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Never Look Away: Changing Societal Norms to Eradicate Domestic Violence in Tamil Nadu, India

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Claremont McKenna College

**Never Look Away:
Changing Societal Norms to Eradicate Domestic
Violence in Tamil Nadu, India**

submitted to

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and

Dean Peter Uvin

by

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for

Senior Thesis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Paradox of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is one of 29 states in India and is located in the South India region. It has a population of 72 million people, about 5 percent of India's population, and a sex ratio of 995 women to every 1,000 men (UNICEF). Tamil Nadu is known for being more economically and socially developed than its brethren Indian states: it ranks in the top three on several economic and social measures, e.g., it ranks third in terms of industrial development and fifth in terms of GDP (Anandhi 2007). Since the turn of the millennium, Tamil Nadu's information technology (IT) sector has seen rapid growth, advancement, and great success. Its software exports went from almost nothing to over US \$1 billion in 2001-02 (Government of Tamil Nadu 2003).

Not only has Tamil Nadu accomplished economic growth, but it is also ranked highly on many social assessments: according to India's National Family Health Survey-3, Tamil Nadu ranked in the top 10 states in India in various female-empowerment indicators. For example, it ranked third in the indicator of women's freedom of movement, meaning that Tamil Nadu has the third highest percentage of women who can freely go to the market or visit friends and family without needing permission from their husbands (NFHS-3 2005). Furthermore, Tamil Nadu has the sixth highest percentage of women employed and earning cash (NFHS-3 2005). Additionally, it is ranked fifth for women's access to media, as a higher percentage of women are regularly exposed to radio, television, or theatre (NFHS-3 2005). Of 16 indicators of female-empowerment

derived from the NFHS-3 data, Tamil Nadu is ranked in the top 50% of Indian states in 12 of them.

Additionally, sex ratio, female literacy rate, and percentage of population below the poverty line are three indicators that provide information regarding the development of a state. Both sex ratio and female literacy rates are also strong indicators of the status of women in a state. A more balanced sex ratio is indicative of lower levels of female feticide and infanticide, and therefore less discrimination against women. Likewise, higher female literacy rates indicate that girls and women have increased access to education. Additionally, the percentage of population below the poverty line is a strong indicator of the economic development of a state. Table 1 further emphasizes the well-being of Tamil Nadu as it ranks 3rd for sex ratio, 16th for female literacy rate, and 14th for percent of population before the poverty line out of 32 regions; Tamil Nadu ranks in the top 50% for these three indicators.

Table 1: Sex ratio, female literacy rates, and percent of population below the poverty line by state. Data drawn from India's 2011 census.

State	Sex Ratio (2011 census)	Female Literacy Rate (2011 census)	% of Population Below Poverty Line (2011 census)
All India	943	65.46	21.92
A & N Islands	878	81.84	1
Andhra Pradesh	992	59.74	9.2
Arunachal Pradesh	938	59.57	34.67
Assam	958	67.27	31.98
Bihar	916	53.33	33.74
Chandigarh	818	81.38	21.81
Chhattisgarh	991	60.59	39.93
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	775	65.93	39.31
Daman & Diu	618	79.59	9.86

Delhi	866	80.93	9.91
Goa	973	81.84	5.09
Gujarat	918	70.73	16.63
Haryana	879	66.77	11.16
Himachal Pradesh	972	76.6	8.06
Jammu & Kashmir	889	58.01	10.35
Jharkhand	947	56.21	36.96
Karnataka	973	68.13	20.91
Kerala	1,084	91.98	7.05
Lakshadweep	946	88.25	2.77
Madhya Pradesh	930	60.02	31.65
Maharashtra	929	75.48	17.35
Manipur	985	73.17	36.89
Meghalaya	989	73.78	11.87
Mizoram	976	89.4	20.4
Nagaland	931	76.69	18.88
Odisha	978	64.36	32.59
Puducherry	1,038	81.22	9.69
Punjab	895	71.34	8.26
Rajasthan	926	52.66	14.71
Sikkim	890	76.43	8.19
Tamil Nadu	995	73.86	11.28
Tripura	960	83.15	14.05
Uttar Pradesh	908	59.26	29.43
Uttarakhand	963	70.7	11.26
West Bengal	950	71.16	19.98

