



FROM VISION TO ACTION: TAMIL NADU'S WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED BY HONOURABLE CHIEF MINISTER MUTHUVEL KARUNANIDHI STALIN

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ABSTRACT

This paper endeavors to shed light on the comprehensive welfare schemes for women empowerment that have been swiftly implemented for the holistic development of the people of Tamil Nadu under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Mr. Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin. The primary objective of this study is to foster awareness and understanding among individuals regarding the diverse range of government initiatives and their effective utilization. Within the context of rural development and citizen well-being, it's imperative to recognize that these issues resonate globally among developing nations. The overarching goals of these development schemes encompass social equity, celebrating the nation's unity in diversity, fostering robust economic growth, enhancing the quality of women's lives, promoting education, ensuring access to healthcare, and satisfying fundamental human needs. India, as a developing nation, confronts a gamut of challenges including religious disparities, social inequities, gender inequalities, food insecurity, educational dropout rates, unemployment, and pervasive poverty. This paper serves as a comprehensive exploration of the initiatives for women empowerment introduced by the Government of Tamil Nadu, under the astute leadership of Chief Minister Mr. Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, starting from the year 2021. These multifaceted schemes, designed to empower marginalized sections of society, have garnered the attention and admiration of various states across India. They represent a beacon of hope and progress in the ongoing journey towards comprehensive societal development.

Key Words: *Rural Development, road length, houses and employment.*

I INTRODUCTION

The development of a nation is intrinsically tied to the well-being and advancement of its citizens. National development hinges on various facets such as fostering social equality, ensuring access to education, providing adequate medical facilities, and facilitating employment opportunities. In essence, every individual aspires to achieve a decent standard of living. However, a significant portion of income often gets allocated towards fulfilling basic necessities, including food, transportation, education, and healthcare. Moreover, issues such as

caste-based discrimination, gender disparities, and social inequalities further impede both individual and societal progress.

Recognizing the crucial role of the government in fostering the welfare of its citizens, it becomes imperative to ensure that every individual within the country has access to, at the very least, the essential necessities required to lead a dignified life. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, known as the "Right to Life and Personal Liberty," underscores the importance of addressing citizens' basic needs. It's important to note that pinpointing the exact basic needs can be challenging, as they tend to vary from person to person. Nevertheless, there are fundamental needs that are common to citizens in most countries, encompassing aspects such as employment opportunities, social recognition, access to food and nutrition, healthcare services, educational access, clean water, sanitation facilities, and adequate shelter. These necessities constitute the bedrock of social well-being.

The progress and development of any nation are inexorably linked to the quality of its human resources. Under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Mr. M.K. Stalin, the government of Tamil Nadu has demonstrated a clear commitment to addressing these pivotal sectors. In a relatively short span of two years, the government has been proactive in implementing a multitude of new schemes with a particular focus on women's welfare. This multifaceted approach is indicative of the government's dedication to elevating the well-being of its citizens and fostering an environment conducive to growth and prosperity.

II WOMEN WELFARE SCHEMES

The advancement of women in both social and economic aspects is a pivotal driver of progress, not only within households but also for the entire nation. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Mr. M.K. Stalin, the Tamil Nadu government has taken significant steps to empower women through a range of welfare initiatives. These women-centric programs, initiated in Tamil Nadu from 2021 onward, is shown in Fig.1.



Fig. 1 Women welfare scheme initiated by Tamil Nadu government

A. Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Ninaivu Puthumai Penn Thittam

According to the Honorable Minister for Finance and Human Resources Management in the Tamil Nadu government, in the Budget Speech delivered in the Legislative Assembly on March 18, 2022, significant modifications were made to the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Marriage Assistance Scheme. It has been renamed as the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Higher Education Assurance Scheme, and several alterations have been introduced. The primary objective of this initiative's redesign is to tackle the low enrollment of female students from government schools in higher education and encourage economically disadvantaged families to facilitate their daughters' aspirations for higher education.

Under the provisions of this initiative, eligible female students who have finished their schooling in government-operated schools from the 6th to the 12th grade will receive a monthly monetary grant of Rs. 1,000, which will be directly deposited into their bank accounts. This financial support will persist throughout their undergraduate studies, diploma programs, and ITI courses, provided they complete these courses successfully. It's worth highlighting that this incentive is offered on top of any scholarships that these students might receive. Furthermore, there is no limit to the number of female students from a single family who can take advantage of this program while pursuing higher education at recognized colleges and universities [1].

