

Education as a Part of Urbanization - Leading to Women Empowerment with Special Reference to Vellore District

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Abstract

One of the key features of urbanization is the gender equality. It provides a generic environment that brings up the level of women in the society equal to men. Urbanization paves the way for women to access the available resources when compared to the women in rural regions and also elevates their status in the society. It has improved the women's professional skills and qualities and it stands in the forefront of demographic transition. The urban poverty first affects the girls and women in terms of unavailability to access the mandatory resources like sanitation, clean water, better living environment and good education. Women in urban areas are liable to employment, healthcare, feminist freedom, secured life, education and democratic environment, those results in economic, social and sexual empowerment. Vellore being one of the largest districts in Tamilnadu has been focused for the research study and the analysis of women empowerment through urbanization has been carried out. The paper discusses the various measures taken by the government of Tamilnadu to empower urban women in Vellore district in terms of urbanization.

Keywords: *Women education, urbanization, Vellore district*

1. Introduction

Women are clothed with strength and dignity. They enjoy the urbanization the most [1]. People, in general, thought and considered that women are weaker than men and are supposed to do only household works like taking care of the cattle, cooking, baby sitting etc. Women under the bond were unable to do their task on their own. They had to fully depend on their husbands or their in-laws. This prevented them even to think and act independently. The pathetic condition of women in ancient days has been illustrated by many poets and writers of that age. But the trend now has changed as we see women in almost all the areas of life and in all careers. Now-a-days women prefer jobs that have high risk and also that requires lot of physical effort. Women have been empowered physically, mentally, politically, socially and economically. Women education had been an eye opener since the independence. Enhancing the status of women is a continuous process and also the same is in practice all over the world. Women do play a vital role in sectors like sales, services, production, agriculture and professional fields which is ultimately connected to urbanization. Education, in one way, plays a vital role in empowering women.

Empowering women by providing access to good health, education, social, economical and political rights [2] in various aspects had been a boon, in particular to the family and in general, the society. It has raised the power of women, provides them access to all the activities, provides positive thinking attitude, creates a self image that comforts them, elevates the growth of status in the society among the men and also has improved their

moral living. Empowering women through education could help them identify their strength, provoke learning opportunities, invite clarity and self-awareness and as a whole moulds them for a better future.

Women's rights and issues have always been a subject of serious concern of academicians, intelligentsia and policy makers. From pastoral society to contemporary information and global society, the role of women has changed drastically. The continuity of changes in socio-economic and psycho-cultural aspects of human living has influenced the role of women. With the process of Industrialization, Modernization and Globalization showing its deep impact on the human society all over the world, the role and responsibilities of women has attained new definition and perspective. Further this has also led to addition of responsibilities and widened the role of women who also shares the financial responsibilities.

The women issues have received tremendous attention in the planning circle and in wide intellectual discussions and forums at national and global platforms. However the existing lacuna in the formulation and execution of the policies has not changed the grass root situation to a great extent. On the encouraging front, in the South Asian countries there have been relatively increasing economic participation in past one decade. Statistically the rate of literacy among women has also increased. The educational and occupational patterns have also changed and widened with women entering the domains, which till decade back was considered to be dominated by men. Further there has been encouraging rise in the percentage of the women joining service sector especially banking and Information Technology. In the background of the gigantic transformation, the core issue, which still remains unanswered, is that of women's right and empowerment.

The women rights are not any exclusive rights as has been debated and put forward. Patriarchal structure of the society over centuries has gradually led to gender inequality. Women rights in this context have assumed exclusivity. Further when women are not considered equal to the men in the social context the question of women rights arise. The women rights are the means by which a dignified living is ensured thereby safeguarding her privileges. Thus the basic fundamental rights of speech, freedom and decision-making are her basic rights as an individual and citizen. The right for education and employment are significant for women development and national development in the wider sense. The power and freedom to exercise these rights is women empowerment. Women rights and empowerment are not independent of each other. The women empowerment can only be facilitated only if she is able to exercise her right in the socio-economic spheres of decision-making.

2. Secondary Status of Women

In India the women are both praised for her virtues and despised for her ills. But the system oppressed them. Hence they have faced gruesome atrocities. One side of history shows the faith among the Indians about "Shakti" or the "Women Power" to be the strongest energy. The other side of history is colored in black, grey shades of dowry, child marriage, sati and other related issues that affect them. Hinduism defines woman to be an equal partner. The Ardhanariswara concept gives equality to women. The concept of "Shiv-Shakti" indicates that a man is incomplete without a woman. Holy Books of different religions preached equality of both sexes.