However, shockingly, Tamil Nadu is ranked 28th out of 29 states for the indicator “freedom from physical domestic violence,” meaning a higher percentage of ever-married women in Tamil Nadu have experienced physical domestic violence since age 15 than women in every other Indian state but one (NFHS-3 2005). Anecdotal evidence underscores the horrors of domestic violence present in Tamil Nadu. A 55-year-old Tamil man when interviewed about his wife stated, “I have beaten her many times. When she

goes out without my permission; when she does not take care of my parents properly; if the food is not ready when I come back from work; when the water is not kept ready and boiling for my bath; if the children are not kept clean and decently dressed” (Ravindran 1999, 43). A 25 year old battered Tamil woman stated, “Every day passes in fear. If I dare talk back I will get beaten more. I have now learnt to keep my mouth shut. Where will I go if he throws me out? Over the past few months I have gone close to taking poison three or four times. Then I think of the children. Who will take care of them if I die?” (Ravindran 1999, 43)

One might assume that coincident with higher economic development and higher female empowerment and autonomy would be lower domestic violence rates. The paradox of Tamil Nadu is that the opposite is manifestly true. Clearly, other important factors affect the prevalence of domestic violence. Slowly evolving societal norms delay reduction of domestic violence rates in Tamil Nadu; despite improvements regarding female empowerment, Tamil Nadu lacks a strong and widespread stigma against domestic violence, which is vital to decreasing its prevalence. Significant efforts to educate the population about pervasive, unmentioned domestic violence are crucial to changing societal norms and therefore decreasing domestic violence rates.

India's North-South Divide

It is evident that in the past 30 years India has seen economic and human development growth. However, “given the extremely heterogeneous character of the Indian economy and society, India’s achievements and failures cannot be understood in composite terms” (Dreze and Sen 1997, 3). It is typically thought that the regional distribution of this growth is imbalanced, leaving the south and west regions of India

generally much better off than the north and east regions. As Tamil Nadu is located in South India, it is thought to align with the characteristics attributed to southern and western states.

A comparative analysis examining 15 major states corroborates the concepts of regional disparities in India. A study examines a “forward” group and a “backward” group (Kurian 2000). The forward group is comprised of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab and Tamil Nadu; the backward group consists of Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (Kurian 2000). Most of the states in the forward group are located in south and west India, while most of the states in the backward group are located in the north and east India. Various indicators are identified to examine the well-being of the states. The lowest fertility growth rates are found in Kerala and Tamil Nadu (two southern states), whereas the highest are in Rajasthan and Haryana (two northern states) (Kurian 2000). Likewise, Kerala and Tamil Nadu had the lowest infant mortality rates in the fifteen states. The highest infant mortality rates were found in Orissa (now Odisha), Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Rajasthan (Kurian 2000). With the exception of Karnataka, all of the named states with high infant mortality rates are located in the north and east. Literacy rates, especially gendered literacy rates, are an important indicator of the development of a society. The disparity between female and male literacy rates is telling of a state’s development level. Higher female literacy is found in south and west India, further validating the concept of regional disparities in India: “All the states in the first [forward] group except Andhra Pradesh have female literacy level above the national average of 29.3%. In contrast only Assam and West Bengal, in the second [backward]

group, have female literacy above the national average” (Kurian 2000, 540). While identifying the regional inequities in India is important, it is crucial not to exaggerate the character of South India, as Andhra Pradesh, the largest south Indian state is in many important respects (such as literacy rates) more similar to large northern states than to Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Dreze and Sen 1997).

Efforts have been made to reduce regional disparities, but they have been mostly unsuccessful thus far; ongoing economic reforms focusing on stabilization and deregulation since 1991 have seemingly worsened regional disparities. The north-south divide further emphasizes the paradox of Tamil Nadu; the studies of regional disparities indicate that Tamil Nadu should be ranking higher than many other states, so its vast short-coming regarding domestic violence is unexpected.

