

The Background of Violations of Women's Rights in Rural Tamilnadu from 1921 – 2011

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Abstract

Women were living without peace and rights and without the right to live on this earth. Women lived as if they were enslaved without knowing who they were and performed rituals and ceremonies. The Women India Association in particular was the first organization to be formed in Tamil Nadu. The Women's Indian Association has been very proactive in liaising with Indian women's organizations abroad. In this way, the conditions of women abroad were adjusted to the conditions in India and they directly witnessed the plight of women in India. These women's organizations not only carried out struggles for reformist ideas but also received lessons and did much socially minded work. They created libraries, education, councils, hospitals, etc. and worked there. This manuscript critically examines the trajectory of women's rights violations in rural Tamil Nadu from 1921 to 2011. It explores the intersection of caste, patriarchy, and socio-political movements, highlighting both systemic oppression and resistance. The study draws on historical records, feminist scholarship and regional movements to contextualize the lived realities of rural women.

Keywords: Women's rights, Caste, Education, Violations and Gender Hierarchies

1. Introduction

The survey that the reason of violence against women is the lack of gender-friendly environment and improper functional infrastructure such as consumption of alcohol and drugs in open area, lack of adequate lighting, unsafe public toilets, sidewalks, lack of effective police protection, lack of technical improvement, help lines, insecurity in public transports etc. (Mehta et al. 2017). Girl students in the schools and colleges faced more crimes against them by teachers, van and bus drivers, tuition masters, vagrant boy students in the school. In some places girl children are sale by her parents for money Women during Vedic period have equal states with man in all aspects of life (Roy 2017). Women were educated. Women were allowed to study the Vedas. In some regions of Tamil Nadu were ruled by women. Women were owing property in their own right and disposing of it as their choice. During the sangam period forty women poetesses had lived and left behind their valuable works (Regi S 2015).

During the course of time, so many invasions caused mixed culture so the situation continued with slight changes. Even, in the middle class Tamil households, the birth of a girl child was normally not welcomed; the practices of infanticides were common in that time (Saravanan 2002). The wife was to be the mother of sons only. Education rejected. Instead of, they were trained at home to become efficient wives and mothers. Socio-economical and political rights are prohibits women contribution. The girls were married at a very young age. Child marriage was also in vogue. Manasmiriti as the divine code of conduct and, accordingly, the status of women as depicted in the text has been interpreted as divine law (Mayee Sahoo 2016). Since women are not capable of living independently. She is to be kept under the custody of her father's child, under her husband as a wife and under her son as a widow. It is a duty of all husbands to exert total control over their wives.

In particular, the Women's Indian Association has been very proactive in liaising with Indian women's organizations abroad. In this way, the conditions of women abroad were adjusted to the conditions in India and they directly witnessed the plight of women in India. They did all the means to make sense of being an Indian woman. These women's organizations not only carried out struggles for reformist ideas but also received lessons and did much socially minded work. As well as created on the basis that there are so many specialties to be done for women. They created libraries, education, councils, hospitals, etc. and worked there. They also started branches in rural areas. Tamil Nadu, a state with a rich cultural and political legacy, has witnessed profound transformations in gender dynamics. Yet, rural women—especially from marginalized castes—have faced persistent violations of rights, often obscured by dominant narratives of progress.

During the period of India's independence, the women's body movement stood up for this freedom struggle and did meditative work with their dedication especially to Gandhiji many women's organizations and individual women participated in her struggles. The women of Tamil Nadu were very helpful to Gandhiji in South Africa and participated in those struggles and achieved great success. Based on this, he said, even when Gandhiji started the Non-Cooperation Movement in India, the outlaw movement was to include women voluntarily in political struggles such as individual satyagraha. This is from the time he started the Non-Cooperation Movement and he accepted the call and the majority of women in Tamil Nadu participated in this non-cooperation movement in every district. Students in particular and those from colleges also took part in the freedom struggles that took place in these struggles. Gradually the common problems of individual women were discovered by women's organizations from abroad and the period in which they formed the Women's Organization for the appropriate solutions under their rule was going on in one area at the beginning of the freedom struggle. In these struggles women slowly participated in every satyagraha and every struggle. Female martyrs from different districts in Tamil Nadu participated in all such struggles and were imprisoned for almost three months and 6 months to one year.

