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பாண்டியன் மகளிர் ஆய்வு இதழ்

மதிப்பாய்வு செய்யப்படும் இதழ்

Volume 6, Issue 1, May 2026

தொகுதி 6, இதழ் 1, மே 2026



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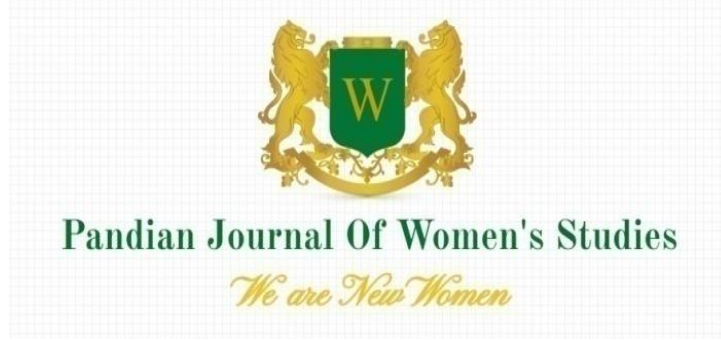
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About the Journal and Scope

Pandian Journal of Women's Studies (PJWS) E-ISSN: 2583-715X is an open-access journal from the patronization of Pandian Educational Trust, Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India. It is published twice (May and November) in a year by the Trust. As a research journal, PJWS publishes quality based research articles from the literature, non-fictional works, empirical study reports, case studies, short communications and other related fields to supplement the educational gap of the academic professionals in the discipline of Women's writing and Gender studies. PJWS follows a double-blind peer-review model to keep unbiased results in its evaluation to all received manuscripts. Its aim is to propagate academic merit and integrity and to hover as one of the best Women studies journals in the arena of Women studies. PJWS is a pioneer Gold Open Access Journal. From its inception, it contributes to make the academic content freely available via the Trust site and other scholarly harvesting databases. The journal follows The Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) <https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/> to ensure free availability of articles in public internet, permitting all to search, read, download, copy, distribute, print, link the full texts of articles (PDF & other formats), indexing, data to other software, use them for lawful purposes, without financial and legal or technical barriers with proper attribution to the author. Now, the journal is published in electronic format and preserved in the trust website with permanent preservation facility and public access.

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Pandian Journal of Women's Studies is a Peer Reviewed Journal which is committed to academic research, welcomes academicians, scholars and students all over the world who to advance their status of academic career and society by their scholarly ideas in the field of Women Studies. Research is to establish, substantiate facts, restate previous works and to resolve issues. An active venture to endow cogent approach to these types for educational reformations through academic research has become the central intent of the journal to bring down scholarly articles to the academic world. I am happy to bring Volume 6, Issue 1, May 2026 to the academic community.

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The Social Status of Dancing Girls in the Novel *Manthahasini*

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Abstract

Araathu's novel 'Mandahasini' is a postmodern feminist work structured around the lives of three dancers—Mandahasini, Sirisha, and Honika—who lived across different geographical and temporal spaces from historical times to the modern era. This article describes the oppressions, sexual exploitation, internal struggles, and their rebellious voice against them faced by these women as dancers in a male-centered social system. This perspective analyzes how the elements of traditional historical novels are deconstructed and satirized in the novel, and how the Shiva-Parvati mythology is linked with contemporary women's suffering. Finally, this article defines the social existence of women as a whole, which languish at the intermediate point between Sirisha's world of poverty and oppression and Honika's world of absolute freedom.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Feminism, Dancing Girls, Devadasi, Restraint, Social Space.

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மந்தஹாசினி நாவலில் நடன மங்கையரின் சமூக இடம்

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ஆய்வுச்சுருக்கம்

அராத்துவின் 'மந்தஹாசினி' நாவல், வரலாற்றுக் காலம் தொடங்கி நவீனக் காலம் வரை வெவ்வேறு புவியியல் மற்றும் காலப் பரப்புகளில் வாழ்ந்த மந்தஹாசினி, சிரிஷா, ஹோனிகா ஆகிய மூன்று நடன மங்கையரின் வாழ்வியலை மையமாகக் கொண்டு கட்டமைக்கப்பட்ட ஒரு பின்நவீனத்துவப் பெண்ணியப் படைப்பாகும். இக்கட்டுரை, ஆண் மையச் சமூக அமைப்பில் நடனக் கலைஞர்களான இப்பெண்கள் எதிர்கொள்ளும் ஒடுக்குமுறைகள், பாலியல் சுரண்டல்கள், அவர்களின் அகப் போராட்டங்கள் மற்றும் அதற்கு எதிரான அவர்களின் கலகக் குரல் ஆகியவற்றை விவரிக்கிறது. நாவலில் மரபார்ந்த வரலாற்று நாவல்களின் கூறுகள் எவ்வாறு கட்டுடைக்கப்பட்டு நையாண்டி செய்யப்படுகின்றன என்பதையும், சிவன்-பார்வதி புராணக்கதை எவ்வாறு சமகாலப் பெண் துயரத்தோடு இணைக்கப்படுகிறது என்பதையும் இவ்வாய்வு பகுப்பாய்வு செய்கிறது. வறுமையும் ஒடுக்குமுறையும் கொண்ட சிரிஷாவின் உலகிற்கும், சகல சுதந்திரமும் கொண்ட ஹோனிகாவின் உலகிற்கும் இடைப்பட்ட புள்ளியில் தவிக்கும் ஒட்டுமொத்தப் பெண்களின் சமூக இருப்பை இக்கட்டுரை வரையறுக்கிறது.

குறிப்புச்சொற்கள்: பின்நவீனத்துவம், பெண்ணியம், நடனமங்கையர், தேவதாசி, கட்டுடைப்பு, சமூக இடம்.

முன்னுரை

தமிழ் இலக்கியச் சூழலில் தனித்துவமான பகடி , நையாண்டி மற்றும் பெண்ணிய பாணியால் அறியப்படும் அராத்துவின் 'மந்தஹாசினி' நாவல், அவரது முந்தைய படைப்புகளிலிருந்து முற்றிலும் மாறுபட்ட ஒரு புதிய கதைப்பின்னலைக் கொண்டது. சுமார் 150 பக்கங்களில் தமிழகம், கோவா, இந்தியா, அமெரிக்கா, ஆப்பிரிக்கா எனப் பரந்து விரிந்த புவியியல் தளங்களில் இக்கதை நிகழ்கிறது. மரபார்ந்த வரலாற்று நாவலின் வடிவத்தைக் கையாள்வது போலத் தொடங்கி, அதன் புனைவு நுட்பங்களை நையாண்டி செய்யும் பின்நவீனத்துவ பாணியை ஆசிரியர் இதில் கையாண்டுள்ளார். காலங்காலமாகப் போற்றப்படும் கலைகளின் பின்னணியில் இருக்கும் பெண் கலைஞர்களின் உண்மை நிலை மற்றும் சமூகம் அவர்களை எவ்வாறு நோக்குகிறது என்பதை புதினம் பதிவு செய்கிறது. காலங்கள் மாறினாலும் பெண்களின் மீதான ஒடுக்குமுறையின் வடிவம் மாறவில்லை என்பதை நாவலின் முதன்மைக் கதாபாத்திரங்களான மந்தஹாசினி, சிரிஷா, ஹோனிகா ஆகிய மூவரின் வழியே நாவல் எழுப்புகிறது. இவர்களின் சமூக இடத்தையும், அவர்களின் வழியே வெளிப்படும் பெண்ணிய உளவியலையும் ஆராய்வதே இக்கட்டுரையின் நோக்கமாகும்.

நாவலின் கட்டமைப்பு மற்றும் புராணப் பின்னணி

மந்தஹாசினி நாவல் ஒரே நேர்க்கோட்டிலான கதைசொல்லல் முறையைக் கொண்டிருக்கவில்லை. மூன்று வெவ்வேறு காலகட்டங்களை இணைக்கும் புள்ளியாக

'நடனம்' மற்றும் 'பெண்ணின் துயரம்' அமைகிறது. கதையின் மையக்கருத்திற்கு மேலும் வலுசேர்க்கும் பொருட்டு, சிவன் - பார்வதி புராணக்கதை இடம்பெற்றுள்ளது.

அராத்துவின் அடையாளமான மரபுகளை உடைக்கும் நகைச்சுவையும் பகடியும் நாவல் முழுவதும் காணப்படுகிறது .

படைப்பு என்பது, தொடர்ச்சியான, நேர்கோடான, ஒன்றுக்கொன்று தொடர்புடைய நிகழ்ச்சிகளின் தொடர்ச்சியல்ல. அது தாறுமாறானதும், திட்டவட்டமற்றதுமான நிகழ்ச்சிகளின் தொகுப்பு ஆகும். கலை, இலக்கிய கோட்பாடுகளினை கேள்விக்குள்ளாக்கி அவற்றின் போதாமையை வெளிக்காட்டி, படைப்புக்களின் மாற்று சிந்தனையை வாசகர்களிடமே விட்டுவிடுகிறது. (நேசன், புலேந்திரன், பக். 3)

பிரெஞ்சு இலக்கியக் கோட்பாட்டாளர் ரோலண்ட் பார்த் (Roland Barthes) முன்வைக்கும் பின்நவீனத்துவக் கருத்துகளின் பின்னணியில், எழுத்தாளர் அராத்து அவர்களின் மந்தஹாசினி புதினத்தை ஒரு புதுமையான பின்நவீனத்துவப் பெண்ணியப் படைப்பாக உருவாக்கியிருக்கிறார்.

'செம்புலப் பெயல் நீரார்' சங்கப் பாடலுக்கு அளிக்கப்படும் நையாண்டி விளக்கம், 'துணுக்குறுதல், 'கச்சைப் புகினும் கள்ளு நன்று', மற்றும் 'சிவன் கழுத்தில் இருந்த பாம்புக்கு ஷிப்ட் முறையில் வேலை' போன்ற பிரயோகங்கள், மரபார்ந்த புனிதங்களை உடைத்து, தீவிரமான பொருண்மையைக் வாசகனுக்குச் சுவாரசியமாகக் கடத்தப் பயன்படும் பின்நவீனத்துவ உத்திகளாக மாறுகின்றன.

முன்னோடிப் பிரதிகளையும், தீவிரமான வரலாற்றுப் வடிவங்களையும் நகல் செய்வதும், அவற்றைப் பகடி அல்லது நையாண்டிக்கு உள்ளாக்குவதும் பின்நவீனத்துவத்தின் முதன்மையான வடிவ உத்திகளாகும். தீவிரமான ஒரு விஷயத்தை விளையாட்டுத் தன்மாவும், நகைச்சுவை உணர்வோடும் அணுகுவதன் மூலம், அதுவரை கட்டமைக்கப்பட்டிருந்த 'புனிதத் தன்மையை' அது வாசகனின் முன்னிலையில் சிதைத்து விடுகிறது. (பின்நவீனத்துவம் என்றால் என்ன?, பக்.132)

மரபார்ந்த இலக்கிய உலகம் எப்போதுமே உயர்ந்தவை மற்றும் தாழ்ந்தவை அல்லது சாமானியமானவை என்று ஒரு பெரும் சுவரை எழுப்பி வைத்திருக்கிறது. சங்க இலக்கியமான 'செம்புலப் பெயல் நீரார்' பாடலோ அல்லது ஆன்மீகப் படிமங்களோ 'உயர் கலை'யின் உச்சமாகக் கருதப்படுபவை. 'சிவன் கழுத்து பாம்புக்கு ஷிப்ட் முறை' போன்ற அன்றாட, மிகச் சாதாரணமான பிரயோகங்களை உள்ளே கொண்டுவரும்போது, அந்த உயர்-தாழ் வகைப்பாடு சிதறடிக்கப்படுகிறது

மூன்று காலகட்ட நடன மங்கையரின் சமூக இடம்

1) மந்தஹாசினி

மந்தகாசினி, பேரரசின் அரசவை நடன நங்கையாகவும், நாட்டியக் கலையின் உன்னதக் கூறுகளைக் கற்றுத் தேர்ந்த பேரறிஞராகவும் திகழ்ந்தபோதிலும், அவளது கலை ஆளுமை அதிகாரத்தின் நிழலிலேயே முடங்கிக் கிடந்தது. மன்னரின் கட்டளைகளுக்குக் கீழ்ப்படிந்து, தன் விருப்பங்களுக்கு மாறாகத் தன்னை ஒடுக்கிக்கொள்ள வேண்டிய அவலச் சூழலே அவளுக்கு வாய்த்திருந்தது. அவளது ஒப்பற்ற கலை மீதும், அவளது உடல் மீதும் ஆளும் வர்க்கத்தின் அதிகாரம் வலுக்கட்டாயமாகச் செலுத்தப்பட்டதை இந்நாவலின் வழி நாம் அறிய முடிகிறது.

தமிழகக் கோயில்களிலும் அரசவைகளிலும் பல்லவர் மற்றும் சோழர் காலத்தில் ஆடல் மகளிர் நியமிக்கப்பட்டனர். அவர்கள் கலைகளில் சிறந்தோங்கி இருந்தாலும், சமூக அடுக்கில் அவர்களுக்கான இடம் எப்போதும் ஆதிக்க வர்க்க ஆண்களின் விருப்பங்களைச் சார்ந்தே இருந்தது. வரலாற்றுக் காவியங்கள் இவர்களைப் போகப் பொருளாக மட்டுமே சித்தரிப்பதில் ஆர்வம் காட்டினவே தவிர, அவர்களின் தனிப்பட்ட

உரிமைகளுக்கோ துயரங்களுக்கோ முக்கியத்துவம் தரவில்லை. (இராசமாணிக்கனார் ப. 245)

அரசவை நடன மங்கை என்ற ஒரே காரணத்திற்காகவே, மந்தகாசினி பேரரசரின் போகப் பொருளாக, அவளது சம்மதமின்றி இழுத்துச் செல்லப்பட்டதும் இங்கு உற்று நோக்கத்தக்கது. வரலாற்று நெடுகிலும், கலை வளர்த்த நடன மங்கையர்கள் ஆட்சியாளர்களின் ஆதிக்கத்திற்குப் பலியாகி வந்ததும், 'தேவதாசிகள்' என்ற பெயரால் ஆளும் வர்க்கத்தினரால் தொடர்ந்து சுரண்டப்பட்டு வந்ததும் கசப்பான உண்மையாகும். சமூகத்தில் அவர்களுக்கான மதிப்பிற்குரிய இடமும், அரிய கலையும் எவ்வாறு திட்டமிட்டுச் சிதைக்கப்பட்டன என்பதையே 'மந்தகாசினி' என்னும் கதாபாத்திரம் நமக்கு உணர்த்துகிறது.

