

Women empowerment and govt schemes



Oviya, writer and social activist: For contact: oviacs2004@yahoo.co.uk

It is quite welcome that the Tamil Nadu government presents an exclusive agriculture budget along with the general budget. This move has triggered expectations of another positive initiative. The state Social Welfare Department, in its policy statement last year, put out a proposal to present a gender budget or an exclusive budget for women. But it is disappointing that the promise has not been translated into action yet.

In fact, such an initiative is absolutely necessary in the present context. A sector-wise, habitat-wise and caste-wise survey of women who constitute 50% of the population must be conducted and based on the exercise's findings and according to the women's state and needs, a budget must be drawn up to redress their woes. Of course, scores of measures are afoot at present to address the social, economic and security issues facing women. But the exclusive budget initiative will take the cake.

Benefits of schemes

In 2022, the Tamil Nadu Social Welfare Department released a draft policy statement for women. However, it's sad that it has not been finalised to date.

Chief Minister M K Stalin has said that in the upcoming budget, a scheme to provide Rs 1,000 a month as cash entitlement to women will be announced. There is no denying that financial assistance will give women a great deal of self-confidence.

At the same time, it could not be taken as one of the basic action plans for women's empowerment. Of course, this scheme will give relief to women, who rely on their husbands even for fulfilling their petty needs. But the catch is that as this amount will automatically be added to the family economy, it won't be expected to pave the way for developing women into a single great force in the society.

The next important project worth noting is the 'Pudumaip Penn' (Innovative Woman), which has already come into effect. This can be billed as a wonderful project with a progressive outlook. This scheme provides for payment of Rs.1,000 a month to the girl students, who have had their schooling from class 6 to 12 in government schools, to pursue higher studies. The scheme, launched in September 2022, has so far benefited 1.20 lakh girl students. Through this project, several lofty, constructive objectives are getting translated into actions. As this scheme entails women's seamless engagement with education, they will be too busy to think of marriage, at least, till the age of 21. Parents, for their part, will prioritize their girl children's education. Thus the girls' drop-rate will come down and enrolment rate in government schools will witness an upswing.

Cash necessary

This scheme is laudable and welcome for it is directly linked to the women's uplift in education rather than being just a cash entitlement. It deserves kudos for it is an improvement upon the 'Gold for Thali' scheme. At the same time, it should be emphasised that the amount under the scheme should be given to the beneficiaries in cash. This is because people who receive such assistance will not have bank accounts. If they open bank accounts for receiving the amount, there is a risk of the banks eating into half the amount on the pretext of levying penalty for not maintaining minimum balance.

It augurs well for social harmony that the government is showing a keen interest in establishing justice for transgenders. In fact, their numbers are very small. But the change in their value in society plays a very important theoretical role in building up an entirely gender egalitarian society. Transgenders should be allowed to lead a dignified and independent life. It is welcome that the government is providing necessary assistance to them to create such a situation. In particular, a monthly stipend of Rs.1,000 given to 40-year-old destitute transgenders and self-employment assistance for them have drastically changed their situation. Similarly, transgenders are getting jobs in government jobs and in the police department. This practice must get expanded.

Women's hostels

Accommodation is the most challenging of issues for women migrating from villages to cities for work and for education. The first challenge they are confronted with is to zero in on the safest residential place in big cities such as Chennai. The women's hostels run by the private individuals are lacking in standard basic amenities. This situation is teeming with so deplorable trials and tribulations for women that it merits a long serial writing. So, the CM has a matter that deserves his foremost attention.

Community Halls for Women

The government should come forward to set up community halls for the working women and the women forced to live away from their families for various complex issues. These halls should be developed into modern worlds that serve as hubs to hone and enhance various skills of women and to enlighten, educate and guide them on women's liberation and empowerment.

The Dravidian movement's regime inspired and powered by Periyar's ideals and ideas can stand front and centre in implementing all these pro-women measures.

Child marriage prevention measures

It is a positive matter that the Social Welfare Department is fully engaging its officials in the prevention of child marriages. Last year alone, 2,532 child marriages were stopped. Moreover, the compensation for girls victimised in sexual violence, which has not been paid since 2012, has been paid now, signaling the greatest social justice for women.

By the way, the views we have expressed over the Tamil Nadu government's last-year draft women policy remain as they are: Let them be recalled here:

1. The Social Welfare Department should be adequately empowered to implement the Tamil Nadu Women Policies.
2. Financial assistance must be enhanced for the Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women and the entity's structure expanded.
3. In order to free women from the yoke of trials and miseries of private life, community dining halls should be set up for them on a large scale
4. The care of the elderly and children should be brought under the ambit of the state
5. Restaurant facilities should be ensured at workplaces.

If the government takes upon itself all these responsibilities, more avenues will open in creating space for women in the public domain. That, in turn, will uplift the women's society and the whole human society as well.

Will the Tamil Nadu government be the shining beacon of hope in this regard?

Translated by V. Mariappan.
