

# POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU-A STUDY

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**Abstract:** Women in India fought for equal rights along with men in all spheres of life, drew the attention under the impact of western education and developments took place during the early part of the 20th century. A powerful mood among the women emerged in the twentieth century to fight for their rightful place in political sphere with men. This approach took a firm shape in the form of feminist organizations and feminist movement with the aim of getting gender equality. The feminist movement actively participated in the national struggle for the freedom of nation. Mutually, the National movement helped women to fulfill their needs of equal rights along with men.

Indian women's organizations entered into politics with a view to getting voting rights and taking part in the decision making process. Under the leadership of Gandhi, National Movement attracted Indian women's organizations. As a result more and more women participated in the freedom struggle. They demanded for suffrage and presentation in the provincial legislature. The British Government accepted women enfranchisement in the elections held to the central and provincial legislative assemblies during 1920s and 1930s. Several strong and eminent women leaders joined the national movement and contributed equally with men for the cause of freedom struggle.

**Keywords:** equal rights, women enfranchisement, feminist movement.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The women's movement has a great impact in the Indian community. However, change is slow and painful, a large section of Indian women lives have improved. An important aim of the movement is to locate the feminist struggle in its various Indian cultural and historical settings. Indian women have their equality in the early nineteenth century. Then, the Indian constitution granted them equality and freedom and discrimination based on gender or religion, and guaranteed their freedom of speech in order to guarantee their welfare. Indian feminist movements are also have a great impact specifically, globalization on women in India. They argue that globalization has lead to economic challenges for women, specifically for working class and upper class women. Many companies in India began to employ educated women in their call centres.

These women have few effective labour rights, or rights to collective action. The movements also have achievements in different field including political level, social welfare and legal issue such as Reform Act of Child Marriage, movements against women's suffrage. The caste system is also limited women from getting opportunities, particularly in India. Recently, feminist movements struggle for justice and equality. Women in India always have had to balance between being a non-sexual equal to men. Some women have managed this balance act, which most women have been excluded from the political arena. The majority of the Indian women who have managed to negotiate their way, only been left with the political dealings. The movement has gone through different stages, but has often returned to similar arguments for women's rights, women's role in the political life that has been regarded belonging to the male sphere. The women's movement is still divided into the lines of class and religion, as well as economic status and education.

## **FEMALE POPULATION AND SEX RATION IN TAMIL NADU**

Population growth is one of the major issues in a developing country in the world. India is not exempted and that too Tamil Nadu also. Total population data in Tamil Nadu and in India for the years 1901 to 2011 are presented in the The population in Tamil Nadu gradually increased from 1901 to 1971 and rapidly increased from 1971 to 2011. Similar trend was in the population of India also. The population has increased about 4 fold in Tamil Nadu and 5 fold in India for the past 12 decades from 2011 to 1901. Whereas, population in Tamil Nadu has increased about 2 fold and 12 fold respectively in the same period. The abnormal increase of urban population in Tamil Nadu is a serious matter which affects the development of Tamil Nadu. C.Jinarajadasa, Short Biography of Annie Besant, Madras, Adyar, Theosophical Publishing House, 1995.

## **POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

Political equality to all in spite of birth, sex and colour, is one of the basic rights of democracy. The political equality includes equal rights to franchise and the right to access the institutionalized centres of power. Thus, political participation of women means not only using the right to vote but also power sharing, co-decision making and co-policy making at all levels. The active participation of women in political sphere is integral to empowerment of women and helps to build a gender-equal society as well as to speed up the process of national development. Women's political empowerment is premised on three fundamental and non-negotiable principles. They are (i) the equality of women and men, (ii) women's right to the full development of their potentials, and (iii) women's right to self-representation and self-determination.

During Sangam period, women were treated well in the society. The status of women under the Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas was high and educated them differently from men. Women's political empowerment was activated by the national movement during the modern period. The National movement motivated women to develop political consciousness. The events in different parts of the world such as French Revolution, the Russo-Japanese War, and the socialist revolution influenced anticolonial struggles in Tamil Nadu. Educated women were drawn into the vortex of national struggle. They strongly supported swadeshi pledge by selling Khaddar.