இன்று உலகளவில் பிரசித்திப்பெற்றிருக்கும் பரதநாட்டியமும், கர்நாடகச் சங்கீதமும் தேவதாசிகள் அளித்த பெருங்கொடை என்றால் மிகையாகாது. சமூகத்தில் மன்னர்களால் உயர்ந்தநிலை கோபுரவிளக்குகளாக இருந்த தேவதாசியார்கள் இடைப்பட்ட தமிழக வரலாற்றில் மதிப்புமிழந்து தாழ்ந்த போதிலும் தங்கள் கலைகளைப் போற்றி வளர்த்தனர். "சதிராட்டம்" என்றே பரதநாட்டியம் அக்காலத்தில் அழைக்கப்பட்டிருக்கிறது. "தேவதாசியார்கச்சேரி" என்பது "தேவடியார்கச்சேரி" என்றும் மருவிவிட்டது. (இராமதாஸ், பிரகாஷ்தாஸ். கு., மற்றும் இரா. சீதாலட்சுமி, பக். 65)

தமிழ்ச் சூழலில் பொதுவெளி சார்ந்த கலை நிகழ்த்துகைகளில் (நடனம், இசை) தேவதாசி மரபைச் சேர்ந்த பெண்களின் பங்களிப்பு வரலாற்று ரீதியாக முதன்மையானதாக இருந்துள்ளது. காலப்போக்கில் இம்முறை ஒழிக்கப்பட்ட போதிலும், கலைகளில் ஈடுபடும் பெண்களை மதிப்பிடும் சமூகத்தின் தார்மீகக் அளவுகோல்களில் எவ்வித முற்போக்கான மாற்றமும் நிகழவில்லை என்பதையே சமகாலப் போக்குகள் உணர்த்துகின்றன. கடந்த காலங்களில் தேவதாசி குலப் பெண்கள் அனைவரும் பாலியல் ரீதியாக எளிய நுகர்வுக்குரியவர்கள் என்பதாகக் கட்டமைக்கப்பட்ட பொதுப்புத்தி முற்றிலும் உண்மைக்குப் புறம்பானதாகும். இருப்பினும், அதே பிற்போக்கான பார்வையின் நீட்சியாகவே இன்றைய சமூக மனநிலையும் இயங்குகிறது. தற்காலத்தில் சமூகத்தின் பல்வேறு படிநிலைகளிலிருந்து தங்களின் சுய விருப்பத்தின் அடிப்படையில் கலை வெளிப்பாட்டிற்காகப் பொதுவெளிக்கு வரும் சாதாரணப் பெண்களையும், இச்சமூகம் அதே 'தேவதாசி' என்ற ஒற்றை அடையாளத்திற்குள் சுருக்கியே மதிப்பிடுகிறது. இத்தகைய ஒடுக்குமுறைப் பார்வையின் விளைவாகவே, கலைத்துறை சார்ந்த பெண்கள் மீது சமூகம் ஓர் ஆதிக்க மனப்பான்மையுடன் அத்துமீறல்களை நிகழ்த்துவதோடு, அவர்களின் தனிமனித எல்லைகளைக் கடந்து கூடுதல் உரிமைகளைத் தன்வசப்படுத்திக் கொள்ள முயல்கிறது. இதனை வரலாற்று ரீதியாக ஆராயும் நா. வானமாமலை,

மன்னராட்சியின் கீழ் கலைகள் போற்றப்பட்டதாகக் கூறப்படும் புனைவுகளுக்குப் பின்னால் பாலியல் நுகர்வும் உடலதிகாரமும் நிலைநிறுத்தப்பட்ட பெரும் சுரண்டல் மறைந்துள்ளது. (தமிழர் பண்பாடும் தத்துவமும், பக். 114)

என்கிறார். அரசவை நடன மங்கையர் அல்லது குறிப்பிட்ட சமூகப் பெண்கள் மிக உன்னதமான கலைஞர்களாகக் சித்தரிக்கப்பட்டாலும், அவர்களின் உடல் மீதான அதிகாரம் எப்போதும் ஆதிக்க வர்க்கத்திடமே இருந்துள்ளது.

வரலாற்றுக் காலத்தில் வாழும் மந்தஹாசினி, பேரரசர்கள் மற்றும் அதிகார வர்க்கத்துடன் பழகும் வாய்ப்பைப் பெற்றவள். எனினும், அவளது பார்வை ஆண்களின் உலகை மிகத் துல்லியமாக எடைபோடுகிறது. அமைச்சர்கள், போர்வீரர்கள், வியாபாரிகள், புலவர்கள், செல்வந்தர்கள் எனச் சமூகத்தின் உயர் அடுக்கில் இருக்கும் அனைத்து ஆண்களின் போதாமைகளையும், வக்கிரங்களையும் அவள் பின்வருமாறு தோலுரிக்கிறாள்:

அமைச்சர் அதிகாரி வட்டத்தில் கொஞ்சம் புத்தி இருக்கிறது, ஆனால் உடற்பேணுதல் இல்லை. சினையாடு போல இருக்கிறார்கள்... போர்வீரர்கள்... மண்டையில் மருந்துக்குக் கூட அறிவோ விவேகமோ இல்லை... புலவர்களில் யாரேனும் தேறுவார்கள் என்று பார்த்தால், அவர்களிடம் ஆளுமை இல்லை, ஆண்மை இல்லை, வறுமை அவர்களைக் கூனி குறுக வைக்கிறது... பெரும் செல்வந்தர்களுக்கு மது மாது மாமிசம் இதைத்தவிர வேறொன்றும் தெரியாது. (மந்தஹாசினி, பக். 23)

மந்தஹாசினியின் இந்த உரையாடல், ஒரு சாதாரண நடனப் பெண்ணின் பேச்சாக இல்லாமல், எல்லா காலச் சூழல்களுக்கும் பொருந்தக்கூடிய ஆதிக்க ஆண்மைக்கு எதிரான கூர்மையான பெண்ணிய உளவியல் விமர்சனமாக அமைகிறது. அமைச்சர்கள், போர்வீரர்கள் எனச் சமூகத்தின் உயர் அடுக்கில் இருக்கும் அனைத்து ஆண்களின் போதாமைகளையும் அவள் தோலுரிக்கிறாள்.

2) சிரிஷா

சிரிஷா, சமகால அடித்தட்டுக் குடும்பப் பின்னணியிலிருந்து நடனக் கலைஞர் ஆக வேண்டும் என்ற கனவோடு வரும் பெண். கலை உலகிலும் அதிகார மையங்களிலும் பெண்கள் எதிர்கொள்ளும் பாலியல் சுரண்டலின் குறியீடாக அவள் திகழ்கிறாள். அரசியல்வாதி ஒருவன் அவளது ஆடைகளைப் பறித்துக்கொண்டு இணங்க வைக்கும் உச்சக்கட்ட ஒடுக்குமுறைச் சூழலில், சிரிஷா காட்டும் எதிர்வினை மிக முக்கியமானது.

அவளை அறையில் பூட்டிவிட்டு, ஆடையின்றி வீதியில் நடந்து வரும் காட்சி மிகைப்புணைவாகத் தோன்றினாலும், படைப்பாளர் நவீன இலக்கியத்தில் பெண் உடலை ஒரு நுகர்வுப் பொருளாகப் பார்க்காமல், கலகத்தின் அடையாளமாக மாற்றிய தருணம் இது.

ஆண் மையச் சமூகம் பெண்ணின் உடலை எப்போதும் ஒரு நுகர்வுப் பொருளாகவோ பார்க்கப் பழகியிருக்கிறது. ஆனால், அதே உடலை ஒரு பெண் தன் மீதான ஒடுக்குமுறைக்கு எதிரான கலகக் குறியீடாக மாற்றும்போது அது அவளை ஒடுக்க நினைத்த ஆதிக்க ஆண்மையின் முகமூடியைக் கிழித்தெறியும் ஒரு பெரும் அரசியல் ஆயுதம். (பெண்ணியமும் உடலரசியலும், ப. 45)

இவ்வரசியலைத் தமிழ் பெண்ணியச் சூழலில் எழுத்தாளரும் சிந்தனையாளருமான ப. சிவகாமி அவர்கள் துல்லியமாக வரையறுத்துள்ளார். ஆண்மையச் சமூகம் காலம் காலமாகப் பெண்ணின் உடலுக்கு 'மானம்', 'கற்பு', 'வெட்கம்' போன்ற போலிப் புனிதங்களை ஏற்றி வைத்து, அதையே அவளை ஒடுக்குவதற்கான கருவியாகவும் பயன்படுத்தி வருகிறது. ஆடைகளைப் பறிப்பதன் மூலம் ஒரு பெண்ணின் 'மானத்தைப்' பறித்துவிட்டதாக ஆண் நினைக்கும் அந்த உச்சக்கட்ட வன்முறையல், சிரிஷா அதை அப்படியே தலைகீழாகத் திருப்புகிறாள். இங்கு நிர்வாணம் என்பது அவமானமல்ல; தன்னை ஒடுக்க நினைத்த அதிகாரத்தின் முகத்தில் அறையும் ஒரு கலக ஆயுதமாக கருத வேண்டும்.

3) ஹோனிகா

சிரிஷாவுக்கு முற்றிலும் நேர்மாறானவள் ஹோனிகா. சகல வசதிகளும், உலகளாவிய அங்கீகாரமும், எல்லையற்ற சுதந்திரமும் பெற்ற சர்வதேசக் கலைஞர். ஆனால், அத்தனை வாய்ப்புகளும் இருந்தும் அவள் காட்டும் 'மனத்தெளிவின்மை' மற்றும் எதிர்பாராத திருப்பம் ஒரு முக்கியமான சமூக உண்மையைப் பேசுகிறது.

உலகமயமாக்கலும் நவீனச் சூழலும் பெண்களுக்கு எல்லையற்ற சுதந்திரத்தையும் பொருளாதாரத் தற்சார்பையும் வழங்கியிருந்தாலும், பல தலைமுறைகளாகத் தொடரும் சமூகக் கட்டுப்பாடுகளின் உளவியல் எச்சங்கள் நவீனப் பெண்களின் அகவெளியில் கடுமையான தடுமாற்றங்களையும் அடையாளச் சிக்கல்களையும் தொடர்ந்து ஏற்படுத்தி வருகின்றன. (பால்சிங், ரா. பக். 15)

பல நூற்றாண்டுகளாக ஒடுக்கப்பட்டு வந்த பெண்களின் மரபணுக்கள் , திடீரெனக் கிடைக்கும் எல்லையற்ற சுதந்திரத்தைக் கையாளத் தெரியாமல் தடுமாறும் மனநிலையை அராத்து ஹோனிகா வழியே பதிவு செய்கிறார். சமூகத் தடைகளைத் தாண்டிவிட்ட நவீனப் பெண்ணின் அகவெளியில் இருக்கும் குழப்பத்தை இப்பாதிரத்தின் மூலம் அறிய முடிகிறது.

நடன மங்கையர் சமகாலச் சமூக இருப்பு

நாவல் உணர்த்தும் மிக முக்கியமான தத்துவவார்த்த உண்மை என்னவெனில், நாம் அனைவரும் சிரிஷாவின் வறுமை மற்றும் சுரண்டல் நிறைந்த உலகிற்கும், ஹோனிகாவின் எல்லையற்ற சுதந்திர உலகிற்கும் இடைப்பட்ட ஏதோ ஒரு புள்ளியில்தான் பயணித்துக் கொண்டிருக்கிறோம் என்பதாகும். சிவன் ஐயங்கார், அமைச்சர், பேரரசர் போன்ற கதாபாத்திரங்கள், மூடநம்பிக்கைகள் மற்றும் ஆதிக்க ஆண்மையின் குறியீடாக நின்று பெண் கலைஞர்களைத் தொடர்ந்து அச்சுறுத்திக் கொண்டே இருக்கின்றனர். அதிகாரமும் பணமும் படைத்த ஆண்கள் தங்களின் பாலியல் மற்றும் நுகர்வுத் தேவைக்கான ஒரு போகப் பொருளாகவே நடனப் பெண்களை எப்போதும் சுருக்கி வைத்திருக்க விரும்புகிறார்கள் என்பதே சமூகத்தில் பெண் நடன கலைஞர்களுக்கான இடமாக அறிய முடிகின்றது.

தமிழக வரலாற்றின் இடைக்காலம் தொடரே தேவதாசிகளின் தோற்றம் குறித்த தரவுகள் ஆய்வாளர்களுக்கு கிடைக்கப்பெறுகின்றன. எந்தவொரு குறிப்பிட்ட மதத்தினையும் சார்ந்திராத சங்க இலக்கியங்களில் நடன மகளிர், விறலியர், கூத்தியர், அடிமைப்பெண்கள், கொண்டிமகளிர் மற்றும் பரத்தையர் குறித்த வரலாற்று சான்றுகள் காணக்கிடைக்கின்றன. கேரளாவினைப் பொறுத்தமட்டில் தேவதாசிகள், கூத்தியர் , குடிகாரி, மறம்பாவையார், தேவிடிச்சி, நங்கைமார் , முறைக்காரி, கூத்தச்சி, மற்றும் ஆட்டக்காரி என்று அழைக்கப்பட்டுவந்தனர். (ஜீவானந்தம், ச, பக். 89)

தேவிடிச்சி (தேவ அடியாள் என்பது மருவி இன்று வசைச்சொல்லாக மாறிய வடிவம்), குடிகாரி போன்ற பிரயோகங்கள், காலப்போக்கில் நிலப்பிரபுத்துவ மற்றும் சாதிய அடுக்குமுறைகள் இக்கலைஞர்களை எவ்வாறு பாலியல் பண்டங்களாக மாற்றி, சமூக விளிம்பிற்குத் தள்ளின என்பதற்கான மொழிசார்ந்த சான்றுகள் ஆகும்.

நடனப் மங்கையர்களின் சமூக நிலையை தமிழில் பேசிய முதல் பின்னவீனத்துவ படைப்பாக மந்தஹாசினி திகழ்கிறது. சங்க இலக்கியத்தில் பரந்து விரிந்து கிடந்த பல்வேறு ஆடல், பாடல் மற்றும் சமூகக் குழுக்களைச் சேர்ந்த பெண்களின் நிலையை, பிற்கால இடைக்காலச் சமூகம் எவ்வாறு ஒரே நிறுவனமயமாக்கப்பட்ட 'தேவதாசி முறைக்குள்' ஒடுக்கிக் கொண்டுவந்தது என்பதைப் புரிந்துகொள்ள இக்கருத்து பெரிதும் உதவுகிறது.

கலை என்பது இங்கே பல நேரங்களில் பெண்களைக் கட்டுப்படுத்தி வைப்பதற்கான ஒரு கவர்ச்சியான முகமூடியாகவே ஆதிக்க வர்க்கத்தால் பயன்படுத்தப்படுகிறது. பல நூற்றாண்டுகளாகத் தங்களுக்கு முந்தைய தலைமுறைப் பெண்கள் அனுபவித்த ஒடுக்குமுறைகள், சுரண்டல்கள் மற்றும் பாலியல் வக்கிரங்களின் வடுக்கள், நவீனப் பெண்களின் மன ஆழத்தில் ஒரு தொடர் தழும்பாக நீடிக்கின்றன. இதனால், எல்லையற்ற வெளி உலகச் சுதந்திரம் இருந்தபோதிலும், தங்களை எப்படிச் சமூகத்தில் நிலைநிறுத்திக் கொள்வது என்ற 'மனத்தெளிவின்மையும்' அகக்குழப்பமும் அவர்களுக்குள் ஒரு உளவியல் போராட்டமாக எப்போதும் நிகழ்ந்து கொண்டே இருக்கிறது.