While scholars have explored female autonomy in Tamil Nadu (Ravindran 1999), declining fertility rates in Tamil Nadu (Savitri 1994), and violence against women in India (Visaria 2008), no scholar has provided an adequate explanation for the high rate of domestic violence in Tamil Nadu given its relative economic and social advantages; this thesis will do so and therefore solve the paradox of Tamil Nadu. It will review the theories proposed by others in efforts to explain why the domestic violence exists so prevalently. Additionally, by providing a comprehensive, contextualized recent history of the state of Tamil Nadu, including its political evolution, economic development, and culture, this thesis will provide a holistic, nuanced view of the state that begins to explain why the paradox exists. Lastly, exploring the empirical data regarding female indicators of Tamil Nadu, including domestic violence, will underscore where the true gaps are in female autonomy and empowerment in the state of Tamil Nadu.

Chapter 2: Domestic Violence Concepts and Theories

In order to solve the puzzle of Tamil Nadu, it is vital to fully understand how domestic violence is defined in an Indian context. This chapter aims to explain the different phases of domestic violence that Indian women face, from childhood to old-age. This thesis will attempt to explain why empowering women does not lead to a decrease in domestic violence in the case of Tamil Nadu. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how empowerment indicators are analyzed and what it means to be empowered in an Indian context, as will be explained within this chapter. Finally, while studying domestic violence, it is important to understand the different theories already developed on the topic. This chapter will review feminist theory, intersectional feminist theory, evolutionary theory, and social learning theory as related to domestic violence. While exploring a diverse body of domestic violence theories, this does not intend to defend or deny any of the discussed theories.

Defining domestic violence in an Indian context

Understanding which behaviors are classified as domestic violence throughout all stages of life provides greater insight into the experiences many Tamil women face. Domestic violence in India is often used as a tool for a man to perpetuate a power dynamic. It is described as an act of “exploitation, discrimination, upholding of unequal economic and social structures, the creation of an atmosphere of terror, threat or reprisal and forms of religio-cultural and political violence” (Karlekar 1998, 1742). When family resources are scarce, decisions must be made regarding who receives access to these resources. Often in India, female children are discriminated against in this decision making process: “this inequality is embedded in oppressive structures of a family

ideology committed to an age and gender hierarchy which is worked out within a household” (Karlekar 1998, 1742). Domestic violence against women can be found at all stages of life. The first stage of this can occur before or shortly after birth. Female feticide and infanticide are the practices of killing either a female fetus or infant. This practice highlights negative attitudes toward girls, and can possibly be attributed to poverty, ignorance of family planning, and/or the cost of dowry (Karlekar 1998). The second stage of domestic violence against women occurs through child abuse. This can involve excessive child labor, physical punishment, and/or rape. Thirdly, and the focus of this thesis, is marital domestic violence. Marriage in India is essential for women, regardless of class, caste, religion, or ethnicity (Karlekar 1998). A scholar states, “Nothing describes the transient nature of a girl’s brief life in her parent’s home or her inherent worth better than the north Indian saying that a girl is ‘paraya dhan’ or another’s wealth. It not only establishes the very notion of belonging but also that a girl is wealth (dhan) which belongs ultimately elsewhere (paraya)” (Karlekar 1998, 1746). This sense of ownership over a wife and her sexuality can lead a husband to act in a physically, sexually, or emotionally violent manner. Furthermore, domestic violence can follow a woman into her elder years, in the form of neglect: “There is evidence that households are increasingly disinclined to invest scarce resources on those whom they feel will have little to contribute to a family’s success and mobility” (Karlekar 1998, 1748). Additionally, if a woman is a widow, she is exposed to new networks of exploitation and is more sexually vulnerable. Maintaining privacy regarding family matters is a common practice in India, often preventing discussions regarding the topic.