2. Early 20th Century (1921–1947): Colonial Shadows and Patriarchal Norms

2.1 Caste and Gender Hierarchies

- Rural Tamil Nadu was deeply entrenched in caste-based patriarchy.
- Women from Dalit and tribal communities were subjected to bonded labor, sexual exploitation and denial of education.

2.2 Devadasi System and Temple Exploitation

- The devadasi system, though legally abolished later, persisted in rural pockets.
- Girls were dedicated to temples, often leading to lifelong sexual servitude.

2.3 Early Resistance

- The Self-Respect Movement (founded by Periyar in 1925) challenged caste and gender oppression.
- Women began participating in public discourse, though rural inclusion remained limited.

3. Post-Independence Era (1947–1977): Legal Reforms vs. Ground Realities

3.1 Legislative Advances

- Abolition of the devadasi system (1947) and Hindu Code Bills (1955–56) aimed to empower women.
- However, rural enforcement was weak, and customary practices continued.

3.2 Education and Health Disparities

- Female literacy in rural Tamil Nadu remained below 20% until the 1970s.
- Maternal mortality and child marriage were rampant, especially among Dalit communities.

3.3 Political Mobilization

- Women's wings of Dravidian parties emerged, but rural women were rarely represented.
- Local panchayats remained male-dominated, reinforcing patriarchal control.

4. The Emergency and Aftermath (1977–1991): Repression and Awakening

4.1 Gendered Violence

- Reports of custodial rape, domestic violence, and dowry deaths increased.
- Rural women lacked access to legal recourse or shelters.

4.2 Rise of Grassroots Movements

- NGOs like RUWSEC (Rural Women's Social Education Centre) began working in villages.
- Women's collectives addressed reproductive rights, domestic violence, and caste discrimination.

4.3 Media and Visibility

- Tamil cinema began portraying rural women's struggles, though often sensationalized.
- Public discourse on gender rights gained traction, but rural narratives remained peripheral.

5. Liberalization Era (1991–2011): Economic Shifts and Gendered Exploitation

5.1 Migration and Labor Exploitation

- Rural women entered textile and brick kiln industries under exploitative conditions.
- Sexual harassment and wage discrimination were widespread.

5.2 Education and Empowerment

- Female literacy rose to 64% by 2011, but dropout rates remained high in rural areas.
- Government schemes like SHGs (Self-Help Groups) empowered some women economically.

5.3 Persistent Violations

- Honor killings, caste-based sexual violence, and witch-hunting persisted.
- Legal mechanisms were underutilized due to fear, stigma, and lack of awareness.

Table 1: Timeline of Key Events and Violations (1921–2011)

Period	Major Events	Forms of Rights Violations	Affected Groups
1921–1947	Self-Respect Movement, Devadasi system	Temple exploitation, denial of education, caste-based servitude	Dalit and tribal women
1947–1977	Abolition of Devadasi system, Hindu Code Bills	Domestic violence, child marriage, lack of legal access	Rural women across castes
1977–1991	Emergency period, rise of NGOs	Custodial rape, dowry deaths, political exclusion	Marginalized rural women
1991–2011	Economic liberalization, SHG programs	Labor exploitation, honor killings, sexual violence	Migrant laborers, Dalit women

Table 2: Structural Factors Contributing to Violations

Factor	Description	Impact on Women’s Rights	Examples
Caste System	Hierarchical social order	Institutionalized discrimination and violence	Devadasi system, manual scavenging
Patriarchy	Male-dominated norms and institutions	Suppression of autonomy and mobility	Child marriage, domestic violence
Economic Marginalization	Limited access to land, credit, jobs	Dependency and vulnerability to exploitation	Textile labor, bonded labor
Political Exclusion	Underrepresentation in governance	Lack of voice in policy and justice	Panchayat underrepresentation
Legal Inaccessibility	Weak enforcement of laws	Continued impunity for violations	Poor conviction rates in rape cases