ஆண் மையச் சமூகம் கட்டமைத்துள்ள ஒழுக்கவியல் விதிகளும் அழகியல் கூறுகளும் பெண்ணை எப்போதும் ஒரு நுகர்வுப் பொருளாகவோ அல்லது அடிமைப்பட்ட உயிரியாகவோ வைத்திருக்கவே விரும்புகின்றன. இலக்கியப் பிரதிகளில் இத்தகைய ஒடுக்குமுறைகளைத் தாண்டி பெண் தன் சுய அடையாளத்தை நிலைநிறுத்த முனையும்போது, அவளுக்கு இரண்டு விதமான உலகங்கள் உருவாகின்றன. ஒன்று, வறுமையும் மரபார்ந்த சுரண்டல்களும் நிறைந்த அவல உலகம்; மற்றொன்று,

நவீனத்துவம் அளிக்கும் போலிச் சுதந்திரத்தின் வழியே உருவாகும் அகவயமான குழப்ப உலகம். பெண்ணியத் திறனாய்வு என்பது இந்த இரண்டு எல்லைகளுக்கு இடையே தவிக்கும் பெண்ணின் சமூக இருப்பை அவளது உளவியல் போராட்டங்களோடு இணைத்துப் பகுப்பாய்வதாகும். அப்போதுதான் ஒட்டுமொத்தப் பெண் சமூகத்தின் இருப்பு நிலையை நாம் முழுமையாக வரையறுக்க முடியும். ('பெண்ணிய இலக்கியத் திறனாய்வு, பக், 84)

நாவலாசிரியர் அராத்து, சிரிஷா மற்றும் ஹோனிகா ஆகிய இரு துருவங்களின் வழி சமகாலப் பெண்ணின் இரு வேறு உலகங்களைக் காட்டுகிறார். இதனைப் பெண்ணியத் திறனாய்வாளர் க. பஞ்சாங்கம் அவர்களின் கோட்பாட்டோடு பொருத்திக் காண முடியும். அவர் குறிப்பிடுவது போல, 'வறுமையும் மரபார்ந்த சுரண்டல்களும் நிறைந்த அவல உலகிற்கும், நவீனத்துவம் அளிக்கும் சுதந்திரத்தின் வழியே உருவாகும் அகவயமான குழப்ப உலகிற்கும்' இடைப்பட்ட புள்ளியில்தான் ஒட்டுமொத்தப் பெண்களின் சமூக இருப்பு நகர்கிறது. நாவலில் வரும் 'சிவன் ஐயங்கார் அமைச்சர், அரசர், பேரரசர், மற்றும் புதினத்தில் இடம்பெறும் அனைத்து ஆண்களும் இந்த இடைப்பட்ட புள்ளியில் தவிக்கும் பெண்அமைச்சர் அரசர் பேரரசர் மற்றும் புதினத்தில் இடம்பெறும் அனைத்து ஆண்களும் அமைச்சர் அரசர் பேரரசர் மற்றும் புதினத்தில் இடம்பெறும் அனைத்து ஆண்களும் பெண்களைத் தொடர்ந்து அச்சுறுத்தும் ஆணாதிக்கக் கட்டமைப்பின் குறியீடுகளாகும்.

முடிவுரை

அராத்துவின் 'மந்தஹாசினி' நாவல் நடன மங்கையரின் வாழ்வியலை வெறும் கலை சார்ந்த அழகியலாகப் பார்க்காமல், அவர்களின் சமூக இடத்தை வர்க்க, பாலியல் சுரண்டல்களின் பின்னணியில் காட்சிபடுத்துகிறது. மரபுகளைக் கட்டுடைக்கும் நகைச்சுவை, பின்நவீனத்துவக் கதைசொல்லல், புராணங்களின் குறியீட்டுத் தன்மை ஆகியவற்றின் வழியாக, வரலாற்றுக் காலம் தொட்டு நவீனக் காலம் வரை பெண்களின் அவல நிலை தொடர்வதை நாவல் அழுத்தமாகப் பதிவு செய்கிறது. சமகாலப் பெண்கள் எதிர்கொள்ளும் பாலியல் வக்கிரங்களை எதிர்கொள்ளத் தேவையான உச்சகட்டக் கோபத்தையும், அதே சமயம் நவீனச் சூழல் தரும் சுதந்திரத்தைக் கையாள்வதில் உள்ள உளவியல் சிக்கல்களையும் ஏககாலத்தில் பேசும் ஒரு புதுமையான பெண்ணியப் படைப்பாக 'மந்தஹாசினி' விளங்குகிறது என்பதை இக்கட்டுரை நிறுவுகிறது.

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நிதிசார் கட்டுரையாளர் உறுதிமொழி: இல்லை

கட்டுரையாளர் நன்றியுரை: இல்லை

கட்டுரையாளர் உறுதிமொழி: இக்கட்டுரையில் எவ்வித முரண்பாடும் இல்லை என்று உறுதிமொழி அளிக்கிறேன்.



இக்கட்டுரை கிரியேட்டிவ் காமன்சு ஆட்ரிபியூசன் 4.0வின் [Creative Commons Attribution4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) கீழ் பன்னாட்டு உரிமம் பெற்றுள்ளது.

Misinterpretive Teaching Reinforcing Sexism: A Christian Context

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Abstract

Society largely patriarchal in structure and expression often remains intransigent even after change in belief, value system, etc. The patriarchal practices are sometime retained as mixed emerging as new form of socio-religious culture. This is true, in many cases, of Christian set-ups in society. While its mode of retention may be through cultural process, it is, in Christian context, through the religious teachings which are supposedly based on the scriptures. The teachings, when taught and practiced, reinforced the old sexism of a given society if the teachings are misinterpretive. Therefore, the outcome is continuation of sex discrimination often with benevolent sex discrimination. Therefore, there must be proper understanding of the actual imports of some problem scriptures of the Bible. In this regard the scriptures in question are 1Corinthians 14:34-35; Ephesians 5:21-25; and 1Timothy 2:11-14. The passages carry apparent teachings on sexism with regard to women speaking in church, submission to husband and authority over man. Yet, the first passage is about proper mode of learning spiritual things, and the second is about mutual respect between wife and husband and the last passage teaches on prohibition of false teachings by women. Understood properly the scriptures they negate sexism. Making them sexist is from patriarchal bias ingrained in belief and teachings. The article is a humble attempt in earnest.

Keywords: Keep Silence, Submission to Husband, Authority over Man, Usurpation of Man's Authority, Misinterpretive Teachings.

Gender study on Christianity plane primarily needs on two counts: debate on men-women relationship set by the Bible and Christianity has been continuing in the churches, and the teachings of the Bible and of the Christianity on gender equality are said to have found compounded gender problems in Christian context. So, our attention is drawn for an incisive study of the relationship and the teachings. And correct understanding of the issues may certainly help the concerned groups to set the problem at rest in the interest of all concerned.

The crux of the debate about men-women relationship is whether the view of superiority of men held by menfolk is tenable or not. And the view is said to have been productive of sex discrimination and the assigning of low status to women. Such gender problems are characterised by the acceptance of subordinate position of women, belief in the inferiority of women, exclusive distribution of priestly offices among the male members, etc. So, what the Church follows and expresses are said to be patriarchal in practice. And Christian society is, in fact, branded as new patriarchal society built upon old patriarchal foundation. Christian women, therefore, are constrained to search for their identity and the endeavour for gender equality and empowerment became inevitable in society. The fire of gender equality is ignited internally but make it burn by the wind of change blown into the society.

The feminist thinking among Christians, as stated above, started as influenced by feminist ideology prevalent in the west and elsewhere. It is natural because Christian society

is no exception to gender problems. Feminism as such has different types. In the introduction to "A Reader in Feminist Theology" Prasana Kumari has pointed out three types of feminism such as liberal, socialist and cultural feminism. While the three are relevant to one context or other, cultural feminism which directs against "predominantly masculine culture and values" is more relevant to the present study. In other words, the gender problems confronting Christian society on religious plane are primarily over the issues relating to men-women inequitable relationship. The relationship is allegedly set by the Bible and upheld by Christian teachings. (Kumari, 1993 P.5)

In Christianity, feminist thinking is said to have started in the 19th century defending women's cause with scriptural support. In other words, the feminists tried to promote women's cause with scriptural proofs and thereby countered the passages which were used to "silence women". In the second place attempt was made to study the contributions of women of the Bible. And in the third place the feminists critically assessed biblical texts and branded as "sexist", (Kumari, 1993). These three types belonged to the first stage of feminist hermeneutics.

In the 20th century the feminists drew their attention to the question whether women characters of the Bible do serve as "role-models for women seeking empowerment and gender equality". Some feminists were not affirmative on the ground that women characters were "enmeshed in patriarchy". And others were affirmative of empowerment prospect. For both ancient and modern women living in patriarchal cultures does "intersect" showing the fact of empowerment of women. So, while positing the Bible is "androcentric" or man-centred and urging to leave or reject those "sexist texts as unauthoritative", the role played by women characters of the Bible should be accepted as fact of gender equality and women empowerment.

What is, for the object, important is to discover the principles which are permissive of the Bible for gender equality? For, a challenge to "androcentric system and structures which are deep rooted in our cultures" is prime concern of present feminist theology in seeking new identity of women and transforming one's community into "just and humane community." In other words, the main object of the feminist theology is to correct the sorry "patterns of patriarchal influence on Christian theology." (Kumari, 1993 P.6). But it must be kept in mind that women empowerment or gender equality issue dealt on religious (Christian) plane should be settled as far as possible, within the bound of the Holy Scriptures.

For the issues involved in the process of women religious empowerment is such as androcentric question, presence of alleged sexist biblical texts, the question of patriarchal influence on Christian theology, etc. indeed demand direct solution of Holy Scriptures. Either party seeking solution outside scriptures by deviating from or misconstruing scriptural stands on the issue may confuse and confound the concerned parties without solution.

The present study of gender equality is necessarily linked to Christian feminism. Christian feminism is liberation theology which aims at achieving identity for women. The identity is sought through the accomplishment of gender equality and practical empowerment of women. And the equality and empowerment are meant for building "abundant life" of all human beings. (Kumari, 1993 P.5)

Perceived exclusion of women in different roles, feminist theologians treat the exclusion as injustice and oppression to women from which they should be liberated. Therefore, feminist theology is, contextually and universally, a liberation theology as it deals with sexism which is common phenomenon in both contexts. Feminist theology revolutionizes traditional theology which is considered patriarchal or androcentric

theologisation. The theology is said to have downplayed women's experiences, history, roles and is treated as deleterious to those spheres of women. The reason is that the theology remains as main culture-shaping force and the perpetuation of men's exclusive attitude to women's roles in history and their experiences. Therefore, this state of affairs compelled women to start feminist friendly theology by questioning the patriarchal mindset used for traditional theology. (Hnuni, 2014, PP.16-18)

The philosophical root of Christian feminism lies in the rejection of dualism. It is rejected on the ground that dualism creates differences in cognition and application. For example, in gender dualism male and female is cognised as different gender individuals. And male is seen as "first member" and "active" and female seen as one who is short of man's position. So, Christian feminism which emphasises "the interdependence, connectedness, equal value and mutual need" rejects dualism. (Kumari, 1993 PP.6-7). What is important here is to examine whether there is scriptural imperative for such uninterchangeable order of importance for all thing particularly concerning man-women relationship.

While Christian feminism as such is a philosophical discourse held in quest of identity for women by discovering the full humanity of women, what is relevant to present study is the examination of select areas such as role, status, gender equality, etc. by paying our attention to biblical texts in question. For the groups in question are concerned with scriptural imports and interpretation of the scriptures when they come to the select areas. There are certain scriptural texts which give rise to controversy in the matter of gender equality. Unless the texts are correctly interpreted no one can put the controversy at rest.

1Co 14:34-35, "Let your women keep in silence in the Churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the Church." (Nave's Study Bible, 1978 P.1584). These verses have generated arguments and counter-arguments in the contention for gender equality. One of the main questions over which the arguments centering around is whether Paul's injunction bears contextual or universal nature. It is commonly accepted that the injunction was given for particular group of women for an orderly worship. But what is pertinent to ask is how about women who are in like-situation today? The injunction should go beyond the historical context and time meaning its validity exists for all like-situations of all ages. So, John Stott has rightly said that "even if this apostolic instruction can be proved to have been situational, it remains applicable to similar situation today. After all, every New Testament epistle is an occasional document, which addresses particular problems in particular Churches; the epistle nevertheless continues to speak to our condition today." (Stott, 2003, PP. 302-304). Moreover, the references (1Co 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:8-15) which give injunctions about "a woman" and "women" are "generic, not specific". (Stott, 2003).

Therefore, the interpretation that the injunction bears a temporary or contextual nature does not help to settle the problem of gender inequality. For the injunction does not affirm the inequality nor does negate the same. And the biblical texts are not sexist either because, contextually viewed the injunction, men, if they were also guilty of the similar questionable behaviour in the Corinthian Church, or could also necessarily be enjoined in similar way. In short, any discussion, basing on the text, has shown no conclusive point about gender problems, such as gender inequality, sexism, etc. Therefore, the matter discussed in Eph. 5:21-25 and I Co 11:3-16 is important to be dug into right imports of masculine leadership for proper understanding of gender issues of the Bible.

Eph. 5:21-25, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. How as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (New International Version, 1983). The scripture is to read with these scriptures: 1Co. 11:3-12, "Now I want you to realize that the head of everyman is Christ and the head of the woman is man, And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head... A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man, neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God."(New International Version, 1983)

While the above quoted scriptures do give injunctions to woman to "submit" to her husband and honour her "head", man, both the Biblical texts also do use something inclusive and make interdependent between two sexes. For Eph. 5:21 is explicit of inclusiveness of two sexes while exercising their submission. In other words, the submission is to be rendered mutually by the respective sexes. And 1Co 11:11-12 makes interdependence between the two sexes obligatory. Then, if submission enjoined is inclusive of both sexes and interdependence is to be exercised by respective sexes, it is implicit that the terms "submit" and "head" become important for understanding gender equality of the Bible. As to the term "submit" the Greek word "hupotasso" implies "a sense of voluntary submission to the will of another with no thought of the importance of the other person. Here again there is no implication of cultural reinforcement of stereotypes. Rather the fear or respect of the wife to the husband is to be deemed as reverential respect which describes a woman's love for her husband, and not that of a slave to the master" (Kumari, 1993, P.39). Here one must read Eph. 5:21, where the verse speaks of mutual submission between sexes, with Eph. 5:22, 24 which speak of wife's submission to husband. The latter does not contradict the former and vice versa. Then "hupotasso" is equally applicable to both sexes. So, there is no question of sexism nor is inferiority hinted by the biblical text (Eph. 5:21-24). In short, it is mutual submission to be maintained by the respective sexes out of their mutual respect. And the submission which is to be mutually maintained is compatible with equality – gender equality.