Defining empowerment in an Indian context

Beyond understanding the different stages and types of domestic violence, in order to explore and answer the research question of this thesis, it is important to understand what it means for a person in India to be “empowered.” While a person of any gender, class, or caste can experience empowerment, this will specifically address women’s empowerment. Empowerment is a process in which powerless people gain control over the conditions of their lives; this includes both their external resources and internal ideology (Kishor and Gupta 2004). The purpose of empowerment is not to obtain power over others, but to have the power to achieve one’s own goals. In nearly every walk of life women are subordinate to men, leaving them with fewer rights and less access to resources. In many cases, this imposes an intrinsic ideology in women that they *should* not control their circumstances (Kishor and Gupta 2004). Sunita Kishor states, “Women’s position and degree of empowerment is defined by gender and gender relations in society. Gender represents not just the biological sex of an individual, but also the different roles, rights, and obligations that are attached by society to individuals born with male or female sex characteristics” (Kishor and Gupta 2004, 694). The subordination of women is what makes women’s empowerment vital to their wellbeing. There are three different kinds of indicators that can help measure a woman’s empowerment level: evidence of empowerment, access to empowerment, and setting for empowerment (Kishor and Gupta 2004). Evidence of empowerment focuses specifically on a woman’s degree of control over her environment as well as a woman’s attitude regarding gender roles (Kishor and Gupta 2004). Examples of this are a woman’s ability to make household decisions or a woman’s acceptance of unequal gender roles.

Additionally, resources are crucial to empowerment; analyzing a woman's access to education, media, and employment can help measure a woman's empowerment level. Lastly, the setting of empowerment can be evaluated by examining the circumstances in a woman's life, for example, the age of marriage, spousal age and differences in education levels, and the experience of violence (Kishor and Gupta 2004).

Feminist Theory

In addition to understanding the various forms of domestic violence and empowerment, knowledge regarding the many theories that have been developed in literature explaining *why* domestic violence occurs can help solve the paradox of Tamil Nadu. Feminist theory is perhaps the most dominant domestic violence theory in literature. Feminists have developed the concept of the patriarchy, which has two components: a structure in which men have more power and privilege than women and an ideology that legitimizes such an arrangement (Smith 1990). Feminist theorists identify the root cause of domestic violence to be the patriarchy: "Violence grows out of inequality within marriage and reinforces male dominance and female subordination within the home and outside it" (Yllo 2005, 22). According to this theory, violence against women is one tool for men to gain control over women and reinforce the patriarchy. An analogy of a wheel has been established in feminist theory, connecting sexual and physical violence to the hub of power and control with various 'spokes': "minimization and denial, intimidation, isolation, emotional abuse, economic abuse, use of children, threats, and assertion of male privilege" (Yllo 2005, 22). While women in some societies have gained structural status, for example career opportunities, partially eroding the patriarchal structure, this does not mean that patriarchal ideologies have

eroded at the same pace: “Wife beating was most common in a context where the structural status of women was relatively high but where there remained considerable support for patriarchal norms favoring the subordination of women within marriage” (Smith 1990, 260). This ideology is centered on a wife’s obedience, loyalty, dependency, sexual availability and sexual fidelity. A woman’s betrayal of any of these aspects could cause a man to act violently towards her if he is dedicated to maintaining dominance in his marriage. Power and control are the center of feminist theory when applied to domestic violence.

Expanding Feminist Theory to Intersectionality

Intersectional feminists build on the feminist theory previously discussed, but believe that a theory that does not acknowledge the different experiences between women of different races, classes, or other characteristics fails to address a large part of the “story” of domestic violence. While power, control, and the patriarchy are still at the center of intersectional feminism, there is an emphasis on observing commonalities between women, beyond their gender. Violence is a common issue amongst women, but women must not be observed as a homogenous group: “A feminist theory that emphasizes only the commonality of gender erases the texture of women’s lives and is less useful than it could be. Feminist scholars and activists who are mindful of these intersections can develop theory, research, and interventions to move us forward” (Yllo 2005, 25). According to intersectional feminists, violence often occurs in a specific context “...that often varies considerably depending on the race, class, and other social characteristics of the woman...these characteristics can be better understood and addressed through a framework that links them to broader structures of subordination

which intersect sometimes in fairly predictable ways” (Yllo 2005, 25). In an Indian context, under this theory in order to understand domestic violence fully it is vital to observe regional, class, and caste variations of patriarchal practices, as violence may take different forms across varying groups.