Participation in the political process provides an opportunity to the women to make the political system to reflect their aspirations and ambitions and at the same time lends legitimacy to the system which is the hallmark of democracy. The women participation in the national movement gained momentum when Gandhi entered into the politics. Gandhi encouraged women to take part in the national, political and social movements of the nation. Gandhi associated himself with women's cause and sought their help when necessary.

## **GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT**

WIA started in Madras in 1917 with main aim of uplift of women sent a deputation of Indian Women led by Sarojini Naidu to the British Parliament. Indian women presented a demand for the enfranchisement of women on the basis of equality with men. Vaanar Sena was an organization comprising the boys and girls as members. This was organized by the women in Madras Presidency with a view to inculcating the patriotism in the young minds. The right of women for vote as demanded by the Indian women deputation under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu was supported the Muslim League and Indian National Congress in their sessions met in September and December 1918 respectively. The South Borough Committee was appointed by the British Government to examine the issue of franchise in the same year. This committee recommended to extend the franchise to Indian women as well as to men.

According to the Government of India Act 1919, the women got voting rights and they had no right to contest in the election. The reform Act was introduced in 1921. According to this act, the women who had a property and education were permitted for vote. Gandhi had extended his support to the enfranchisement of women. In 1926 election, only 32% of the total population had voting right. The women voters were only 8.46% of 32%. It shows the education and less awareness of the women in the society. The British Government had appointed Simon Commission in 1927 to review the working of Act of 1919.

The Commission recommended that the wives of men who possessed property and over 21 years of age with educational qualification should be registered as voters. A resolution was passed as "Women's Day" in Madras on 25th December 1927. Demands were raised to reserve a proportionate number of nominated seats for women in the provincial governments, municipal councils and local boards. In 1929, all the provincial legislatures had given the women the right to vote on the terms as men. In 1930, women's organization demanded immediate acceptance of adult franchise without

sex discrimination. It was rejected by the British government. The Indian National Congress met at Karachi in 1931 accepted the demand of adult franchise and committed itself to women's political equality, regardless of their status and qualification.

A joint committee mention of comprising the members of AIW, WIA and NCWA was conducted under the presidentship of Sarojini Naidu in Bombay in 1931. In this meeting it was discussed about equal rights and adult suffrage and demanded the same. AIWC met in 1932 at Madras to discuss the franchise rights of women and their representation in the future constitution. A public meeting was held on 18th February 1933 at the Servants of India Society, Royapettah, Madras under the presidentship of Ramaswami Sivan. The meeting was held in order to consider the recommendations of the Roundtable Conferences with regard to the franchise rights of women. This public meeting pressed the British Government to give equal opportunities for women in society and politics as given to men.

Government of India Act 1935 had provided women's franchise and reservation. According to this Act, women of 21 years of age and over will be eligible to vote. Further, seats would be reserved for women in both federal and provincial legislatures on communal basis. According to this provision an election took place in 1937 in 11 provinces including Madras provinces. The total population was 46,740,107 and male and female populations were 23,082,000 and 23,652,108 respectively. The number of women voters were 1,152,300 and the women actually voted were 161,322 and it was only 14%.

### **POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMENS**

The first general election was held in 1937 for Government of India. Nine women members were elected Madras Presidency. Madras legislative Assembly and adorned C. Rukmani as the Deputy Speaker. The next election took place in 1946 and the women actually voted was only 20.57%. After independence, the Constitution of India provides equality of status and opportunity, justice, social, economic, political and dignity of the individual were given equally to men and women. Gandhiji had visualized transformation of women's roles and responsibilities in the task of national reconstruction. Political equality is granted to women under the Indian Constitution and is guaranteed through the instrument of adult franchise and article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex. The political parties were generally been indifferent towards women, treating more as appendages to men.