Then, what is important in the study of gender equality from biblical perspective is the question of masculine headship. Of course, the question of masculine headship must be, for every logical reason drawn from the discussion made on wife's submission to husband, consistent with the notion of wife's submission to husband or head. For headship and submission are alluded in the same injunction and for same reason. Then, the pertinent questions are: Does the masculine leadership speak of authority? If so, it is compatible with the principle of mutual submission between sexes out of their mutual respect. If no, how do we understand the masculine headship? We all must agree that headship implies "some degree of leadership, which, however, is best expressed not in terms of "authority" but of "responsibility" on the following logical reasons.

Firstly, Christ's relationship with the Church or husband's relationship with wife is made through love. Secondly, practically speaking love and authority are incompatible with one another. Therefore, biblical masculine headship, while implies some degree of leadership, is not authority but of masculine responsibility. For love and responsibility are

functionally compatible and the latter (responsibility) is not incompatible with equality. In fact, responsibility can be maintained horizontally and authority, by nature, functions vertically or exclusively (Stott, 2003, P. 306). It is illogical that no person exercises literal authority over someone to whom he simultaneously loves. But it is possible with responsibility meaning one can exercise both responsibility and simultaneously love for someone. Therefore, biblical masculine headship is hermeneutically best understood in term of "responsibility". And headship is one which is "more of care than of control, more of responsibility than of authority." (Stott, 2003, P.307). Such nature of headship is what Paul envisaged and that is something logically conclusive.

We have seen so far the gender equality is envisaged in the Bible. But Peter apparently speaks of the opposite. Seemingly he creates discrepancy over the issue: gender equality. 1Pe 3:7 reads: Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the precious gift of life; so that nothing will hinder your prayers." (New International Version, 1983). This biblical text is neither sexist nor does negate gender equality for it talks about usual difference on physical plane. The reasons which do support the idea are: (1) The Greek word for "weaker" is "asthenesteros" which means "with less strength." On physical plane "men are by and large bigger than women, and by and large stronger than women (Stott, 2003, P. 308). So, while Peter speaks of such usual fact of less physical strength of women, he does not demean women or wives. Secondly, the treatment (treating wives/women) is to be accompanied with respect implying absence of demeaning to women or sexism in it. So, even if wives or women are accepted as weaker partners, they are not demeaned there. For they are treated equal with men as being co-heirs with men of new life. So, biblical headship is to "describe a major way in which women need men and men may serve women. It is not intended to suppress but to support them, and to ensure that they are, and may more fully become-their true selves." In fact, biblical masculine headship is "headship of protective care" (Stott, 2003) which makes no subordination of women to men. And it does not imply their "inferiority to men..." nor does engender "low self-esteem." (Stott, 2003)

Our discussion so far made, basing on the principle of mutuality, on controversial biblical texts, has shown that Bible does not teach gender inequality or sexism. If anything is apparent to be so, it was mostly injuncted women under contextual constraints and the injunction(s), while its principle may be applied in any like-situations today, are limited to those groups of women in question and confined to that context. Genesis 1:27 affirms gender equality which reads "So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This verse testifies to equal worth of men and women for being equally borne the image of God by them. Of course, according to Genesis 3:16 which were pronounced by God after the Fall, reading "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" is a truism of the distortion of the primeval sexual equality. So, "the domination of woman by man is due to the Fall, not the creation." (Stott, 2003, P.291)

Now what is pertinent to ask is: Whether women lost position of gender equality? It is usually viewed that "original equality" has been re-affirmed through the redemptive work of Christ. His work has accomplished two major things in restoring back the original equality. First, God calls men and women for service by imparting gifts of the Spirit to them. Secondly, irrespective of sexes, all repenting men and women are regenerated on same basis – saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-10) and made women coheirs with men of eternal life. So the Bible loudly claims the equality in Gal. 3:26- 29, which reads: "You are

all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (New International Version, 1983)

Now, the impartation of the gifts of the Spirit has to do with service and the service with the roles of Christians in the Churches. And if different gifts are equally imparted to both sexes, roles, if sex-based, are unscriptural. In other words, particular roles exclusively owned by men, in view of gifts imparted to both sexes, are institutional rather than charismatic. And the roles of men and women, if charismatically viewed, are derived from diverse gifts which are imparted to them which include leadership, preaching, etc. Concerning this matter Rom 12:4-8 state clearly: Just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (New International Version, 1983) Every woman who is a child of God belongs to the body and has privilege as man has.

Of course, in gender issue, gifts like teaching, leadership, etc. draw more our attention. In other words, roles of women which they are supposed to play as teachers or leaders in spiritual context deserve critical focus on two counts: (i) Biblical prohibition on teaching by women, and (ii) the issue of women in Ministry, is crucial issues in gender matter. On the prohibition of teaching by women is stated in 1Tim 2:11-14 which reads: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner (New International Version, 1983). Is there inconsistency in Paul's teachings particularly on women issue? If not, why did he give this injunction? Paul was consistent with his teachings on women particularly concerning teaching by women, masculine headship and submission of women. Remember the terms "head" and "submit" Paul employed were never used to debase or demean women. And the present prohibition of teaching by women is similar with the one he made for Corinthian women. In other words, the injunction in question was primarily meant for Ephesian Church women. For Paul nowhere passed the like-injunction except in 1Corinthians and 1Timothy. In point of fact, Paul encourages women to teach or prophesy (see Titus 2:3-4; 2Tim 1:5; 3:14). In 2Tim. 2:2 Paul encourages men and women to teach others. Here the term "men" in Greek is "anthropos" which means "mankind" or human beings and it is inclusive of women.

Then 1Tim 2:11-14 is an injunction or prohibition meant for the women (wives) in question. For the injunction "does not appear to be anything inherent in our distinctive sexualities which makes it universally inappropriate for women to teach men." (Stott, 2003, P.314) Then what had prompted Paul to make the prohibition? The prevailing atmosphere that prompted Paul for the prohibition was produced by heretical teachings (heresies) (1Tim. 1:3, 4; 6:20, 21; Rev. 2:6). The heresies, to which Ephesian Christian men and women exposed, generated or promoted "controversies" and "godless chatter" in the Ephesian Church. And how the women were guilty of the godless liquacy is revealed by the nature of restriction made on godless chatter and the implications of terms used in the instruction. The implications are explicit of the restriction on liquacious practices.

As to the nature of the injunction, it has two aspects - instruction and restriction. The former is about how to learn and the restriction is on non-apostolic teachings (doctrines). Concerning restriction, it is conclusive that some women did teach men in Ephesian Church. Had not they taught men Paul would not have been particular about it. What did they teach? Contextually viewed it is most likely that they taught something spiritually untrue as influenced by the prevailing heresies which are essentially deceptive. Therefore, the instance of how Eve was deceived was alluded. In other words, Paul took the deception of Eve which led to the fall of man as object-lesson while cautioning Christians, contextually women/wives, that deception in spiritual matter turned out to be disastrous. It was true of heresy-infested Ephesian Church. Its spiritual state and fate is revealed and predicted in Rev. 2:4-5.

The second aspect of the injunction is instruction on learning. Evidently some Ephesian Christian women failed to follow the right way in learning. Had they not been so, Paul would not have laid emphasis on "quietness", "submission" and "silence" while instructing women on learning. So, basing on the report about women's attitude to learning and teaching in Christian gatherings, Paul was prompted to make the prohibition on teaching by women by restricting them to teach heresies.

As to implications of certain terms "woman" and "teach" which are supportive to the interpretation that the injunction was for wife or wives against her/their teaching of non-apostolic doctrine? The Greek word "Gune" means wife. Of course, "a woman" is referred to any wife of the Ephesian Church. There are two things which are clear from the prohibition of women to teach. First, the prohibition of teaching is for wife or wives and is exclusive of unmarried females. Secondly, it was women (wives) who taught non-apostolic teachings or doctrines. This is supported by the interpretation of the term "didaskaleo" which means "to instruct or teach doctrine (Parrish and Parrish, 1999, P. 20). Most unmistakably some women (wives) taught something spiritually untrue in the Church. To be precise, they taught men non-apostolic doctrines. Were they competent to teach apostolic doctrines in those days? Were they more informed than men like Timothy though he might be younger than them? Not so, now if they did teach men with something unauthorised things they deserved restriction.

And the term "silence" in Greek is "hesuchia" which is in the meaning of "quietness" or "stillness". This meaning has to do with something physical implying that the Ephesian Christian women behaved contrarily not being quiet or still in the church. They stepped out of propriety of spiritual gatherings. Finally, the Greek word for the term "subjection" which must also be maintained by women in learning is "hupotage" which meant "subjection" or "submission". So, it is conclusive from this discussion that the injunction is for wife/wives in the event of their teachings of spiritually untrue things; that they maintained questionable style in their expression/speech in spiritual gatherings. Not only their teachings and style were wrong, no women including men were authorised to teach non-apostolic teaching in the church.

In this way the problem passage (1Tim 2:11-14) is discussed which deals with the problems of teaching by women. And before we take up another aspect - "authority over men", we can posit three things; (i) The letter (1Timothy), like all other letters was primarily meant for the particular local church; (ii) and like other letters, it was written to address certain specific problems which confronted the local church; (iii) yet each injunctive or prohibitory principle contained in the letters remains valid for or applicable to any like-situations in all ages. Imagine, new conversion situation when new converts, men and

women, who may be of different religious and cultural backgrounds, may tend to create the like- situation in any part of the world. Even in the church either party may create like-situations of Corinthian and Ephesian churches on certain issues. And it is scripturally unadvisable for either party (men and women or pro and against) to create rowdy scene over gender issues in the churches without actual respect and submission. Therefore, contextually viewed the injunction was meant for the local church in question. But its principle remains applicably valid if similar problems crop up in any spiritual situations. The injunction on teaching is therefore, meant for particular group of women of a local church and is without being sexist in it. In other words, 1Tim. 2:12 does not prohibit all females to teach theological education.

Prohibition on the usurpation of authority (1Tim. 2:12), was given by referring to the order of creation and deception meaning Adam was first created and then Eve, and sin came through the deception of Eve. Why does Paul put together these things? Is this injunction based on inherent distinctive sexuality? From all accounts it does not. If we critically read between the lines, the issue of usurpation of authority over a man by woman is come up in connection with the prohibition on teaching by woman. Observe the logical sequence of Paul's prohibition on teaching and usurpation of authority, and instruction on behaviour of women. To be precise, Paul instructed a woman (wife) to be "silent" in the matter of teaching and their authority (see the text: But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence). Why? In view of heresies in Ephesian church, women would teach, if they were permitted to do so, non-apostolic doctrines which evidently some of them did. And if women taught something heretical with questionable behaviour they would create problem of indiscipline and undermine the authority of the authorised men like Timothy. How would this likely? The women/wives would undermine the authority of apostolic doctrines which, directly or indirectly help them to gain upon the authority of men which they had for teaching apostolic doctrines over local church, etc. in those days. So, women were instructed to be "silent" in the matter of teaching and authority. And, what is core, in this regard, is the prohibition of teachings by non-delegates of divine truth for which any man including woman is equally prohibited. The authority the Bible speaks is truth-derived authority. In this way, the prohibition is not gender-specific. Any genders are prohibited on the ground of non-delegation of primary divine truth. So the prohibition is not sexist.

And it was against this women's tendency that Paul reminded women of masculine headship (Adam was created first). As to the idea of headship we will not repeat here. It is neither authority nor domination over a wife but a responsible headship with love, and mutual respect and submission between husband and wife. But Paul put together the issue of masculine headship and the deception of Eve. Why? What Paul actually wants to say is that husband is the head of wife, and she should do nothing to ignore his headship. If a wife challenges the headship or the order (husband is the head of wife) for her own exaltation she will be open to spiritual deception. Why we say this is of Paul's intention? Firstly, the issue of authority is restricted to husband-wife relationship. The term "Gune" used in the passage means "wife" and the positional relationship between husband and wife is illustriously referred to that of Adam and Eve - a couple. That is, Paul says that God created "Adam first, then Eve" and thereby he introduces the headship of husband. In Gen. 3:16 it says "he (Adam) will rule over you (Eve). Of course, rule does not imply authority or domination but headship which is vested with husband. And headship is not domination either. It is responsibility assigned to husband.

Secondly, Paul prohibits wife not to have authority over husband. Why? (a) wife's tendency for usurping authority or headship over man is scripturally predicted (see the text: "... Your desire will be for your husband") Gen. 3:16: Is this desire something positional or biological? According to scripture rulership was passed to Adam alone after the Fall - "he (Adam) will rule over you" (Eve), Gen. 3:16: Now the Hebrew word of "rule" is "mashal" which carries similar implication with that of Greek "kephale" which means head. For "mashal" does not imply authority but functional care or responsibility for something or someone. Therefore, it carries similar connotation with that of "kephale" and thus "mashal" also stands for the headship of husband. So, evidently Eve's desire is something positional. This line of interpretation is supported by another Greek word "authenteo" used in 1Tim. 2:12 for "authority" which means "to use one's own armour". The authority is not an institutional authority of women but one which has to do with one's resource or means for achieving something against someone.

The manner of the use is something illegitimate or unjustified. That is something wife should not do. Therefore, Paul prohibits wife or wives to do it. In other words, he cautions them that they may not be tempted to step out of their place in God's order. And wives may even desire to take over the men's place of God ordained rulership" or headship, (Parrish and Parish, 1999, P.20). In other words, if a wife challenges the headship of husband for her own exaltation she will be open to deception in divine matter.

Finally, therefore, the significance of Paul's reference to the deception of the Eve is linked to the issue of authority over a man. As we have seen that Eve had desire for a position with or over Adam saying "Your desire will be for your husband". Eve's desire for emulation was the root of her temptation (Jas. 1:14-15). Therefore, the tempter came to her.

Evidently, she acted independently in the event of her temptation. For she did not take Adam into confidence. She was naturally bound to be in that manner. Independence rather than submission was what she wanted for pushing herself forward. So, the Bible cautions husband and wife against such fundamental mistake and commands them to submit to one another. So, Paul taking Eve's deception as object-lesson cautions wife against her desire for having authority over husband and spiritual deception through her emulative tendency. In Ephesian church some wives who did attempt to push themselves forward were under influence of such tendency.