To streamline the implementation of this programme for female students, an online application system named "Penkalvi" has been introduced. Additionally, a dedicated Program Management Unit (PMU) has been established to supervise the program's efficient execution and ensure its smooth operation. Furthermore, four prominent banks have been assigned the task of facilitating the opening of bank accounts and the issuance of debit cards to students as required.

This transformational scheme has several salient features, including promoting the educational status of girl students, empowering them economically and socially, creating a skilled women workforce, eliminating financial barriers to education, enhancing career opportunities, and preventing dropouts beyond higher secondary education.

To oversee and coordinate the implementation of the program, two committees have been formed at the state level. The State Level Steering Committee, under the leadership of the Chief Secretary, and the State Level Monitoring Committee, led by the Director of Social Welfare, have been established. At the district level, District Collectors will chair the District Level Monitoring Committees, which will convene regularly to evaluate progress and ensure the successful execution of the scheme. The Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Higher Education Assurance Scheme underscores the Tamil Nadu government's commitment to advancing gender equality in higher education and empowering women through educational opportunities.

Based on the latest data furnished by the Tamil Nadu Social Welfare Department as of March 31, 2023, the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Ninaivu Puthumai Penn Thittam (Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar

Higher Education Assurance Scheme) has had a positive impact on the education of girls attending government schools in Tamil Nadu. The scheme has supported a total of 2, 50,000 female students.

Table 1 Beneficiaries from Puthumai Penn Thittam

Sl. No.	Educational Level	Number of Beneficiaries
1	Undergraduate Degrees	1,50,000
2	Diploma Courses	50,000
3	ITI Courses	50,000

Each beneficiary girl student receives a monthly financial assistance of Rs. 1,000. This support is extended from the time of their admission to their higher education institution until they successfully complete their course. The scheme's impact is evident in the substantial increase in the enrollment of girls from government schools in higher education. In the academic year 2022-23, there was a remarkable 20% rise in the enrollment of girls from government schools in undergraduate degree programs compared to the previous year.

B. Free Travel Scheme for Women in Government Buses

The Tamil Nadu government has introduced numerous welfare schemes aimed at improving the well-being of its citizens. Among these initiatives is the Zero Ticket Bus Travel Scheme, which particularly targets women in the state. Launched in 2021, this scheme has a clear objective: to promote greater female workforce participation and reduce reliance on private transportation. Many working women, female students, and laborers face the financial burden of regular commuting expenses, making it challenging for them to move from one place to another conveniently. To alleviate this financial burden, the government has taken the innovative step of offering free travel in government-run buses. Under the Zero Ticket Bus Travel Scheme, women passengers can commute without any fare charges on government buses for journeys of up to 30 kilometers. To avail of this benefit, women beneficiaries need to carry a photographed identity card for verification purposes. Transgender individuals are also eligible for this free travel program, which is applicable to Tamil Nadu government-operated ordinary and city buses, as well as buses under the jurisdiction of the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation. The scheme's design ensures that eligible women can enjoy the convenience of cost-free bus travel directly without needing to apply elsewhere. This initiative not only empowers women by reducing their transportation expenses but also encourages their active participation in various sectors, fostering overall socio-economic development [2].

Based on official records provided by the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC), as of March 31, 2023, a grand total of 20 million women have availed the advantages of the Free Travel Scheme for Women on

government buses in Tamil Nadu.

C. Widow and Destitute Women Welfare

The Government of Tamil Nadu has established the Widow and Destitute Women Welfare Board, as per G.O.(Ms) No.56, SW & WE Dept dated: 02.09.2022. This board serves as a dedicated institution to tackle the myriad challenges encountered by vulnerable women, encompassing widows, abandoned women, orphaned women, and unmarried women. Its primary mission is to enhance the quality of life for these individuals by devising and implementing a range of initiatives. These initiatives encompass vital aspects such as education, healthcare, employment opportunities, the formation of specialized Self Help Groups, and the provision of skill training. The ultimate goal is to empower these women, enabling them to secure a safe and dignified existence within society. Through these comprehensive efforts, the Widow and Destitute Women Welfare Board aspire to foster positive changes in the lives of these women, promoting their socio-economic well-being and helping them lead fulfilling lives [3].

The Tamil Nadu government is resolute in its commitment to assisting widows and destitute women, substantially enhancing their quality of life through these schemes. It is presented in Table 2. Furthermore, the government offers additional benefits to this group, including free education for their children up to the 12th standard, access to free medical care at government hospitals, priority in housing schemes, and subsidies on loans for those aspiring to start their own businesses. The comprehensive support provided by the Tamil Nadu government underscores its dedication to improving the well-being of widows and destitute women across the state.