While a male child is encouraged to pursue his desired professions under the pretext that he will take the household responsibility on growing up. Whether he really does or does not, yet he is prioritized for being the "heir" who will carry on the family surname. Marriage is security for a woman and it might be an easier way of accumulating wealth for a man. Parents of a girl child educate their daughter and accumulate wealth for finding a "better groom" for her. Still, her income generating capacities are tested by the boy's parents. If she qualifies in terms of property, education, income only then she has a

chance to get a suitable match. If she lacks in the first and the last category then her chances can be reduced to nil. Even her beauty cannot compensate for it. Beauty of a woman has the last of all priorities during match-making.

Child marriage and sati are still prevalent in states like Rajasthan, India. Denying a girl her right to live and to live happily are heinous crimes. But sadly, even in the 21st century India, women struggle to find their right place. Dowry deaths have not become a talk of past nor has woman's secondary status elevated to equal. The change that has happened is only that the picture is hidden, sometimes behind the close doors and sometimes underneath a dark region invisible to the naked eye.

3. Women Achievers

With the help of social reformers women of India slowly started recognizing their true potential. They started questioning the rules laid down for them by the society. As a result, they started breaking barriers and earned a respectable position in the world. Today Indian women have excelled in each and every field from social work to visiting space station. There is no arena, which remained unconquered by Indian women. Whether it is politics, sports, entertainment, literature, technology everywhere we can see the entry of women.

Women can definitely multi-task much better than men. They are more sincere, creative, responsible and hard working. They are technically strong too. Women express themselves better than their male counterparts and this helps them to interact with customers better. They are excellent team players. The corporate environment is also becoming more women friendly. HR policies are changing and many companies have introduced work from home. Women are becoming ever more noticeable in the domestic and international front in media, entertainment, business, IT, politics and literature. There is growing acknowledgment of female go-getters and the surfacing of powerful Indian women. Whether it is Barkha Dutt, who has become an inspiration for prospective journalists, Arundhati Roy, a Booker Prize Winner and a social worker, or Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, who became the wealthiest Indian woman after the first public submission of her company, Biocon, they have all heralded the influx of Indian women professionals. Kiran said that as a corporate, Biocon realizes its inherent responsibility to fulfill its role as educator, trainer, business leader and development professional, to contribute to the progress of the nation.

Earlier engineering subject was considered as the domain of the males. Even engineering colleges, civil and mechanical engineering were regarded as inappropriate for the Indian middle class girl. Today the Indian women opted for Electronics & Communication and Computer Science resulting in more women graduating in these subjects. In order to acquire extra expertise some women opted for computer courses after they successfully completed their graduation. It was later when the Indian women realized their efficiency in the sector and went on to chase their subject of interest as a full time career. Ever since the requirements for technical experts increased in IT sector, women are now seen as tough contenders to men in terms of both experience and ability. Many of them also work in international scenario expanding their visibility to the companies recruiting them for their dexterity and proficiency.

The expanding of the Indian economy, the amplified functions of the private sector and the boost in the number of multinationals coming up has assisted a slow but steady increase in the number of women executives and entrepreneurs in the corporate industry. In India, we still notice very few women at the top positions as many of them have selected parallel career options to concentrate equally on their domestic front. Indian MNCs still have to plan women oriented proposals designed especially for working mothers and institutional assistance. Indian women are working even in the night shifts in IT related service industries.

Global night shift labor was intersecting with the lives of women in ironic and unsettling ways. With the surfacing of India's service industry such as travel, tourism, hospitality, media, and entertainment, business process outsourcing and IT, we have seen the improved roles of female employees at both the entry and middle levels. This way they are expected to pave the way for prospective female professionals in the future.

Indra K. Nooyi is chairman and Chief Executive officer of PepsiCo, and according to Fortune, Nooyi is ranked as the most powerful woman. Beginning in the mid 1990's was the chief strategist that dramatically reshaped PepsiCo.

4. Education, Empowerment and Emancipation of Women

Education is considered to be the major aspect for the enhancement of women's power. It cannot be denied that education releases every woman from the bondages. Women after acquiring some education try to be self-reliant. They even cross the barriers developing some self confidence in them. It is the result of literacy. Today in India, it is seen differently when it is said that no education for women. Education enlightens the women. It drives out what was thought earlier. It encourages women to be economically self-sufficient. Many professional studies have come especially for women. The female literacy in India has grown well. Women determine what is required for them and to their family.