To sum up the discussion on the wife's desire/tendency for usurping authority over a man/husband and the significance of Paul's reference to the instance of the deception of Eve, it may be stated that if a wife ignores the headship of husband to push herself forward she is open to deception in divine matter. What is pertinent to add here is that everything related to gender concerns which seem good and reasonable is not spiritually expedient? For instance, western feminism which primely advocates for the independence of women from men is contradictory to biblical teachings on man-woman relationship and is thus perverse. Moreover, it is a flat refusal of the headship of man. Again, the feminists' endeavour for "inclusive language for God" (replacement of every male language for God in the Bible) is spiritually a degenerative initiative arising out of the quest for gender equality. It is distortive and perverse as well. The initiative is heretical in import and is thus deceptive. Such intellectual heresies are not dearth anywhere in modern Christian society.

Our discussion on the prohibition on teaching by women (wife) and her authority over a man shows that neither prohibition on teaching nor one that on authority is sexual discrimination in true imports. As to the prohibition on having authority over a man what actually Paul wanted was the reiteration on the headship of husband. And since the headship

is not authority or domination of husband over his wife, it is not sexual discrimination. For it is a responsible headship of husband or wife with love, respect and submission. So, the prohibition on having authority over a man is an injunction to wife so that she may not ever ignore the headship to take over his place. The Bible always prohibits such struggle of wife for her own exaltation. And the prohibition on such nature of struggle of wife has universal validity on the following grounds: (i) Husband-wife relationship set by the Bible is unalterable. In other words, headship of husband to which a wife should submit is unchangeably set. And her submission is not one done between superior-subordinate people but one out of voluntary act. (ii) A wife who ignores the headship of her husband to step positionally ahead of him is prohibited for being her action open to deception in divine matter. So, the prohibition, while it was meant for local problem, has universal validity as well for like-situation.

As to the prohibition on teaching, it is restricted to the teachings of non-doctrinal things by some wives in Ephesian church. As far as its primary purpose is concerned it has no universal validity. Even if the prohibition is made in connection with the prohibition on having authority, the question whether to teach or not to teach may also be decided by the motive of the wife. That, if her teaching is an attempt to reverse scriptural husband-wife relationship and even domineer men by ignoring his headship she is prohibited to teach man. And for the obverse on her part she is permitted to teach theological education.

Since the study about the prohibition on teaching by women (wives) has shown that the prohibition was not gender-specific: it was primarily given for local church and the wives with questionable behaviour, and God used of women in ministry in the Old Testament times and the impartation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to both sexes. Of them, perhaps the most relevant and convincing one is the impartation of gifts of the Spirit to both sexes which include theological teaching ministry. In fact, the prohibition on teaching seems not to have based on “anything inherent in our distinctive sexualities which make it universally inappropriate for women to teach men” “There is no evidence, or even hint, that the charismata in general were restricted to men, although apostleship does seem to have been. (Stott, 2003, P.314)

Moreover, the nature of the prohibition is permissible for teaching of theological education after the apostolic era. That the requirement of “high degree of authority” of the apostles for “their foundational teaching” is no longer needed. And no revelation can be expected today. So, both sexes if their teachings are solidly derived from the written scriptures validity of the prohibition do not arise except teachings done in non-delegatable nature or character by any genders (Stott, 2003). And Paul who prohibits wife (woman) not to teach on the charge of heresies also encourages both men and women to teach others (2Tim. 2:2). As stated earlier the term “men” in the passage is “anthropos” which means “a human being” or “mankind” - both men and women (Young, 1970, P.642). So, it is clear that women can teach theological education and the prohibition was meant and applicable in those days and to those wives in question in local Ephesian church.

We have paid due attention to the Bible teachings on gender equality. For the Bible is allegedly teaching gender inequality and is said to be a responsible factor for gender problem in Christian society. But it is clear that the Bible does not teach the way Christians thought. Then the church or Christian denominations are responsible for sexist teachings in the society. Some common gender concerns among Christians today are inferiority of women, authoritative headship of man over women (misinterpreted by menfolk), denial of equal status to women, etc. (Jonathan, personal communication, 2020)

The root of gender problems in Christian society can be traced back to two sources: (i) Hermeneutical misinterpretation of certain biblical texts and (ii) institutional bias. This is also basically located to the first source. Any endeavour for either equality or inequality the concerned enthusiasts have to be guided by the scriptures. In other words, every gender issue related to Christianity has to be, as far as possible, settled by the Bible for which correct hermeneutical position is a must for all concerned. As to one which is of institutional is more difficult in the sense that change is possible through consensus or has to come from higher authority. For example, denominations like Catholic or Presbyterian, etc. have centralised authority and no change can be effected by lower (local church) authority for gender issues like women priesthood or ordination of women, and the likes. Yet it is true that the real authority for any Christian denominational groups is the Bible from which they rise and exist.

As to the efforts Christian women made for gender justice in religious life, major measures are of educative. As they do for gender justice in the society, they often advocate formal measures such as the conduct of seminars, women conferences, sharing church pulpits, etc., in which they discuss gender equality, (Phaomei, personal communication, 2020). These measures are relevant to their efforts for bringing about change in man-woman relationship in several ways. First, the activists can make personal contact with the concerned people in suitable contexts such as church, mass gatherings, etc. Secondly, the idea of gender equality is spread in the form of message which even mass illiterate Christian men and women can personally hear and digest it. It is a medium of communication to which Christians are accustomed. Thirdly, the measures have actually demoted much energy needed for organised struggle for gender equality or justice. So, while there are things left unfulfilled, the society is moving forward creating atmosphere for gender equality and empowerment process.

Apart from this mode of efforts for the concerns, theologically trained Christian women along with like-minded educated men and women have devoted for the popularisation of women theology. Their efforts for the concern are sought mainly through two channels: (i) One channel is formulation of course content for women theological study and inclusion in Bible College/Seminary syllabus. So, it gives necessary scope focusing on Bible teachings and cultural influences which generate gender problems in the society. The second channel is the conduct of researches (both for degree accreditation and solution finding study) on women issues. The researchers are majorly manned by female candidates. This endeavour has facilitated the understanding and popularisation of gender problems particularly in intellectual circle of the society. Moreover, the female researchers are comparatively more informed than others and they lend strong support to women empowerment activities or they themselves become activists of gender equality and women empowerment. (Gangmei, personal communication, 2020)

Unlike churches in the past decades, the churches have increasingly produce Bible graduates and a number of Bible scholars today. While all of them are not extending their support to empowerment and gender equality efforts, many of them (both men and women) do work for the same. The later are the sustaining resource and reinforcing force for empowerment and equality in Christian society. The effective way they afforded is that their efforts are not confined to religious dimension but they also equally work for empowerment in socio economic and political matters. (Gangmei, personal communication, 2020) This is right because religious empowerment without empowerment in other dimensions is incomplete.

It is found that comparatively more attention is, as of now, drawn to the need of religious empowerment of women in Christian society. The reason is that the awareness of women religious empowerment in other Christian societies has motivated the concerned people to work for the same in the matter. Deprivation of any opportunities such as women priesthood, institutional or organizational headship of women, etc. is treated as sexual discrimination in male-dominated Christian society. In other words it is treated as denial of opportunities in religious life. In fact, debate over the like-gender issues has been continuing in Christian society. An ultimate solution to these issues lies in the correct understanding or interpretation of Bible teachings on women. Struggle for greater result may be through the leveraging of activism.

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Empowerment of Women through the Welfare Schemes of Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Tamil Nadu is often seen as a leader in social welfare in India. The state's approach to empowering women uses a structured strategy that aims to help women become active participants in their own progress. This article studies on how these welfare schemes work and focus on their real impact on women in both rural and urban areas. It highlights key programs like Amma Unavagam, the Pudhu Vaazhvu Project, and maternity benefit schemes, and examines how they tackle issues such as nutrition, financial independence, and health. The article argues that these schemes support the social system that combines financial help, skill-building, and social security. It discusses the challenges in implementation, access, and social barriers that still limit their reach. The findings show that while Tamil Nadu has built a strong foundation and real empowerment depends on understanding local needs and improving digital and financial literacy. The Tamil Nadu model offers important lessons and its future success will rely on ongoing improvements and a focus on service quality. This article adds to the discussion on women's development by offering a clear and critical look at one of India's most active states.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Tamil Nadu, Welfare Schemes, Social Security, Financial Inclusion.

Introduction

Women's empowerment in India has seen both progress and ongoing challenges. In this setting, Tamil Nadu is often highlighted for its forward-thinking social policies. The focus on women's welfare comes from a long history of social reform and political will that values human development. From the self-respect movement to today's gender budgeting, Tamil Nadu has made women's progress a key part of its policies and these efforts are based on the idea that empowering women is vital for society and the economy as a whole. Welfare schemes from different governments aim to break cycles of poverty, illiteracy, and health problems that have held women back.

This article investigates on how these welfare schemes actually work. Unlike the common belief that welfare is just about giving money, Tamil Nadu's approach is broader. It includes cash transfers, goods and services, skill training, and support from institutions. The article goes beyond surface-level details to see how these programs affect women's lives. It asks how Amma Unavagam helps pregnant women and children get better nutrition, how the Pudhu Vaazhvu Project helps rural women become entrepreneurs, and how maternity benefit schemes lower maternal and infant deaths. These issues are discussed as part of the larger goal of sustainable development.

Architectural Framework of Welfare

Tamil Nadu's welfare system is made up of many connected schemes that support women at different stages of life and in different areas, such as health, finances, education, and social security. This broad approach is important because women's empowerment

depends on all these factors. For example, the state's nutrition program is not just a midday meal for schoolchildren. It also helps pregnant women, new mothers, and teenage girls get balanced diets during key times in their lives and their children's development. This is important because mothers who don't get enough nutrition are more likely to have babies with health problems, which can continue into the next generation. By offering nutritious meals, the state helps future generations and eases the financial strain on poor families. This program directly improves women's health by lowering rates of anemia and other nutrition-related diseases. It also creates jobs for women by working with local self-help groups and cooperatives.

The Pudhu Vaazhvu Project in the Tamil Nadu government is a good example of economic empowerment. It treats women as active partners in their own progress. The project helps rural women become entrepreneurs by giving them start-up funds and training in managing money, marketing and business planning. Self-help groups are at the heart of this project by helping women work together and support each other. These groups also make it easier for women to get loans, even if they don't have collateral, which is often required by banks. The project's success can be seen in the many small businesses started by women, such as tailoring, food processing, and farming. This financial independence lets women take part in family decisions and boosts their confidence.

Social security and insurance are also important parts of the support system. For example, the Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme gives cash directly to pregnant women to help with childbirth and care after delivery. This support encourages women to give birth in hospitals and get proper medical care, which has helped lower maternal deaths in Tamil Nadu. The state also offers life and accident insurance for women from poorer backgrounds, giving families some protection if something goes wrong. These programs give women peace of mind, making it easier for them to take risks in their work and personal lives because they know there is help if needed.

Impact of Success and Transformation

Any welfare scheme lies not in its budget allocation but in its impact on the ground. In Tamil Nadu, the results of these schemes are visible in several key indicators. The state consistently outperforms the national average on the Human Development Index. The real value of a welfare scheme is seen in its impact, not just its budget. In Tamil Nadu, these programs have led to clear improvements. The state does better than the national average on the Human Development Index, thanks in large part to progress made by women. Health improvements are especially strong. Over the last twenty years, the number of mothers dying during childbirth has dropped a lot, due to maternity benefit schemes, more health centers, and better nutrition from Amma Unavagam. Fewer babies are dying too, showing that both mothers and children are getting the care they need. Now, women participate in Gram Sabha meetings and engage with local government officials to advocate for their rights. This shift represents a fundamental change in village power dynamics. As noted by S. Anandhi and others, the collective action through these talent groups has provided women with a political identity that extends beyond traditional domestic roles by positioning them as entrepreneurs, community leaders and stakeholders in the development process.

Amma Unavagam Program

The Amma Unavagam program has helped more girls enroll in and stay in school. Knowing their daughters will get a healthy meal at school makes families more likely to send them, instead of keeping them at home for chores. This is important because education is a major factor in long-term empowerment. The educated women tend to marry later and have

fewer children. They make sure their kids go to school and join the workforce. So, the nutrition program does more than improve health—it also supports other efforts to empower women.

Challenges and Disparities in Implementation

There are still big challenges to empower women. One main issue is the gap between making policies and actually putting them into practice at the local level. The steps needed to get these benefits can be too much for women who can't read or use digital tools. The complicated process of applying, sending documents, and checking on applications can stop many women from joining. This slows down the programs and keeps them from reaching everyone who needs them.

The quality of services in these schemes is not always the same. Amma Unavagam is often praised; there are still reports of poor food quality, missing ingredients and unclean kitchens in some places due to petty politics and irresponsible workers. Even still some Amma Unavagam is running on and they solve the hunger of the poor people. These problems hurt the program's nutrition goals and make people trust the system less. The Pudhu Vaazhvu Project also has mixed results. Many women have started successful businesses, but some who got loans have struggled to earn enough to pay them back, often because they lack good markets, quality products, or enough training. The project has been criticized for focusing on giving out loans without enough support afterward. Also, in many families, men still control financial decisions, so economic empowerment does not always lead to real social or personal empowerment. These schemes help with women's material needs, but they do not do enough to change the cultural and social attitudes that keep gender inequality in place. As Nivedita Menon points out, Tamil Nadu's efforts are limited unless it works to change how society values women. The schemes are important but real change needs ongoing education and legal support.

Digital Literacy and Financial Inclusion

The empowerment of today situation often depends on access to technology and digital financial services. Tamil Nadu's welfare schemes are using more digital tools, with many payments now sent straight to women's bank accounts. While this is more efficient, it can be a problem for women who don't know how to use digital devices or banking apps. Many don't have their own phones or the skills to use them, which leaves out the most vulnerable. While self-help groups help women save money, they are not a replacement for full access to banks and other financial services. Women need things like affordable insurance, loans, and investment options. Without these, their businesses stay small and are easily affected by problems. The welfare programs should teach women how to save and also to invest, manage risks and plan for the future. This would help them become planners and leaders for their families and communities, not just survivors.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Ecosystem

To build on the progress made by these welfare schemes, a clear and complete strategy is needed. The first step should be to make the application process simpler. The state could create a single system for all welfare programs, making it easier and less stressful for women to get help. Technology should be used to remove barriers, not add new ones. Setting up mobile help centers and digital kiosks in communities would help women apply online and get the support they need. A transition from output-based to outcome-based monitoring is also essential in the state. It is not only to merely counting the number of women who receive loans or meals is insufficient; it is necessary to assess the subsequent impact of these interventions. For example, evaluating whether loans result in sustainable businesses or

whether meals improve health indicators provides valuable insights. Data-driven evaluation is also important to move from just counting how many women get loans or meals to checking what actually changes in their lives. For example, it's better to see if loans help women build lasting businesses or if meals really improve health. Using data to track results helps leaders find problems and make better decisions. This needs a strong system for monitoring and evaluation, including outside audits and regular feedback from the women who use these programs. Initiatives involving male community members should be implemented to educate them about the benefits of women's empowerment and to challenge traditional gender roles. Achieving empowerment requires a shift in mindset among all community members. Quality and accountability. There must be a strict system of penalties for corruption and negligence in the delivery of welfare services. Women must be given a formal role to oversee these schemes. It can be achieved by establishing village-level welfare committees with the authority to inspect facilities, report grievances and ensure that the schemes reach the intended beneficiaries. This type of governance model would foster a sense of ownership among the people and increase the responsibility of service providers

Conclusion

Nevertheless, Tamil Nadu's welfare schemes represent a comprehensive effort to drive social change through state intervention. These types of initiatives have contributed to notable improvements in women's health, education and economic status by establishing a safety net that reduces poverty and vulnerability. The self-help group (SHG) movement exemplifies the potential of collective action to empower marginalized populations. However, the process of achieving true empowerment remains ongoing. While current schemes effectively address material deprivation, they are less successful in confronting the underlying social and cultural causes of gender inequality. For women's empowerment to keep growing in Tamil Nadu, the state needs to keep changing its approach. It should move from just providing services to helping women take charge of their own lives, and focus more on real results than just numbers. The tackling of the root causes of gender inequality is also a key point to end all types of problems. And by closing the gap between policy and practice, making processes simpler and running strong social campaigns will help Tamil Nadu become a model for others. The tools are already there, but ongoing effort and smart planning are needed. Empowering women should be seen as an investment in a fairer and more successful future.