According to official data released by the Tamil Nadu Social Welfare Department, as of March 31, 2023, there are approximately one million widows and destitute women in Tamil Nadu who are in need of assistance. The Tamil Nadu government has implemented several schemes aimed at providing crucial support to this vulnerable demographic.

D. Working Women's Welfare Schemes

The Government of Tamil Nadu, in a dedicated effort to cater to the housing needs of working women who traverse various districts and states for employment, training, and official engagements, established the Tamil Nadu Working Women's Hostels Corporation Limited (TNWWHCL). This initiative, inaugurated under the leadership of the Chief Minister on 13.07.2023, endeavors to offer exceptional accommodation services that provide an entirely new and enriching living experience, all at cost-effective rates. TNWWHCL has strategically developed hostels across Tamil Nadu, situated in diverse locations, ensuring safe, affordable living spaces for working women, complete with contemporary amenities. The Government of Tamil Nadu has taken a unique step by creating a distinct entity, the "Tamil Nadu Working Women's Hostels Corporation Limited (TNWWHCL)," which was officially established under the Companies Act of 2013, dated 28.05.2019. This corporation, incorporated under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs on 6th February 2020, is driven by the vision of establishing a self-sustaining chain of high-quality hostels throughout Tamil Nadu, setting a precedent in the nation [4].

E. Self Help Groups

Around the globe, there exists a consensus that an effective approach to alleviating poverty and enhancing the overall quality of life within communities involves the social mobilization of the impoverished, particularly women, through self-help groups (SHGs). Since gaining independence, numerous innovative schemes have been launched in India to uplift its women. The Indian government has proactively undertaken initiatives to strengthen rural credit systems and development programs. It has adopted the strategy of Self Help Groups (SHGs) as a means to empower rural women living in poverty. Empowering women through SHGs not only benefits the individual women and the groups themselves but also extends to their families and the wider community through collective efforts in pursuit of development. This article critically examines the endeavors of Tamil Nadu in establishing SHGs as a symbol of women's empowerment. Mr. Periyasamy, in his address, highlighted that Union Ministers who recently assessed the functioning of fair price shops in the state commended the effectiveness of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and even presented certificates of appreciation. He further noted that, since the DMK government came into power, loans amounting to ₹13,047 crore incurred by SHGs and farmers have been forgiven, with Dindigul district alone witnessing the waiver of ₹900 crore in loans, encompassing SHG loans, jewelry loans, and agricultural loans. Remarkably, an additional ₹800 crore has been disbursed for the animal husbandry sector to date [5].

F. Monthly Financial Assistance Scheme

Launched in September 2023 by the Tamil Nadu government, the Monthly Financial Assistance Scheme has been instrumental in providing crucial support to women who are the heads of their households across the state. Under this initiative, these women receive a monthly financial aid of Rs. 1,000. As of March 31, 2023, an impressive 1.06 crore women in this category have benefited from the scheme, making a significant and positive difference in the lives of countless women throughout Tamil Nadu [6].

This program has achieved multiple positive outcomes, including poverty reduction among female heads of households, enhancements in the nutritional well-being of women and children, and advancements in the educational achievements of their children. Some key aspects of the scheme are its universal accessibility to all women in this position, the direct transfer of the monthly financial assistance into the beneficiary's bank account, and the absence of any income restrictions for participation. The Tamil Nadu government has allocated a substantial budget of Rs. 12,720 crore for the scheme in the financial year 2023-24. The Monthly Financial Assistance Scheme stands as a significant and successful endeavor by the Tamil Nadu government, serving as a catalyst for the betterment of women who lead their households and fostering positive change in their lives.

CONCLUSION

Under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, the Dravidian Model of Governance has ushered in a series of impactful women welfare schemes. These initiatives represent a deliberate and compassionate effort to cater to the requirements of the underprivileged, impoverished, and marginalized segments of society. The introduction of these welfare schemes by the Stalin government has yielded substantial and far-reaching benefits, transforming the lives of countless individuals throughout Tamil Nadu. These programs have played a pivotal role in alleviating poverty, enhancing educational and healthcare opportunities, and fostering empowerment among women and marginalized communities. As a result, they stand as a testament to the government's commitment to uplifting the less fortunate and ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for all citizens.

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