Education is creating awareness among women in removing wrong notions against them. It tries to enhance women overcoming challenges. The economic independency is an outcome of education. The men of today started recognizing the capabilities of women. Education for women in India has been a major concern of both the government and civil society because educated women hold a vital role in the development of the country. For a developing country like India, the role of women's education in India is vital for the overall development of the country and human resources. It will also contribute in improving their quality of life at home and outside so that they can provide better guidance to all their children. There are certain obstacles, which are being faced in this area and this includes gender discrimination, which needs to be filled up. The male literacy rate in India is more than 75% as compared to the female literacy rate of 54.16%. The Indian government has tried to provide incentives for girls' school attendance through programs like midday meals, free books, and uniforms. This welfare thrust raised primary enrollment between 1951 and 1981. In 1986 the National Policy on Education decided to restructure education in tune with the social framework of each state, and with larger national goals. It emphasized that education was necessary for democracy, and was central to the improvement of women's condition.

Women constitute almost half of the population of the world. Education for women is the best way to improve the health, nutrition and economic status of a household that constitute a micro unit of a nation's economy. In this context, it can be argued that lack of woman's education can be an impediment to the country's economic development. In India, women achieve far less than the education of men. As per the Census report 2001, the literacy rate of women is 54.16 per cent and that of men is 65.38 per cent. There has been a sincere effort to improve the education attainment of women by both government and voluntary organizations. The changes in the policies and infrastructural supports on primary, secondary and higher education reflect the initiatives of the Government of India towards women education. Recent policy documents of government of India on primary education sees women's role in education as mobilisers. The study revealed that there had been significant progress in the performance of women education revealed from female literacy levels and its change over time. It was also observed that the gaps between rural and urban female literacy rates are narrowing down. It was observed that rural poverty acts as a push factors for women's education rather than as an obstacle. The significant influence of urbanization on women's education implied that urbanization had been

playing a beneficial role in the attainment of women's education in India. At the same time, the drop-out rate had a negative effect on women's education. It revealed that that reduction of girl's drop-out rates is necessary for achieving women's education.

Despite government attempts at improving education for all its citizens, India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia. There are 330 million women above the age of 7 in India. Today about 60 percent, or over 200 million, are illiterate. Literacy rates are important not only as a gauge of a country's educational development, but overall development. Illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality. Their nutritional level and earning potential is very low, affecting the entire household. The lack of an educated population can be a major obstacle to the economic development of a country. The mother also plays a vital role in molding her children, so her education level affects the future generation. Educated mothers are likely to have a stronger impact on the aspirations and expectations of their children. The seventh plan strategy for education included revision of school curricula to remove gender bias and accorded priority to enrolment of girls in formal and non formal education courses.

5. The Statistical Analysis of Women in Vellore District

Vellore is a south Indian district with salient physical features like mountains, rivers, lakes, forest, forts built in the ancient period and historical spots. Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh is the northern boundary, Krishnagiri district on the west, Thiruvannamalai district on the north and Thiruvallur and Kanchipuram districts on the east. Vellore is a place with extreme climatic conditions during summer and winter. According to 2011 census data, the population in Vellore is about 3,936,331, the male population is 1,961,688 and the female population is 1,974,643. The literacy rate of male and female is 86.5 and 71.95 percent respectively.

The rural urban population has been depicted in the following graph in Figure 1.

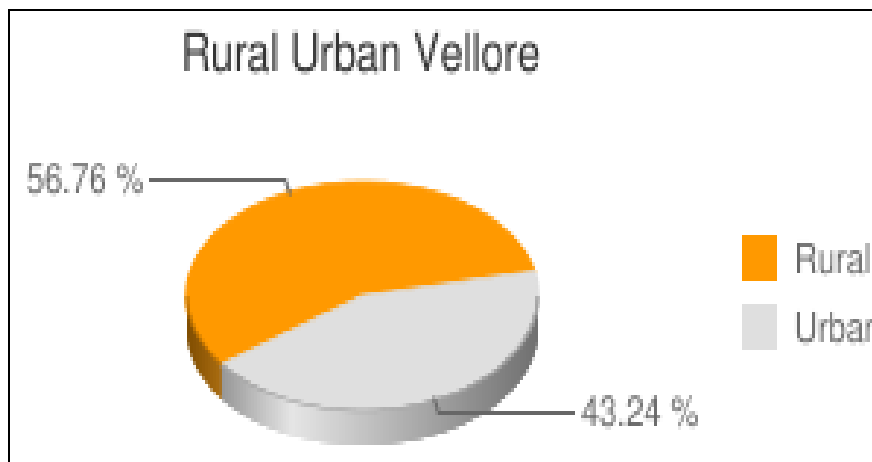


Figure 1. Rural Urban Population Chart of Vellore District [3]