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An Empirical Analysis of Pmmy Loan Performance among Women Entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), which was introduced by the Indian government in 2015, offers small and micro businesses loans without collateral in an effort to promote financial inclusion and entrepreneurship. Using secondary data from official reports from 2015–2016 to 2023–2024, this study examines the expansion and effects of PMMY loans on women entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu. Descriptive statistical approaches, such as year-over-year (YoY) growth rate and compound annual growth rate (CAGR), were used to assess changes in the number of loan accounts and the loan amounts authorized under the Shishu, Kishore, and Tarun categories in order to identify trends and progress. Results indicate that PMMY has greatly increased formal credit availability and encouraged entrepreneurial endeavors, especially among women. The program continues to encourage financial inclusion and the establishment of new businesses in the state, despite occasional volatility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), Financial Inclusion, Microfinance, Loan Growth Analysis

Introduction

In developing countries, entrepreneurship is essential for promoting financial inclusion, job creation, and economic progress. Micro and small businesses play a major role in driving economic development in India by creating jobs and fostering innovation. However, a significant obstacle many entrepreneurs—especially women and first-time business owners—face is restricted access to formal loans. In order to address this, the Indian government launched the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) in April 2015, which provides non-corporate, non-farm micro and small businesses with collateral-free loans up to ₹10 lakh. Based on the stage and financial requirements of the company, these loans are separated into three categories: Tarun, Kishore, and Sishu. Women, small traders, artists, and new business owners who previously depended on unofficial loans are among the marginalized populations that the program seeks to empower. Tamil Nadu's strong banking infrastructure and thriving MSE sector make it stand out as a top state in PMMY implementation. While new entrepreneurs create innovation and employment, women entrepreneurs support inclusive growth and increase household incomes. Even if the number of beneficiaries is growing, it's crucial to evaluate the program's efficacy by looking at account growth, credit disbursement, and general interaction with these groups. In order to provide insights into PMMY's effectiveness in promoting financial inclusion and

entrepreneurial development, this study uses secondary data to empirically examine its impact and growth trends among women and new entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu.

Review of Literature

Bolla, Jahan and Kumar (2025) with an emphasis on female entrepreneurs, the study examined the performance of loans made under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. It discovered that PMMY loans in the Shishu, Kishor, and Tarun categories greatly expanded women's access to financial inclusion and entrepreneurial prospects. According to the study, a significant portion of PMMY recipients are women and the program is crucial to the growth of microbusinesses in India.

Tomer (2025) study investigated the ways in which MSMEs assist Indian women entrepreneurs. It made clear that financial assistance and government programs encourage women to launch enterprises and contribute to economic growth. The study also emphasized the importance of favorable policies and institutional financing availability in boosting women's entrepreneurship in the MSME sector.

Tejaswini Bastray et al. (2024) evinces that to improve their social status and self-confidence, many women choose to become entrepreneurs. In order to successfully compete in the market, women-led enterprises typically rely on their own resources, ingenuity, and internal capabilities. The survey also emphasizes how important it is for women entrepreneurs to assist economic growth, improve social welfare, and create jobs.

Saini, Malhotra and Bhushan (2024) examined the effects of government support initiatives on female entrepreneurs and discovered that financial aid and training programs raise their socioeconomic level of entrepreneurship. It highlights the significance of legislative assistance and financial inclusion in promoting women-owned businesses.

Sheba and Vasanthi (2024) investigated the impact of PMMY on the growth of rural entrepreneurship was investigated in this study. The findings indicate that having access to Mudra loans has increased income levels, expanded job prospects, and stimulated entrepreneurial activity in rural areas. The paper also emphasizes how the program has helped numerous small company owners launch their enterprises through institutional loans.

Laxmi Devi (2023) highlighted various barriers including inadequate guidance, restrictive norms, high production costs, and limited leadership in a male-dominated society.

Vosuri Sandhya Rani and Natarajan Sundaram (2023) emphasized the importance of financial inclusion and social engagement for successful entrepreneurship. The importance of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in improving financial access, promoting saving behaviors, and generating entrepreneurial opportunities for women is highlighted by their research.

Salma Bano (2023) estimated that many women have successfully started businesses and reached organizational goals. However, their presence in top management or leadership roles is still limited. The study emphasizes that increased support from government, families, and society is crucial to promote women's entrepreneurial involvement.

Subbarayudu C. H. and Srinivasa Rao C. H. (2021) pointed out that woman entrepreneurs bring new ideas and solve problems in business, contributing to stronger economic growth. However, women still make up a smaller share of entrepreneurs than men, emphasizing the importance of promoting equal participation in economic activities.

Ritwik Saraswat and Remya Lathabhavan (2020) emphasized that inspirational stories, motivational strategies, and entrepreneurial training programs can empower women to overcome traditional barriers and pursue business opportunities.

Jostna Kumar Gantepogu and Priyanka Moola (2019) emphasized the importance of women's entrepreneurship for inclusive growth and socioeconomic progress. However,

women often have to deal with high production costs, marketing obstacles, budgetary constraints, and juggling job and family obligations. To increase women's economic involvement, these structural barriers must be removed.

Vanita Yadav and Jeemol Unni (2016) study reveals that the discipline lacks a strong theoretical basis and is still evolving. To better comprehend women's business paths, they recommend fusing feminist perspectives with traditional ideas of entrepreneurship.

Meenu Maheshwari and Priya Sodani (2015) emphasized how women's entrepreneurship is an essential instrument for socioeconomic advancement and empowerment. Their investigation highlights the ways in which women's participation in entrepreneurship is influenced by cultural, political, and economic issues. The study calls on academics and legislators to develop laws that encourage women-owned enterprises.

Research Gap

A number of studies have examined women's financial inclusion and entrepreneurship in India, particularly in relation to the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. Scholars such as Bolla, Jahan, and Kumar (2025) highlighted PMMY's contribution to improving financial access and assisting women-owned microbusinesses. However, rather than examining particular loan performance measures like utilization, repayment trends, and business viability, the majority of current research focuses on the overall effects of PMMY and associated government activities. Sheba and Vasanthi's (2024) studies concentrate on the growth of rural entrepreneurship but do not provide comprehensive empirical data on the loan performance of female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, there isn't much study that focuses on Tamil Nadu particularly. Consequently, a thorough empirical assessment of PMMY loan performance among female entrepreneurs in this area is required..

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the annual increase in the number of accounts and loan amounts sanctioned under PMMY in Tamil Nadu.
2. To examine the growth and impact of PMMY loans specifically among women entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu..

Statement of the Problem

For women and fledgling business owners in India, access to adequate funding sources remains a significant barrier. Many prospective entrepreneurs are unable to access formal credit due to obstacles such a lack of collateral, a short credit history, and a lack of financial literacy. As a result, they frequently turn to unofficial finance sources, which have high interest rates and limit company expansion. In order to address these problems, the Indian government introduced the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), which uses collateral-free loans to help microenterprise development and encourage financial inclusion. Despite the program's widespread national adoption, its efficacy in particular areas and among the targeted populations has to be assessed. For instance, PMMY loan disbursements have significantly increased in Tamil Nadu, especially for women and new business owners. However, disparities in loan uptake, growth trends, and payout patterns raise significant concerns regarding the overall viability and efficacy of the program. Therefore, in order to comprehend its impact on the growth of entrepreneurship in Tamil Nadu, an empirical analysis of PMMY loan performance within these groups is crucial.

Research Methodology

This empirical study uses secondary data, obtaining data from public sources and the official Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana portal regarding the number of accounts and loan amounts approved under the PMMY plan. It evaluates how well PMMY loans work for

women and young business owners in Tamil Nadu between 2015 and 2016 and 2023 and 2024. The study uses descriptive statistical tools such year-over-year (YoY) growth rate, compound annual growth rate (CAGR), and basic descriptive statistics to examine growth trends in loan accounts and sanctioned amounts.

Limitation of the Study

This study has limitations even if it provides insightful information about how PMMY loans perform among women and new business owners in Tamil Nadu. First of all, it is entirely dependent on secondary data from Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana websites and official reports, which may contain modifications or reporting errors over time. Second, the analysis ignores qualitative aspects like beneficiary satisfaction, access issues, or business performance results in favor of just focusing on quantitative measures like the quantity of accounts and loan amounts authorized. Thirdly, the study solely looks at female entrepreneurs, leaving out other recipient groups like already-existing companies or sector-specific allocations. Fourth, cross-state comparisons are challenging because the study is limited to Tamil Nadu. Lastly, it does not evaluate long-term effects like business sustainability, employment creation, or borrowers' repayment behavior.

Analysis and Discussion

Table No – 1
PMMY Year-Wise Performance Report of Shishu – Women Entrepreneurs
(Amount Rs. in Crore)

Sl. No	Year	No. of A/Cs	YoY Growth%	Sanctioned Amount	YoY Growth%	Total	
						No. of A/Cs	Sanctioned Amount
1	2015-2016	27103118	-	69038.97	-	27628265	82183.55
2	2016-2017	28472344	5.06	66997.91	-2.96	29146894	80289.68
3	2017-2018	32144132	12.89	80371.59	19.97	33558238	103254.12
4	2018-2019	33403579	3.92	96253.15	19.77	37062562	133033.62
5	2019-2020	35718217	6.94	109659.78	13.95	39103349	145181.87
6	2020-2021	27753288	-22.30	74490.46	-32.09	33303604	131303.35
7	2021-2022	30441921	9.70	89621.66	20.34	38429259	166422.47
8	2022-2023	32817496	7.79	112856.7	25.91	44256813	216954.16
9	2023-2024	30193055	-7.98	109355.45	-3.11	42492281	225887.08
CAGR%		1.34		6.02			
MEAN		30894128		89849.52			
MEDIAN		30441921		89621.66			
SD		2690000		17300			
Coefficient of Variation		8.71%		19.26%			

(Sources: www.mudraloan.org)

The performance of "Shishu" loans granted to female entrepreneurs under the "Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana" from 2015–2016 to 2023–2024 is displayed annually in Table 1. According to the data, the number of loan accounts rose from 27,103,118 in 2015–2016 to 35,718,217 in 2019–2020, suggesting that women are becoming more involved in the microfinance industry. The scheme's early years saw robust expansion, as seen by the highest

growth rate of 12.89% in 2017–2018. However, there was a significant drop of –22.30% in 2020–2021, mostly as a result of economic disruptions brought on by COVID-19. In 2021–2022 and 2022–2023, the number of accounts progressively increased, but in 2023–2024, it slightly decreased once more. The overall Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 1.34% indicates a moderate rate of long-term beneficiary growth. The overall sanctioned amount rose from ₹69,038.97 crore in 2015–2016 to ₹109,355.45 crore in 2023–2024, with the largest growth of 25.91% in 2022–2023, notwithstanding variations during the pandemic. A consistent increase trend in financial support is indicated by a CAGR of 6.02%. With an average sanctioned value of ₹89,849.52 crore and a Coefficient of fluctuation of 19.26%, there is a moderate fluctuation in the distribution of credit as opposed to 8.71% in account numbers. Overall, the data shows that financial assistance to female entrepreneurs falling under the "Shishu" category is on the rise.

Table No – 2
PMMY Year-Wise Performance Report of Kishore – Women Entrepreneurs
(Amount Rs. in Crore)

Sl. No	Year	No. of A/Cs	YoY Growth%	Sanctioned Amount	YoY Growth%	Total	
						No. of A/Cs	Sanctioned Amount
1	2015-2016	473536	-	9068.03	-	27628265	82183.55
2	2016-2017	624925	31.9	9541.63	5.2	29146894	80289.68
3	2017-2018	1335192	113.6	16586.84	73.4	33558238	103254.12
4	2018-2019	2875392	115.5	26741.23	61.2	37062562	133033.62
5	2019-2020	2988307	3.9	26476.69	-1.0	39103349	145181.87
6	2020-2021	5468211	83.1	50730.64	91.7	33303604	131303.35
7	2021-2022	7892778	44.4	70027.9	38.0	38429259	166422.47
8	2022-2023	11285672	43.6	92756.54	32.5	44256813	216954.16
9	2023-2024	12104591	7.3	102677.87	10.7	42492281	225887.08
CAGR%		38.23		30.34			
MEAN		5005400		44956.37			
MEDIAN		2988307		26741.23			
SD		4200000		33900			
Coefficient of Variation		83.9%		75.4%			

(Sources: www.mudraloan.org)

The performance of the "Kishore" category loans given to female entrepreneurs under the "Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana" from 2015–2016 to 2023–2024 is displayed annually in Table No. 2. The number of loan accounts increased significantly during this time, according to the data. Accounts grew from 473,536 in 2015–2016 to 12,104,591 in 2023–2024, demonstrating the quick expansion of women entrepreneurs' access to capital. In 2017–2018 (113.6%) and 2018–2019 (115.5%), growth rates were very high, demonstrating the robust involvement and growth of women-owned small companies. The number of accounts increased once more in 2020–2021 (83.1%) and continued to rise steadily after that, despite a modest slowdown in growth in 2019–2020 (3.9%). Significant long-term growth in loan accounts is shown in the total Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 38.23%. As a

result, the total amount of loans disbursed rose from ₹9,068.03 crore in 2015–2016 to ₹1,02,677.87 crore in 2023–2024. The program saw a slight decline of -1.0% in 2019–2020, but it recovered significantly in the years that followed. The expanding financial assistance is highlighted by a CAGR of 30.34%. With a high Coefficient of Variation of 75.4%, the average loan amount disbursed was ₹44,956.37 crore, demonstrating significant variations during the study period. Overall, this table shows how quickly financial assistance for female entrepreneurs in the "Kishore" sector has grown and expanded.