Evolutionary Theory

Evolutionary theorists venture away from the concepts of feminists and intersectional feminists, providing an alternate domestic violence theory. The concept of evolutionary theory is that domestic violence is caused by paternity uncertainty: “Because the paternity of children was never certain in our evolutionary past, natural selection would have favored proprietary behavior by males with regard to sexual access to their mates. Spousal violence, in this view, stems from the insecurity and jealousy that males feel when their partners are exposed to the possibility of sexual encounters with other males” (Eswaran and Malhotra 2011, 1222). Evolutionary psychologists support this theory with evidence that domestic violence rates decrease with age, indicating that domestic violence decreases when a women’s reproductive value declines; there is less need to control a female’s sexuality once she is no longer viable for reproduction, which explains the data, they claim. Evolutionary theorists use this evidence to criticize feminist theorists, questioning that if domestic violence is a reflection of patterns caused by the patriarchy, as feminist theorists contest, then how can the decline in domestic violence with age be explained? (Jay, Shackelford, and Buss 2002). However, an evolutionary scholar states, “The results of this and other studies examining risk patterns for domestic violence suggest that, with slight modification, the feminist hypothesis that domestic violence is a technique that men use to control women fits well with at least one

evolutionary psychological perspective on domestic violence. Specifically, the refined feminist hypothesis is that domestic violence represents one technique men use to control a female partner's sexuality. Although that control may extend into every facet of the victim's life, control over her actions, thoughts, and feelings may be used in the service of control over her sexuality" (Jay, Shackelford, and Buss 2002, 263). While paternity and reproduction are at the center of evolutionary theory, control and sexual control are overlapping themes of both evolutionary and feminist theory.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is a prevalent theory in literature and provides a completely different explanation for domestic violence than either feminist theories or evolutionary theory. When applying this theory to family, it is the concept that children and adolescents observe how parents or guardians behave with each other or a boyfriend/girlfriend. Through these observations, a person gains an understanding of what is appropriate behavior for intimate relationships. If a person observes domestic violence in his upbringing, he is more likely to exhibit this kind of behavior, according to social learning theorists. It is believed that violent behavior is not inherent but learned: "through models provided by the family, either directly or indirectly, and reinforced in a childhood and continued in adulthood as a coping response to stress or a method of conflict resolution" (Mihalic and Elliott 1997, 21). According to social learning theorists, because children and adolescents are strongly influenced by their upbringing, domestic violence often times becomes cyclical in families. More recently, researchers are exploring potential effects of exposure to violence through television and video games, expanding social learning theory regarding domestic violence to all influences, not just to

that of role models such as parents or guardians. According to the social learning theory, “repeated exposure to violence through television, movies, sports, video games and music videos would result in desensitization. This, in combination with an overall prevalence of violence in society, provides a justification for an individual’s use of violence (London Family Court Clinic 1998). Unlike evolutionary theorists and feminist theorists, social learning theorists believe that domestic violence is used as a method to resolve conflict due to desensitization to violence, as opposed to a deliberate method to gain control over a woman, whether it be her sexuality or other aspects.

Tying together the conversation

Through these various theories it is evident that myriad factors potentially contribute to domestic violence. This thesis aims to explore the connection between development and domestic violence, as these two elements diverge in Tamil Nadu. It is vital to understand the theories of what drives domestic violence in order to observe which aspects of development (economic, social, etc.), if any, affect domestic violence rates. This is especially important when studying India, as it is the second most populous country in the world and has 29 states which are all unique and at differing points in development.