The graph says that 56.76% of the population belong to the rural area whereas, 43.24% are from the urban places. This helps us to understand that Vellore has a mixture of rural and urban places with almost equal population. Urbanization involves both men and women of the locality. As per the census report, the sex ratio is 1000:1015, that means for every 1000 male in the urban places there are 15 females more in number. The figure shows that women are equally accommodated in the urban places of Vellore district [4].

6. Women Self –help Groups in Vellore

Women empowerment being the major focus, the TamilNadu government had introduced Self-Help Groups (SHG), in Vellore and almost all the districts of TamilNadu. These groups contain a maximum of 15-20 women folk in the same locality and strive for their economic and social growth. The leader of the group conduct meetings with the members regularly and discuss on the challenges and issues they face in their day-today activities and try to find the solution with the help of the government. Usually the economic status of the women is a big challenge, which is solved by getting loans with less interest rate and easy and flexible repay provision [5]. Rural and urban women get benefited by these SHGs, especially in Vellore district. These groups were developed to eradicate poverty from the low level and down trodden people.

As mothers, women have the capacity to change the dynamics of the home, the child, and eventually the nation. Recent studies have shown that there is a minimum threshold of education that must be reached before the mother's schooling positively affects her children.

The community development programmes for women comprise agriculture, animal husbandry, cooperation, rural industries, rural engineering, health and sanitation including family welfare, family planning, women welfare, child care and nutrition, education including adult education, social education and literacy, youth welfare and community organization. In each of these areas of development, there are several programmes, schemes and activities which are additive, expanding and tapering off, covering the total community, some segments, or specific target populations such as small and marginal farmers, artisans, women and in general people below the poverty line. Nursery schools, elementary schools, secondary schools, and schools for adult education for women have now been set up all over the country by the government.

7. Education for Women in Vellore

Education plays a significant role in empowering women all over the world. Knowing the capabilities and the hardworking nature of women many schools and the colleges of private schools go in the process of giving priorities to them. Since women naturally have concern and have tendency to convince the society they are trained for becoming a part of educational systems. Some how there are many women educational colleges were established in India to enroll girl children in the institutions. Girls are more likely to attend school and achieve more academically if they have female teachers.

Higher education for women has gained a wider role and responsibility all over Vellore district. Today, in the 21st century, one cannot afford to ignore the importance of higher education for women any longer. The reason for its need and urgency is that there is no biological difference in the systems of males and females. The need for higher education among women assumes all the more importance in countries like India where colonialism has remained a great force hindering education for the general masses and for the women in particular. Higher education of women has indeed become essential, whether to provide society with competent men and women trained in agriculture, arts, medicine, science, technology and various other professions, or to strive to promote equality and social justice by reducing social and cultural differences.

In Vellore district female literacy rate is comparatively more and there is a lot of openings for the female teachers when compared to male teachers. According to a survey in Vellore there are about 7748 teachers in primary schools, but the male female ratio is 1724:6024. This shows a positive impact on the women education in Vellore and the openings for the girl children to regularly attend the school. As with young children they feel very comfortable when they have female teachers than males. In case of upper primary level schools the male female teachers' ratio is again an eye opener, as it has the ratio 1663:4360 respectively [6]. Creating a positive approach about schools in the minds

of little school children has been a regular practice in village schools, as the teachers go out into the village to canvas the children and the parents to send them to school regularly. This approach paves the way for urbanization that inculcates the habit of school going in the minds of the young citizens.

8. Women Achievers in Vellore

Leaders not only lead but inspire and motivate others for successful accomplishments and achievements. Men and Women Leaders do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness [7].

In connection to the above statement a leading role is played by Vellore Mayor Mrs. P. Karthiyayini, the youngest and energetic leader. As a mayor she has inculcated the braveness and self confidence in every individual especially in women counselors. This is possible only because of the education that added more value to her life.