Table No – 3
PMMY Year-Wise Performance Report of Tarun – Women Entrepreneurs
(Amount Rs. in Crore)

Sl. No	Year	No. of A/Cs	YoY Growth%	Sanctioned Amount	YoY Growth%	Total	
						No. of A/Cs	Sanctioned Amount
1	2015-2016	51611	-	4076.55	-	27628265	82183.55
2	2016-2017	49625	-3.9	3330.54	-18.3	29146894	80289.68
3	2017-2018	78914	59.2	6295.7	89.0	33558238	103254.12
4	2018-2019	783591	897.5	10039.23	59.7	37062562	133033.62
5	2019-2020	397825	-49.2	9045.4	-9.9	39103349	145181.87
6	2020-2021	82105	-79.3	6082.24	-32.7	33303604	131303.35
7	2021-2022	94560	15.2	6772.91	11.3	38429259	166422.47
8	2022-2023	153645	62.6	11340.92	67.9	44256813	216954.16
9	2023-2024	194635	26.7	13853.76	22.2	42492281	225887.08
CAGR%		14.86		14.86			
MEAN		209612		7870.81			
MEDIAN		94560		6772.91			
SD		226000		3340			
Coefficient of Variation		107.8%		42.4%			

(Sources: www.mudraloan.org)

The 'Tarun' category loans provided to women entrepreneurs under the 'Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana' plan from 2015–2016 to 2023–2024 are shown in Table No. 3. The data reveals significant variations in the quantity of loan accounts during this time. Accounts somewhat declined from 51,611 in 2015–2016 to 49,625 in 2016–2017. 2017–2018 had a notable increase of 59.2%, and 2018–2019 saw an incredible surge with 783,591 accounts—an astounding growth rate of 897.5%. This indicates a significant increase in the "Tarun" category's support for female entrepreneurs. However, accounts fell by 49.2% in 2019–2020 and 49.2% in 2020–2021 as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic.

After that, the program gradually recovered, with 194,635 accounts in 2023–2024. With a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 14.86%, the long-term growth is still moderate. The overall loan amount disbursed during the study period likewise fluctuated, but it eventually increased to ₹13,853.76 crore in 2023–2024 from ₹4,076.55 crore in 2015–2016. A modest degree of variability in the loan amount is indicated by a Coefficient of Variation of 42.4%; on the other hand, the high variability in the number of accounts (107.8%) demonstrates the instability in the number of beneficiaries under this category.

Overall, this table shows that the financial support given to female entrepreneurs through "Tarun" category loans has gradually improved.

Findings

Several important conclusions can be drawn from an examination of yearly statistics on loans approved to female entrepreneurs under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. The 'Shishu' category had the most loan accounts during the study period, indicating that most female entrepreneurs prefer small loans to launch microbusinesses. The overall loan sanctioned in this category climbed gradually, suggesting greater financial support, despite some variations, particularly during 2020–2021 because to the COVID-19 epidemic. Both the number of accounts and the loan amounts in the "Kishor" category increased significantly. The quick expansion and growing role of female entrepreneurs in small enterprises are shown by the high CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) in both indicators. The 'Tarun' category, on the other hand, had significant variations in account numbers throughout time. The overall sanctioned amount steadily rose in spite of this volatility, indicating growing assistance for larger businesses. All things considered, the evidence shows that PMMY has been crucial in advancing financial inclusion in India and supporting the development of female entrepreneurs.

Recommendations

Based on the results, a number of recommendations have been made to enhance the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana's ability to assist women entrepreneurs. First, as many female entrepreneurs are still ignorant of the scheme's advantages, the government and financial institutions should intensify awareness campaigns, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Participation can be increased through campaigns run by local organizations, self-help groups, and digital platforms. Second, banks should simplify the loan application and approval procedures to make them easier to understand and more transparent for women who are applying for the first time. This is because many of them encounter challenges because of low financial literacy and problems with documentation. Thirdly, in order to help women make good use of their loans, financial institutions should offer training and skill development programs in areas like digital marketing, business management, and financial planning. Last but not least, continuous oversight and assistance are necessary to guarantee that funds are utilized properly and to encourage the long-term development of women-led enterprises.

Conclusion

According to the survey, the Shishu, Kishore, and Tarun loan sectors of the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) provide financial assistance to women entrepreneurs. The Shishu sector has the greatest number of beneficiaries, according to the data, indicating that many women rely on small loans to launch microbusinesses. Both the number of accounts and the total amount of sanctioned loans in the Kishore sector have grown quickly, suggesting the expansion of women-led enterprises. Financial support has gradually increased over time, notwithstanding minor changes in the Tarun section. The COVID-19 pandemic's economic effects were the primary cause of the decline in 2020–2021, but recovery took place in the years that followed. In general, PMMY has improved formal credit availability, increased financial inclusion, and promoted economic growth and empowerment among Indian women entrepreneurs.

Future Scope of the Study

By examining secondary data on loan accounts and authorized amounts, this study examined the performance of female entrepreneurs under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana.

By gathering primary data to investigate the impact of these loans on income, job creation, and business sustainability for female entrepreneurs, future research might expand on this. There may be geographical variations in loan availability if beneficiaries from rural and urban areas are compared. Further studies might also examine the impact of digital banking, training programs, and financial literacy on loan use. Policymakers might enhance the program's efficacy and outcomes with the use of these findings.

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A Call to End Gender-Based Violence

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Gender-Based Violence is one of the persistent and damaging challenges to our society's growth and well-being. Tackling it requires more than just policies—it requires a collective, sustained effort to shift mindsets, strengthen support systems, and empower every citizen to act.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has proposed a comprehensive framework to deepen our impact at every level—from spreading legal literacy to strengthening emergency response systems. The key areas of focus include:

Legal Awareness for All

We must ensure that every woman, girl, and frontline worker knows the rights and remedies available under laws like the important Domestic Violence Act 2005, POSH Act 2013, POCSO Act 2012, and the new criminal laws—BNS and BNSS, 2023—especially concerning victim compensation and legal recourse.

Digital Outreach

A dynamic social media campaign by using powerful hashtags, relatable visuals, and easy-to-understand content will help to spread awareness on helplines (112, 181, 1098), One Stop Centres, the SHe Box portal, and the Bal Vivah Mukh Bharat (BVMB) Abhiyan. The aim is to ensure no woman feels isolated or helpless when seeking help.

Safe Workplaces and Confidential Reporting

Working women must know that the SHe Box portal <https://shebox.wcd.gov.in/> offers a secure and confidential channel to report workplace harassment without fear. This is not just a tool and it is a statement that their safety and dignity matter.

Strengthening the Safety Net for Women and Children

Awareness of emergency numbers and services like 112, 181, and 1098 needs to become second nature. These helplines are lifelines and must be quick, accessible, and effective for anyone in distress. They should be circulated and be inculcated in women and children to call at the time a problem arises. See: <https://whl.tnsw.in/index.html>

Preventing Child Marriages, Protecting Childhoods

Through the BVMB portal, citizens can now report child marriage cases and seek swift redressal. We need to make this portal a known and trusted resource in every community. See: <https://stopchildmarriage.wcd.gov.in/>

Connection of the Dots under Mission Shakti Movement

The services like One Stop Centres, Hubs for Empowerment, Shakti Sadan, and Sakhi Niwas must be accessible and visible. We also need to link these with Gender Resource Centres under State Rural Livelihood Missions to ensure seamless support at the grassroots. See: <https://missionshakti.wcd.gov.in/>

Education as the Main Foundation

The conduct of workshops in schools and colleges are crucial by teaching young minds about gender equality, consent, healthy relationships and the importance of respecting dignity. When we shape attitudes early, we shape a better future.

Men and Boys as Allies

The idea of positive masculinity must be promoted through curricula, training

materials and community dialogues. The concepts like shared caregiving, co-parenting and rejecting exploitation need to be normalised—not as 'women's issues' but as human values.

Sensitising the Frontline Work

The Anganwadi workers, childcare staff and counsellors at OSC, Shakti Sadan and Sakhi Niwas are the first point of contact for many survivors. So, they must be trained to respond with empathy, awareness and efficiency for the victims.

Hence, the stakeholders ought to own this agenda to act with urgency and ensure that no woman, child, or survivor is left unheard, unseen, or unsupported at the time of violence.

Let us join hands and move forward with compassion, commitment and conviction to stop Gender-Based Violence.

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A Cross-State Analysis to Establish Relationship between Secondary Education and Women's Well-being in India using NFHS-5 Data

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Abstract

This research paper examines the relationship between attainment of secondary education and the well-being of women across states of India. Three specific dimensions of women's well-being are considered: (1) Reproductive Well-being, (2) Personal well-being, and (3) Economic Well-being. Along these three dimensions, several key indicators of women's well-being are computed from the country-level datasets of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). For the purpose of key indicator computation from the corresponding sub-indicators, we use dendrogram techniques and/or standardization followed by averaging of constituent datapoints. The cross-correlations between attainment of secondary education and the key indicators are computed across states of India and their relationships are established by validating their respective statistical significance. The results in this paper provide empirical evidence from NFHS-5 data on the strong association between secondary education and multiple aspects of women's well-being.

Keywords: Women's Well-Being, Secondary Education, NFHS-5, PLFS, Cross-State Analysis.

1. Introduction

Women's well-being is widely recognized as a central objective of contemporary social development policy. It is conceptualized as a multidimensional state of holistic health encompassing physical, psychological, social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Women's education plays a pivotal role in shaping their well-being. Education enhances awareness, builds self-confidence, challenges entrenched gender stereotypes, expands economic opportunities, and strengthens decision-making capacity. Secondary education, in particular, marks a critical threshold that can significantly influence women's life choices and opportunities and thereby impact their long-term well-being. In this research paper, we investigate the associations between attainment of secondary education in India and three key dimensions of women's well-being, namely, (1) Reproductive Well-being, (2) Personal well-being, and (3) Economic Well-being.

1.1. Literature Survey

Women's well-being is defined by Lips and Gordon (2010) as a holistic state of physical, emotional, social and economic health. Given the multi-dimensional nature of women's well-being, it has been studied in the literature since 1980s along specific dimensions. Glenn and Weaver (1981) studied the impact of education on the psychological well-being of women. Hill and King (1995) studied the impact of education on economic well-being. Blau (1997) analysed the trends (1970-1995) in women's well-being and noticed that different levels of education led to differentiated well-being outcomes. Mead et al.

(2001) observed a relationship between low education and poorer physical health outcomes. Gokhale et al. (2002) observed strong association between low literacy rate and high infant mortality rate in India. Klumb and Lampert (2004) summarised 161 measures of impact of employment on women's well-being where they commented on potential role of education as a driver of women's employment. Breierova and Duflo (2004) noticed the prominent role of education in controlling fertility and reducing child mortality in Indonesia. Johansson et al. (2007) used the data from Sweden to examine how a combination of education, occupation and family involvement impacts the health and well-being outcomes in women. Desjardins (2008) researched links between education and well-being in OECD countries and noticed challenges related to data limitations and measuring education and its impact.

Chen and Li (2009) found mother's education to be an important determinant of the health of adopted children in China, noting the importance of post-natal nurturing. Jones et al. (2010) argued that women's health and education are mutually reinforcing foundations of family and societal well-being, with improvements in both leading to broader social and intergenerational health benefits. Graff et al. (2010) studied the pathways between child growth and fertility rate in Guatemala and commented on the critical role of education in influencing the same. Ross and Mirwowsky (2010) argued that education impacts women's health more than men's health. Beaman et al. (2012) found that female leadership influences adolescent girls career aspirations and educational attainment. Saurabh et al (2013) demonstrated that female literacy rate is a stronger predictor of reduced birth rates and lower infant mortality in India than other socio-demographic factors. Muralidharan and Prakash (2013) recognized that the targeted government scheme 'Cycle to School' in the poor Indian state of Bihar increased girls' enrolment in secondary education by 30%. Illakiya and Kanchana Ratnam (2018) identified women's education in India as a foundational driver of improvements in health, economic development, and social outcomes.

Maas (2020) argues that educating and empowering women within healthcare systems is essential to advancing women's health outcomes. Reshi et al. (2022) observed that access to education has significant impact on women's empowerment. Hemamalini (2023) highlighted the importance of targeted educational interventions such as vocational training and sex specific curricula to fully mobilize the potential of education as a vehicle for women empowerment. Singh et al. (2023) found education to be one of the determinants of age of first marriage in India. Almgren et al. (2024) found substantial association between secondary education and women empowerment in the MENA region. Banerjee and Kayal (2024) recommended female education, along with reduction in income disparities and improved health care provisioning, for reducing inequality in women's health. Bhuwania et al. (2024) analyzed the impact of Mahila Samakhya (MS) scheme on the educational outcomes for women in selected districts of India. In five distinct contributions, UN Women and UNDP (2023), Vignitha et al. (2024), Vemireddy (2024), Mukhopadhyay (2025), and Sehgal et al. (2025) proposed indices to measure women empowerment and woman health. In a meta-analysis work, Jain and Mathur (2025) found education to be a statistically significant contributor to women empowerment in nine publications on the subject, thereby cementing its central role in women's well-being.

1.2. Motivation for this work

The central role of education in improving women's well-being is well-recognized. Given this central role, the government of India has launched numerous large scale initiatives such as 'Sukanya Samridhi Scheme' and 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' (see Government of India (2015)) over the last 10-15 years to improve educational attainment of women in India.

Further, the government continues to devote sizable investments towards improvement of women's well-being, as highlighted in its Union Budget published by the Ministry of Finance (2026), which places Women along with Poor, Young and Farmers at the centre of all development measures. Given the ongoing scale and investments committed by the government of India to enhance women's well-being through education, it is important to frequently reassess the relationship between educational attainment of women and the measurable indicators of women's well-being. To this end, with the publication of India's two largest countrywide survey programs, namely, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), it is now possible to freshly estimate relationships between education and several old and new indicators of women's well-being. Both the surveys have a wide coverage where NFHS-5 (2019–21) covers 636,699 households across 28 states and 8 union territories (altogether 707 districts) of India and the PLFS surveys approximately 80,000–100,000 households each quarter. Leveraging the richness of these new datasets, the key motivation behind this research paper is to examine the cross-state statistical relationships between women's education—specifically secondary education—and key indicators of women's well-being.

2. Aims and Objectives of this Study

In this study, we focus on statistical relationships between attainment of secondary education and three specific dimensions of women's well-being, namely, (i) Reproductive Well-being, (ii) Personal Well-being, and (iii) Economic Well-being. Across these three dimensions, we focus on eight key indicators of women's well-being:

Reproductive Well-being

- 1) Mean Age at Marriage
- 2) Reduction in Fertility rate
- 3) Maternal and child health

Personal Well-being

- 4) Freedom from violence
- 5) Information Connectivity and Awareness

Economic Health

- 6) Household Quality of Life
- 7) Participation in Financial Decision-Making
- 8) Workforce participation

We leverage the publicly available government survey data sets of NFHS-5 and PLFS to compute these eight indicators. While a few of these indicators such as mean age at marriage and fertility rate are available directly in the data sets, the other indicator are computed from survey data points using statistical and dendrogram techniques.