### **WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Women political participation should be indicated by the strength of women candidates in the State Legislative Assembly. The first general election in India was held in between October 1951 and March 1952 for Parliamentary seats. In this election, more than 250 million women were disqualified due to the wrong entry of their names in the electoral list. The first General elections on the basis of adult suffrage were held in 1952. According to the Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies (Madras) October 1951, made by the President under sections 6 and 9 of the Representation of people Act, 1950, the Madras Legislative Assembly consisted of 375 seats to be filled by election. In all, 2,507 persons filed their nominations out of which 2,472 were men and 35 women. Of these nominations, 78 men and 1 woman were rejected. Out of the 1,677 nominated candidates, 1,302 were unsuccessful. The polling percentage was 54.75. According to the new Delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies Order, 1956, made by the Delimitation Commission, India, under the provisions of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, there were 205 seats to the Madras Legislative Assembly.

The second Legislative Assembly election to the Madras State (presently Tamil Nadu) of the women members were elected in the fifth State Legislative Assembly election held on March 1971. In this election the women voters were 69.66%. It was less than the previous election. This may be due to the ignorance of rural women. Two women candidates were elected in the sixth Legislative Assembly election in June 1977. The polling percentage of women was reduced to 59.08%. About eighty percentage of rural families was affected badly by the price rise, hunger and poverty. Because of these factors, the women lost their faith in politics. There were 5 (2.14%) women members in the seventh Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu state. This election was held on 28 May 1980 female voters had gone up to 61.61%.

The next eighth General election of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly was held in 1984. The female polling was increased to 72.49% and only 8 female members were elected. The ninth General election to Tamil Nadu State Assembly was held in Nadu) was held on 31st March 1957. This was the first election held after the linguistic reorganization of Madras State in 1956. The strength of the Madras Legislative Assembly was 205 as per the State Reorganization Act, 1956. The 1957 elections were conducted for these 205 seats. Only 12 women were (5.85%) elected and 193 members were men. The polling percentage was 46.56.

The third Legislative Assembly election to the Madras State (presently Tamil Nadu) was held on 21st Century 1962. The strength was increased to 206 due to the abolition of two member constituencies as per 1961 Act. In this election, total polling was 70.65% including 74.62% male and 66.45% female voters. However, only 4.85% of women i.e. 10 members were in this assembly. The fourth Legislative Assembly election of Madras State was held on 21st February 1967. The polling was higher than the previous election i.e. 76.57%. The regional party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam came to power. One of the reasons for this change was that rural women developed more interest in politics than the educated urban women. It is indicated in the polling percentage of women increased to 73.99%. But the number of women candidates elected was only 1 (1.30%) only. None of the women members were elected in the fifth State Legislative Assembly election held on March 1971. In this election the women voters was 69.66%. It was less than the previous election. This may be due to the ignorance of rural women.

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The female polling was 69.02%. The women members were slightly increased to 4.30% (10 members). The tenth General election of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly 1991 was a remarkable one in the history of the State Assembly elections. There were 31 women members (13.20%) were elected to the State Assembly. The polling percentage of female voters was 61.69%. The eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth General elections of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly were held in 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011 respectively. The women members elected were 10, 26, 22 and 17 respectively for the above said elections.

#### **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN TAMIL NADU**

The participation of women in politics in Tamil Nadu on the basis of their participation in the general elections as voters, representatives in the State Legislative Assembly and local bodies. Women voters cast their votes were less than the one third of the total votes. However, there was gradual increase in the turnout of women voters in the subsequent General Elections held after 1967. In general, the women voters were nearly or more than 50% of the total votes in all the elections held up to 2011. There was a decline about 10% in the number of women voters in 1991 election compared to the other elections.

