been enhanced to Rs.12,000 in the year 2011 with three installments. The financial assistance is provided to the poor pregnant women and those who avail the delivery in any of the government hospitals like Primary health centers, Maternity homes and Government hospitals.

➤ **THE CRADLE BABY SCHEME**

The neglect of the girl baby is legendary in Tamil Nadu. To counter the menace of female infanticide in certain parts of Tamil Nadu, this unique scheme called cradle baby scheme was initiated in 1992. It is a humanitarian umbrella to protect the female babies from being killed without seeing light of the day. Under this scheme cradles are placed in the hospitals, primary health centers, orphanages and children homes in order to enable the rescue of female children abandoned by their biological parents due to various social circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Initially the scheme was started in Salem and later extended to Madurai, Theni, Dindigul, Virudhunagar and Dharmapuri districts. 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.<sup>16</sup> According to 2011 census, there are 914 girls per thousand boys between the age of 0 to 6 in India. But in Virudhunagar district, the sex ratio is 954 female for thousand male. The situation is better than the National level.<sup>17</sup>

➤ **MAHALIR THITTAM**

Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women was established for the development of women in 1983 by the government of Tamil Nadu. Under this the Tamil Nadu Women’s Development Project (or) Mahalir Thittam was started in Virudhunagar district in 1997. It has been introduced to improve the conditions and status of women especially in rural areas. It is functioning through a network of women self-help groups established and monitored with the assistance of NGOs at village level. It recognized the importance of promoting self-help initiative through savings and credit.

**Analysis of benefits derived from State Specific Women Development Programs**

S.No.	Social Welfare Schemes for Women	Targeted aspects in Women Development					
		Literacy	Finance	Health	Livelihood /Training	Social security	Others
1.	Sathiyavanimuthu Ammaiyar Ninaivu Mahalir Free Supply of Sewing Machine Scheme	Nil	**	Nil	**	Nil	Nil
2.	Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Higher Education Assurance Scheme (or) Puthumai Penn Thittam	***	***	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
3.	Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy Ammaiyar Ninaivu Mahapperu Udhavi Thittam	Nil	***	***	Nil	**	Nil
4.	The Cradle Baby Scheme	Nil	Nil	***	Nil	**	Nil
5.	Mahalir Thittam	***	***	Nil	***	***	***

<sup>15</sup> G.O. (Ms). No. 23, Social Welfare, Women Welfare, Government of Tamil Nadu, dated 16.02.2007.

<sup>16</sup> Infant Deaths and infanticide as per PHC Records, District of Tamil Nadu 1995, p.32.

<sup>17</sup> District Human Development Report, Virudhunagar District, State Planning Commission, 2017, p.44.

**\* - Impact      \*\* - Moderate Impact      \*\*\* - High impact**

These State Specific Women development programs were analyzed in the table for its impact on literacy, economy, health, livelihood/training, social security and others. These schemes emphasize the infrastructure development for the social security of women. Pudhumai Penn scheme distinctly different from the other schemes by giving more attention to women higher education. The Mahalir Thittam strongly emphasizes empowerment of women through all the aspects of their development.

From the above analysis, it is pertinent to note that the Government of Tamilnadu has been taking several efforts and started several social welfare schemes to uplift women who formed the most vulnerable section of the society. The gradual shifting of government's focus towards women's welfare motivating them to participate in the development activities. The marriage assistance schemes besides providing financial assistance, ensures higher education to girls in rural areas. The incidences of girls dropping out are also reduced and the marriage at a young age due to poverty is also being brought down.

Literacy status is one of the key indicators of socio-economic development and the relative employment opportunities largely depend on the level of education. The schemes implemented by the Tamilnadu Government are unique in nature as it was introduced with the primary aim of promoting women education through these schemes. The increase in number of beneficiaries benefited under this scheme proves that women education in the district. Thus the above discussed welfare schemes and polices of Tamil Nadu a change in women's lifestyle and their future prospects. By these schemes, women can uplift their status of life both in family and society.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF WELFARE SCHEMES**

In early time, there were large disparities on the basis of gender. Even among their own children, there were differential treatments between male and female children in terms of education, food, preferences towards socio-cultural activities etc. But now-a-days, this gap is narrowing by giving equal importance and weightage to women. Social developments depend upon response and respect given to women. Now after the introduction of many projects and programmes for the upliftment of women, women are equally participating in economic and social activities. The present status of women reflects the development of the district. In Virudhunagar district, the women population to total population is 50.20 per cent. It means the female population in the district is greater by 0.20 per cent than male. The sex ratio in the district is 1007. Considering female literacy, it was 72.70 per cent. Compared with other districts, Virudhunagar is far better in Maternal Mortality Rate, which was 126.<sup>18</sup>

The human development status can be calculated for the district namely Human Development Index, Gender Inequality Index, Child Development Index and Multidimensional Poverty Index are the tools which not only reveal the level of human development in the district but also serve as a measuring scale to compare the performance of the blocks and to identify intra-block disparities. The disparities in education, health and income across the blocks of the district are distinctly captured by these indices. It is observed that certain blocks that fared well in terms of certain indices, failed to fare well in other indices. This has pulled down the overall human development index of these blocks.

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<sup>18</sup> State Human Development Report, State planning commission, Chennai, 2017.