Table 3: Resistance and Reform Movements

Movement/Organization	Time Period	Focus Areas	Impact on Rural Women
Self-Respect Movement	1920s–1940s	Anti-caste, gender equality	Raised awareness, challenged devadasi system
Dravidian Political Movements	1950s–1980s	Social justice, education	Improved literacy, limited rural outreach
RUWSEC & NGOs	1980s–2000s	Reproductive rights, violence prevention	Grassroots empowerment, legal literacy
SHG Programs	1990s–2010s	Economic empowerment	Financial independence, community leadership
Media & Cinema	1970s–2010s	Visibility of rural issues	Mixed portrayal, increased awareness

Discussion

Violence against women is called as gender-based violence, means collectively or exclusively acts or omission committed against women. Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. Common violence against women are rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment reproductive coercion, female infanticide, child abuse, parental sex selection, obstructive violence, mob violence as well a harmful customary practices such as honor killing, dowry violence, female genital mutilation, marriage by abduction, forced marriages violence by police and authoritative people, trafficking in women, forced prostitution.

Most often violence against women has been framed as a health issue, and also as a violence of human and particularly women rights. From B.C.3 to A.D.3, 600 years, is called Sangam age in Tamil History. Tholkappiam, Aganaanuru, Kurunthogai, Pura-Nanuru, Madurai Kanji, Nartrinai, Nedunelvadai, Tirukural, Naladiyar and Silapathikaram are a portion of the literature of Sangam writing (Mohana Kani, 2011). They have demonstrated an unmistakable picture about Sangam women and their status. There was no equity among people lawfully and in addition socially. Women of the Sangam age had much responsibility. In spite of the fact that spouse earned cash, it was her obligation to save it for the support of her family. Male centric culture was there in Sangam age. The Sangam writing says that women had the status not equivalent to men. They needed to pursue bunches of guidelines, which were not intended to men. There was no proof for rebuffing a man who left his better half and went to prostitute. There were confirmations, which demonstrate that the Sangam age women were dealt with most exceedingly terrible. Sangam age was a period of war. Despite the fact that they required more men to battle in the war, they didn't loathe the introduction of the female child. They expected enthusiastically for the introduction of male kid. Sangam age did not decide the marital age for the women (tamilnadu.ind.in 2016).

To the extent the situation of women in Tamil Nadu in the medieval period is concerned, women were not precluded from the pleasure in rights. They were under no limitations in their political, social, social, religious and economic exercises however humility was considered the most elevated among their graces. In the medieval period, women have confronted upsets like female infanticide, child marriage, sati, devadasi system etc.

Modern India alludes to the period beginning from the time of Later Mughals to the finish of British rule in India (1700 A.D. to 1947 A.D.). In the British period, the education of women was supported and this came about change in the situation of women. The educated women began to raise their voice against the British control and entered the national movement for freedom. Later they began to battle for their very own rights.

According to the Census 2011, Tamil Nadu has the population of 7.21 Crores, an expansion from the figure of 6.24 Crore in 2001 enumeration. Add up to the population of Tamil Nadu according to 2011 statistics is 72,147,030 of which male and female are 36,137,975 and 36,009,055 separately. In 2001, add up to population was 62,405,679 in which male were 31,400,909 while females were 31,004,770. The literacy rate for female is ceaselessly on an ascent in Tamil Nadu. As indicated by the 2011 population census, female literacy remains at 73.44 per cent. In 2001, the literacy rate of the female was 64.43 per cent. With 73.4 per cent of its female educated, Tamil Nadu, third among bigger states after Kerala and Maharashtra, has India's biggest number of establishments run by women, one million (Economic Census, 2012). Sex Ratio in Tamil Nadu is 996 i.e. for every 1000 male, which is below the national average of 940 as per census 2011. In 2001, the sex ratio of female was 987 for every 1000 male in Tamil Nadu. The women in Tamil Nadu have been effectively

Conclusion

Despite legislative progress and social movements, rural women in Tamil Nadu faced entrenched violations of rights from 1921 to 2011. The interplay of caste, patriarchy, and economic marginalization created a complex web of oppression. Tamil Nadu State commission for Women is a statutory body was constituted to deal with the cases related to crime against women. It's also investigating the problems of women and takes up studies related to women. This commission is also vested with sufficient powers to safeguard women's rights and ensure quality and protection for women against all forms of harassment and problems faced within the families and the community. It's also creating the awareness among the public regarding the legislations related to women.

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