The position relating to the extent of participation of women legislations in the legislative assembly in Tamil Nadu state for the past 14 general elections held from 1952 to 2011 was much to be desired. The overall percentage of women members participation in the Tamil Nadu State Legislative Assembly did not exceed single digit for the total of 234 members except in 1991 and 2001. In these two elections the percentage of women members was 13.20 and 11.10 respectively. This indicates that women continued to be marginalized in the legislative assembly, though the women constitute about half of the total population of Tamil Nadu. Hence, their share in the highest policy making body of state legislative Assembly in Tamil Nadu is found to be very negligible.

#### **EDUCATION IN BRITISH PERIOD**

The Government, to accelerate the progress of women's education in addition to the establishment of model primary schools for girls at important centres, initiated with the appointment of additional female staff and creation of inspecting agency. In 1902-03 there were 478 primary schools exclusively meant for them with strength of 3975. At the secondary stage also the growth was impressive. The number increased from 2,800 in 1902-03 to 3,348 in 1911-12. During 1911-12 there were 19 Women's Colleges. But only three women students took the M.A., degree of the Madras University in 1912.

Madras University is one of the earliest institutions to provide special courses suited to women and women's education has flourished in this University to a much extent. The resolution of government of India (1913) referred to the education of women by suggesting a special curriculum of practical utility and an increase in the number of women teachers and inspectors. Compulsory Education Act was passed in 1919 which included both boys and girls within its jurisdiction. But this Act was

not applicable for rural areas. It was meant for municipal limits. In Madras, 1920 the Compulsory Education Act was passed for boys and girls. This Act helped the development of primary education greater extent than in any part of the country. Degree courses like B.Sc., M.Sc in Home Science were offered in this University.

### THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The freedom movement inspired many women in Tamil Nadu and brought them to participate in it. Salt Satyagraha was one of the National movements started for India's freedom. Gandhiji made an appeal to Indian women to come out from their home and advised them to participate in the political movement to end the British rule in India. After this appeal, women enrolled themselves in large numbers as volunteers for Salt Satyagraha. Prominent women leaders led the Satyagraha in their respective places and provinces. The women of south India also took part in the movement. In Tamil Nadu Vadaraniyam was selected for Salt satyagra and satyagraha was carried out under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari and accompanied by Rukmini Lakshmi pathy who was the vice-president of Madras provincial congress committee. Both of them were arrested. Durgabai Ammal led the Satyagraha on behalf of Madras province. She gave her jewels to Satyagraha fund. So mother women such as Smt. Pragasa, Unnava Lakshmi bayamma, Lakshmi Narasamma, Vedantam Kamadevi and several others were arrested. Durgabai Ammal and Varaga Ammal along with women volunteers assembled in the beach and produced contraband salt.

They were punished and attacked by police and they were injured. Durgabai Ammal criticized the police atrocities before the crowds. She was arrested. Saraswathi Pandurangan was the first woman participant in the Salt Satyagraha movement in Madras. Angachi Ammal and Saraswati Ammal along with about 50 volunteers met in the 'Santhome Beach' to propaganda about the Satyagraha. As a result they were convicted. Similarly, in Coimbatore, North and South Arcot Districts many women were participated in Satyagraha. Among them, Savithri Ammal of Coimbatore, Radha of North Arcot and Sakunthala Bai of South Arcot were notable women. Seetha of Nilgiris, Annubai Ammal from Thanjavur, Kunjammal of Ramanathapuram district and Padmavathy Asher of Tirupur were the permanent participated in the Salt Satyagraha. In Salem district R.C. Caveri, Alamelu Ammal, and Angachiammal participated in the salt Satyagraha and they were arrested and jailed.

### 2. CONCLUSION

Women in India fought for equal rights along with men in all spheres of life, drew the attention under the impact of western education and developments took place during the early part of the 20th century. A powerful mood among the women emerged in the twentieth century to fight for their rightful place in political sphere with men. This approach took a firm shape in the form of feminist organizations and feminist movement with the aim of getting gender equality. The feminist movement actively participated in the national struggle for the freedom of nation. Mutually, the National movement helped women to fulfill their needs of equal rights along with men.

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