The Vellore district has more number of schools that give good education to both rural and urban children. The schools have committed teachers and mentors who train the children to achieve good education and moral values.

Vellore has educational institutions especially for girls. The children get benefited by their learning from the qualified teachers as there are advantages as follows:

- ✓ The education environment is comfortable,
- ✓ Children can learn without any hesitation for doubts clarification,
- ✓ Children get mother-like approach in teaching,
- ✓ Personal issues are also being solved by lady teachers,
- ✓ Especially the problems faced by teenage girls could be handled by women teachers,
- ✓ As women are polite and kind hearted, the mischievous children can be tackled with a friendly manner,
- ✓ Children feel happy and delighted while learning even the difficult subjects.

In Vellore, especially in government schools, the women teachers are trained by imparting psychological knowledge to handle school going children and also a deep insight on the subjects they teach. They are equipped to teach during the preschool time, by attending special training sessions and orientations provided by Tamilnadu government. Not only in government schools, but also in private schools the same methodology is followed to enforce quality education with ethical relationships with the children.

The urbanization and education are the two sides of a coin. When women are empowered by education, they get an opportunity to prove their potential in which ever field they enter. There are many opportunities for women who desire to start their own business with education and training as the essential components [8]. The support from the government and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) provide funds with no/minimum interest rates, easy repay facility *etc.*

In Vellore district most of the women are employed either through the schemes from the TamilNadu government or through the private sectors like schools, colleges, offices, hospitals and other organizations. The illiterate women at home willing to make money to meet their essential needs go to work as clerks, ayamma, sweepers, gardeners, helpers and assistants. There are opportunities and vacancies open for educated women based on their qualification in the public and private sectors.

The list given below provides ample opportunities for women especially in Vellore district.

- ✚ Christian Medical College and Hospital, CMCH,
- ✚ Vellore Institute of Technology, VIT,
- ✚ Government schools ,
- ✚ Private schools,
- ✚ Government hospitals,
- ✚ Private hospitals,
- ✚ Textile shops and showrooms,
- ✚ Hotels and restaurants,
- ✚ Marketing sectors and
- ✚ Miscellaneous sectors.

The Pie chart in Figure 2 represents the percentage of the involvement of women in various sectors.

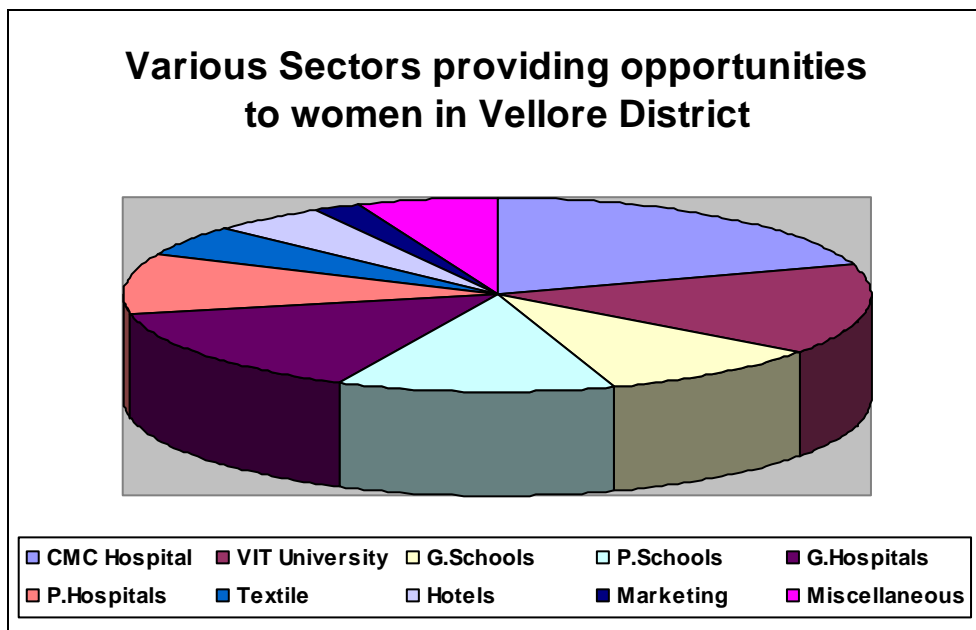


Figure 2. Sectors Providing Opportunities to Women in Vellore District, TamilNadu, India

In the above figure the labels **G** represent “Government Sectors”, **P** represents “Private Sectors”. A comparison with respect to the progress of women employment between the year 2000 and 2015 is depicted in Figure 3.