3. Data Description

3.1. NFHS-5 Data

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) (2019-21) data is a large-scale household survey data covering all 28 states and 8 Union Territories of India. It is conducted by the International Institute For Population Sciences (IIPS), a research institute under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. NFHS-5 provides district and state-level estimates for a wide range of demographic, health, and socio-economic indicators. The survey collected information from approximately 636,000 households and interviewed over 724,000 women (aged 15–49) and 101,000 men (aged 15–54). It includes data on fertility, maternal and child health, nutrition, mortality, immunization, anaemia, women's empowerment, domestic violence, sanitation, housing conditions, and health insurance

coverage. The survey follows a stratified two-stage sampling design. NFHS-5 is being widely used for policy evaluation, program design, and academic research in public health, gender studies, and development economics.

3.2. PLFS Data

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is a countrywide labour market survey conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India. Launched in 2017–18, the PLFS provides annual estimates of key labour market indicators such as labour force participation rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR), and unemployment rate (UR) for individuals aged 15 years and above. The survey uses a stratified multi-stage sampling design covering both rural and urban areas across all states and union territories. PLFS also collects detailed information on employment type, industry, occupation, education, and wages, making it an important source for analysing employment trends and workforce participation in India.

4. Methods

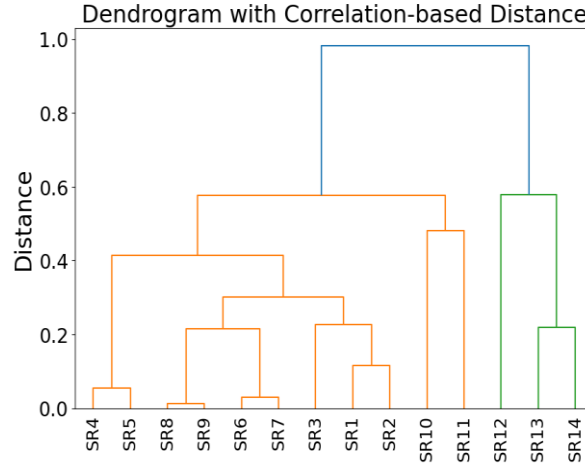
The computation of key indicators and estimation of statistical relationships with attainment of secondary education are described below:

Key indicators of Reproductive Well-being:

1. *Mean age at Marriage:* This is a simple indicator, directly available in the NFHS-5 data. A higher mean age at marriage is indicative of freedom from child marriage as well as from patriarchal mindset of treating young unmarried women as 'paraya dhan' in traditional Indian families.
2. *Reduction in Fertility Rate:* This is a again a simple indicator available in the NFHS-5 data. Given the historically high fertility rates in the country, a lower fertility rate is indicative of better reproductive well-being.
3. *Maternal & Child Health:* We compute this indicator from the following fourteen relevant Survey Responses (SRs) catalogued in the NFHS-5 data:
 - SR 1: % receiving ANC (ante-natal care) from a skilled provider
 - SR 2: % who had four or more ANC visit
 - SR 3: % with an ANC visit in the first trimester during pregnancy
 - SR 4: % who took IFA (iron and folic acid) for at least 180 days
 - SR 5: % who received all recommended types of antenatal care
 - SR 6: % of deliveries with a postnatal health check for the mother
 - SR 7: % of deliveries with a postnatal mother health check in 2 days of birth
 - SR 8: % births delivered in a healthcare facility
 - SR 9: % deliveries assisted by a skilled provider
 - SR10: % births delivered by a C-section
 - SR11: All age-appropriate vaccinations of child
 - SR 12: % mothers with child <2yrs with stool disposed-off properly
 - SR 13: Anaemia in Children (<11.0g/dl)
 - SR 14: Anaemia in Women (<12.0 g/dl)

We combine these multiple (sometimes overlapping) survey responses or SRs into meaningful sub-indicators of Maternal & Child health by doing hierarchical clustering using dendrograms. We first compute cross-correlation matrices of all SRs where correlation coefficients are computed across the SR data for the 28 states and 8 union territories of India. We then use '1-correlation coefficients' as distances to build dendrograms of the 14 SRs, resulting in two meaningful groups of SRs. Each SR in a group is significantly correlated (correlation coefficient > 0.4 or distance < 0.6) with the rest of the SRs in that group while

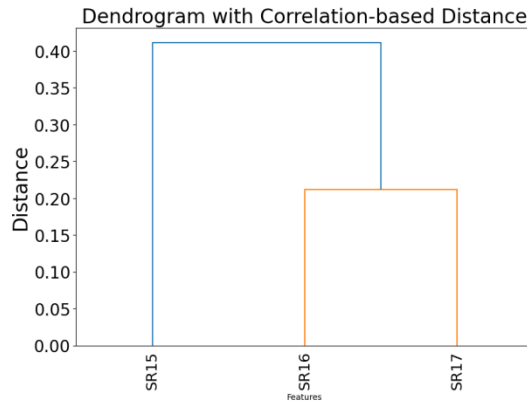
having much lower correlations with SRs in the other two groups. The dendrogram is visually shown as below:



A single sub-indicator for each group is computed by standardizing all SRs in that group using $(X - X_{min}) / (X_{max} - X_{min})$ standardization and taking the averages of standardized SRs. This results in two sub-indicators of Maternal & Child Health. We call these as Sub-Indicator 1 and Sub-Indicator 2.

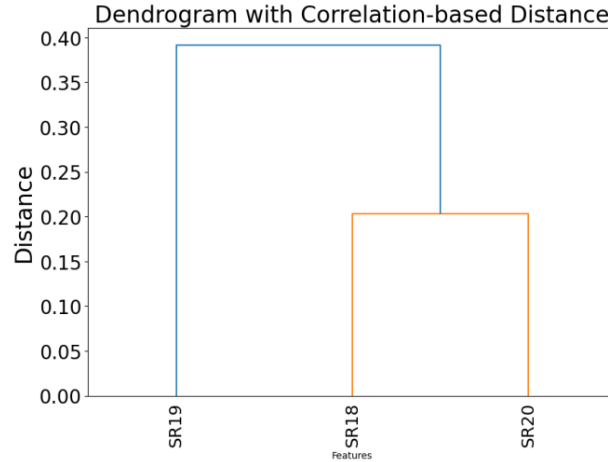
Key Indicators of Personal Well-Being:

4. *Freedom from violence:* We compute a single composite indicator by combining three fundamental SRs in NFHS-5:
 SR 15: Freedom from Physical Violence
 SR 16: Freedom from Emotional Violence
 SR 17: Freedom from Sexual Violence



Since the above dendrogram indicates a reasonably high correlation (>0.6) among the three SRs, These three SRs are combined into a single indicator using the same technique as used in indicator 3, namely, average of standardized values of these SRs.

5. *Information Connectivity & Awareness:* A single indicator is computed by combining the following SRs:
 SR 18: % females who have phones that they use themselves
 SR 19: % females who use messaging services
 SR 20: % females who use internet



Once again, given the high correlations among three indicators, they are combined into a single composite indicator.

Key Indicators of Economic Well-Being:

6. *Household Quality of Life:* We consider the following five SRs to assess household quality of life in Indian context:

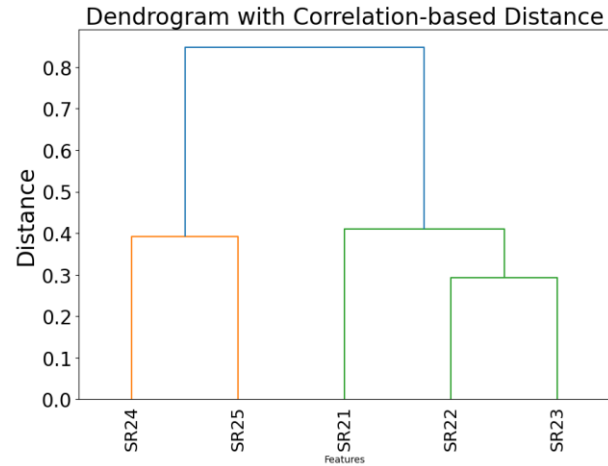
SR 21: % households with electricity

SR 22: % households living in a pucca house (made of bricks and cement)

SR 23: % households uplifted from solid fuel to gas etc. for cooking

SR 24: % households with toilet facility

SR 25: % households with improved toilet facility



The two groups are individually combined into two sub-indicators, which we label Sub-Indicator 3 and Sub-Indicator 4.

7. *Participation in Financial Decision-Making:* For this indicator, we consider the following SRs:

SR 26: % who alone or jointly with husband decide how her earnings are used

SR 27: % who alone or jointly with husband decide how husband's earnings are used

SR 28: % who earn more or about the same as their husband

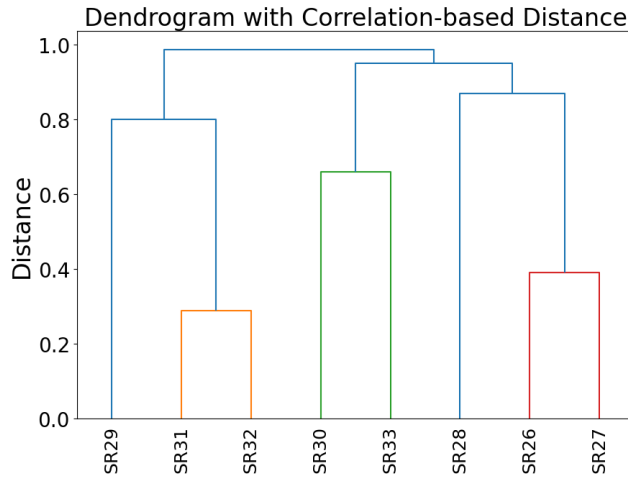
SR 29: % who have money that they can decide how to use

SR 30: % who have a bank or savings account that they themselves use

SR 31: % who have knowledge of a microcredit programme

SR 32: % who have taken a loan from a microcredit programme

SR 33: % who use mobile phone for financial transactions



The key challenge in this indicator is that the constituent SRs do not exhibit much correlation with each other. Consequently, it is difficult to come up with neat groups or corresponding sub-indicators. We therefore combine the eight SRs into a single indicator by averaging the standardized SRs.

8. *Workforce Participation*: We consider two specific metrics available in the PLFS data for workforce participation of women, namely:

SR 34: Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR); and

SR 35: Ratio of Female LFPR to Male LFPR (as used by the Niti Aayog (2024) of India in its sustainable development goals).

As it turns out, the correlation among the two metrics is 0.7, and hence we combine the two metrics into a single indicator by post standardization averaging.

Estimating relationships with attainment of secondary education

For each of these indicators, we check whether the feature is normally distributed or not using Shapiro Wilk Test. For a normally distributed feature group, we find its correlation with female secondary education (which is normally distributed) using Pearson's correlation coefficient. For a non-normal single feature group, we find its correlation with female secondary education using Spearman's rank correlation. All cross correlations are computed across states and union-territories of India.

5. Results and Analysis

Our results related to the multi-faceted relationships between attainment of secondary education and the three pertinent dimensions of women's well-being, as measured through the eight indicators computed from the NHFS-5 and PLFS data, are summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Eight indicators computed from the NHFS-5 and PLFS data

Well-Being Dimension	Indicator of Well-Being	Type of Indicator	Correlation with Secondary Education	p-value
Reproductive Well-being	Mean Age of Marriage	Simple	0.5116	0.01494
	Reduction in Fertility Rate	Simple	0.5683	0.00030
	Maternal & Child Health	Composite	0.5770	0.00023

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-Indicator 1 • Sub-Indicator 2 	Composite	0.5602	0.00038
Personal Well-being	Freedom from Violence	Composite	0.5295	0.00089
	Information Connectivity and awareness	Composite	0.8114	0.00001
Economic Well-being	Household Quality			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-Indicator 3 • Sub-Indicator 4 	Composite	0.6940	0.00001
		Composite	0.5989	0.00011
	Participation in Financial Decision-Making	Composite	0.2207	0.19590
	Workforce Participation	Composite	0.08192	0.6348

We observe that for six of the eight indicators considered (namely, mean age of marriage, reduction in fertility rate, maternal & child health, freedom from violence, information connectivity and awareness and household quality of life), the correlation with attainment of secondary education is more than 0.5 with the highest being 0.81 for information connectivity and awareness and the lowest being 0.51 for mean age of marriage. This clean evidence obtained from such large scale surveys and computed using cross-correlations across states and union territories of India, strengthens the widespread findings in the literature related to strong relationship between education and women's well-being.

The importance of using secondary education rather than any specific variant of tertiary education obviates the challenge stated by Desjardins (2008) for OECD data where it was noted that measuring education can be complex. In the case of India, unlike OECD, the standards for secondary education are fairly uniform across states and union territories even though tertiary education and economic strength (GDP/capita) can be quite different across states.

The relationship between secondary education and two key indicators of economic well-being (namely, participation in financial decision making and workforce participation) were found to be low at 0.22 and 0.08, respectively. With regard to participation in financial decision making, the low correlation may not necessarily imply that secondary education is not empowering women along this indicator. On the other hand, this is one of the indicators where SRs themselves are quite uncorrelated (in the dendrogram) and hence the consolidated indicator computed from these SRs may or may not be a good measure of autonomy in financial decision making. Further, the low correlation of secondary education with workforce participation may be indicative that economic opportunities and other factors may play a more dominant role in workforce participation than education alone.

6. Concluding remarks

Women's well-being is a key objective of contemporary social development policy. A number of works in the literature point to relationship between education and women's well-being. In light of the large survey datasets of NFHS-5 and PLFS made available by the government of India, we reassessed the relationships between attainment of secondary education among women in India and their reproductive, personal and economic well-being. We specifically focused on eight indicators, including certain composite indicators and sub-indicators, which could be estimated using NFHS-5 and PLFS datasets. We found evidence of the strong relationships between secondary education and six of the eight indicators, while

little evidence of relationship with the remaining two indicators. The strong correlation may not necessarily indicate that secondary education is the driver of all these six indicators. For instance, a family with high household quality of life is likely to be richer and hence more likely to get access to secondary education for its girl child. At an aggregate level, however, the high correlations with such diverse set of indicators is indicative of the central role of secondary education in well-being of women in India. While the above results were obtained through cross-correlations for 36 states and union territories in India, the relationships obtained through cross-correlations at district levels provide a similar picture (albeit district data is available for far fewer SRs) and skipped here for brevity. The government of India is consistently increasing the granularity and richness of its survey datasets. For example, NFHS-5 is significantly richer in both content and coverage compared to NFHS-4 data. Further, the frequency of PLFS has increased from annually to quarterly. These survey datasets with vast coverage enable better assessment of social issues than what was feasible till a few years back. While the data is not currently rich enough to assess other aspects of well-being, specially psychological and environmental well-being of women, such an analysis might be feasible with future datasets. Further, with richer datasets of future, it may be possible to study impact of tertiary education on workforce participation of women, a topic which was out of scope for this paper.

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