

The Dark Side to Modern Domesticity in Tamil Nadu

What is the issue?

Women face misogyny and violence despite the State's primary focus on their welfare and development.

What is the status of domestic violence in Tamil Nadu?

- Data from the National Family Health Survey for 2019-2020 (NFHS) report reveal that 44.7% of married women in Tamil Nadu have experienced physical and sexual violence in their homes.
- Tamil Nadu ranks second in India when it comes to domestic violence against women.
- The NFHS report says that more than two-thirds of married women in Tamil Nadu are said to be afraid of their husbands due to spousal violence.
- Further, 79.8% women in the State felt that it is acceptable for husbands to beat their wives and 81.1% of married women victims in Tamil Nadu neither informed nor sought any help from anyone.

Have the state's welfare measures for women reaped any benefit?

- The NFHS 2019-2020 data for Tamil Nadu shows that over the years, the State has achieved remarkable gender parity in higher education.
- Dalit female enrolment in higher education has seen the highest gender parity index in the country, with the percentage of SC women's enrolment in higher education being higher than SC men.
- In Tamil Nadu, the female labour force participation too is much higher than the national average though the labour force participation even in Tamil Nadu does not pair well with women's education.

What makes modern domesticity in Tamil Nadu increasingly violent despite the government's focus?

- **Compulsory marriage-** Despite higher education and access to employment, choice marriages by young women are still not acceptable for several caste groups in Tamil Nadu.
- **Caste patriarchy-** The domesticity steeped in caste patriarchy of masculine control over production and protection is viewed essential for shaping women's subjecthood as dependent, subordinate and responsible for family and caste mobility.
- The choice of hypergamous inter-caste marriage by young women has often resulted in violence perpetrated by men from caste groups who are increasingly getting trained in new masculinity and caste politics.
- **Unpaid female labour-** Only 20%-22% young urban women were in paid work while 60% of educated young women stay at home to care for the household and await marriage.

- **Strings to higher education-** Higher education for the young women, is thought of being instrumental in enhancing family respectability, prestige and marriage prospects.
- **Exclusion-** Women's access to the technology and labour markets could not achieve the desired freedom and autonomy for women in the domestic sphere for the reason of exclusion of this space.

What about the case of non-criminalisation of marital rape?

- Justice Verma Committee suggested that marriage should not be considered as an automatic and irrevocable consent for sexual acts and that marital rape be considered as a criminal offence.
- But, the Union government is unwilling to criminalise marital rape and had strongly argued that this involved societal consensus and not state intervention.
- Such arguments by the State takes domesticity back to the zones of 'discursive privacy' in which women's identity and labour are depoliticized.

What lies ahead?

- One finds misogyny everywhere being normalised and practised by men to the detriment of women's emancipation.
- Tamil Nadu urgently needs a radical reform of marriage, familialism and domesticity along the lines of Periyar's advocacy of self-respect and women's freedom.

Reference

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-dark-side-to-modern-domesticity-in-tamil-nadu/article65491967.ece>