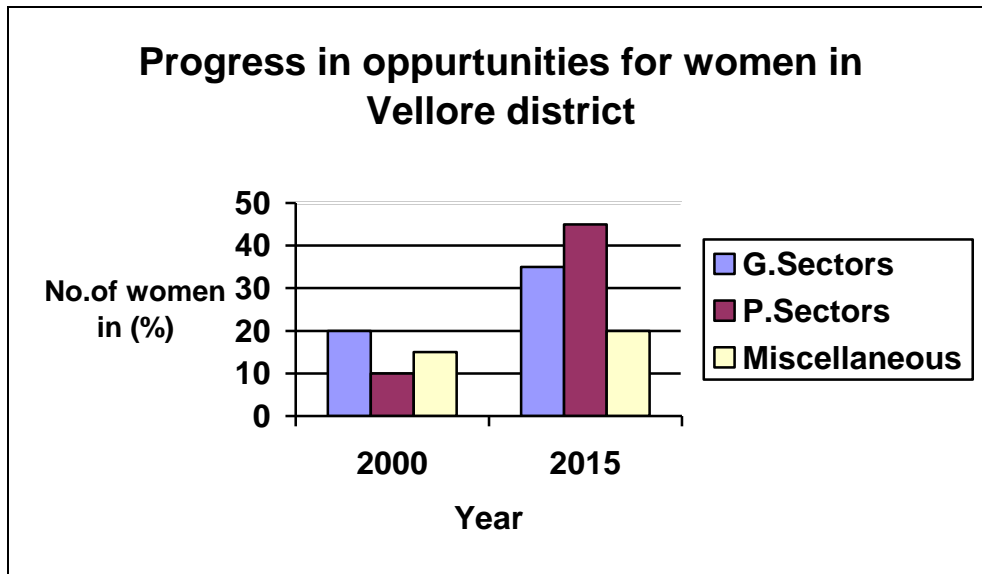


Figure 3. Graph Depicting the Progress in Women Employment in Vellore District

Thus, in the past decade there is a tremendous change in the status of women in Vellore district due to its urbanization which by default opens a door for their education. Women are given equal rights with men and uplift their position in the society. Empowering women also empowers the entire family and helps them to stand on their own legs [9]. As women started taking meaningful decisions in the family, there exists a growth factor that provides better living condition to all the family members. It is amazing to identify the fact that educated women can definitely be a boon to the society.

9. Conclusion

Education is the basic requirement and the 'Fundamental Right' of the citizens of a nation. While Higher Education is important, the Elementary Education system serves as the base, over which the super-structure of the whole education system is built up.

The objective of the Indian society as has been laid down in the Constitution is to achieve a democratic, socialistic and egalitarian community. In such a society women are supposed to perform their roles on par with men. Their status structurally needs to be equal with men and in the present scenario, higher education is certainly that factor which can actually support them to execute their role on par with men.

The organized workforce has been reduced to less than ten percent in India in the last decade. The 'formal' sector is under considerable attack. There is a great deal of concern regarding the impact of these developments on women. Women of today face increasing pressures to earn from petty self-employment, in the informal sector and in production for larger industries. The crumbling social security systems force women to revert to being primary care-givers and responsible for the well-being of their communities. For the majority of women, the impact of the challenges to organized industry is indirect. This indirect impact is two-fold and in opposing directions.

One of the biggest challenges women have had to face in recent years is the growing influence of the religious right in India. Right-wing groups have built much of their support on the involvement of women: offering to help them with domestic problems, enabling them to enter the public space in a limited way, and all the while ensuring that the overall ideology within which they operate remains firmly patriarchal. For activists too, this has posed major problems. It has forced them to confront the fact that they cannot assume solidarity as women that cuts across class, religion, caste, ethnic

difference. Perhaps the most significant development for women in the last few decades has been the introduction of 33% reservation for women in local, village-level elections.

Urbanization generally eliminates the gender inequality in the society and improves the education and health level of women. It helps the women to become good decision makers, to take control on husband's earnings, to spend the money as per their wishes in a meaningful way, to save it in banks in their accounts, to get loans from the banks under profitable schemes and to do major house hold purchases. Producing women entrepreneurs provides socio-economic benefits for the country [10]. In Vellore district, urbanization continues in making a positive impact on the status of women that breaks all the barriers both in the family as well as in the society.

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