Chapter 3: The History of Tamil Nadu and Tamil Women

Understanding the background and evolution of the state of Tamil Nadu helps to provide a more nuanced understanding of Tamil women. Social movements in Tamil Nadu, such as the Self Respect Movement, founded by E. V. Ramasamy (also called Periyar) in the late 1920s attempted to eliminate ideologies proscribing unequal worth between men and women, rich and poor, and people of varying castes. This progressive movement had profound influence, altering the opportunities women had to become educated and improve their status. The state's long history of poverty was a driving factor causing women to enter the labor-force, which led to increased female independence. Additionally, effective family planning programs enabled Tamil Nadu to be a leader amongst India's states in lowering fertility rates. All of these factors positioned women in Tamil Nadu to be more empowered than those of many other Indian states. However, regardless of the increased opportunities for women to become educated, enter the work-force, and head smaller families, the culture, social mores, and norms surrounding women have been slow to evolve. Typical gender roles as well as the male-female power dynamic have persisted despite other social modernizations in Tamil Nadu.

Social Aspects:

Social movements in Tamil Nadu played a large role in increasing female empowerment. The Self Respect movement was originally formed as a revolt against the Indian Congress's unwillingness to address the issue of caste-based oppression in Tamil Nadu (Pandian 1996). Beyond criticizing the caste system, the Self Respect movement attacked the "traditional" family as an institution: "This happened in two ways: first, through practical strategies that sought to transform society at the site of its production—

the family—and second, by articulating what ‘Tamilness’ was, through descriptions of a good, modern family. Self-Respect Leaders regularly positioned themselves in opposition to what they deemed traditional views on divorce, romantic love, remarriage and contraception” (Hodges 2005, 252). Periyar argued that conventional marriages in Tamil Nadu put wives in the role of unpaid servants and sex slaves, which was reinforced by denying women property rights. Additionally, he believed conventional marriages were mere financial arrangements that could cause women great debt through dowry and other practices (Hodges 2005). The ‘conventional marriages’ that Periyar criticized were arranged marriages; the girl or woman was typically younger than the man. The weddings of these conventional marriages were typically lavish, expensive, and days long with ceremonies performed by a Brahmin priest. Periyar stated, “The concept of husband-wife relationship has been one of master-slave relationship. The essential philosophy of marriage has been to insist on women’s slavery...why should human beings alone keep such contract of one-man-one-woman relationship...until women are liberated from such marriages and from men, our country cannot attain independence” (Anandhi 1991, 25). Within the typical family critiqued by Periyar, the wife’s main role was child-bearing and household duties; she had little autonomy. Contrarily, the husband was in charge of working and decision making. Periyar advocated for measures deemed as extreme at the time, encouraging women to embrace their sexuality and take on sexual partners, as he felt marriage imposed a lack of sexual freedom. Additionally, he wanted women to pursue economic self-sufficiency (Geetha 1989). The Self Respect Movement enabled women to claim the power of thinking for themselves and question and criticize the poor opinions men held of women (Geetha 1989).

Two major political parties were born of the Self Respect Movement. The Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) party was founded by Periyar and gained power in Tamil Nadu in 1967. Its ideological goals were to end Brahmin dominance in Tamil Nadu, end northern domination over Tamil Nadu politics and economics, oppose Hindi as India's official language, and integrate social reforms. The DK party and its followers passionately advocated for and embraced state pride. The love for the Tamil language led to hostility against other languages: "For the Tamils, the other two languages that were demanding attention were Hindi and Sanskrit. Hindi is a national language. It is not the language of the south. The southerners held that the attempts to impose it on the nation by the northerners show their desire to dominate over the south. The opposition to Hindi therefore was vehement" (Pinto 1999, 1483). Many Dravidians thought their beliefs would not be legitimized unless Hinduism, caste, and Aryanism were destroyed. In addition to the DK party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party was formed in 1949 by men who were discontented with the DK party. It was led by M. Karunanidhi. Scholars identify the DMK to utilize assertive populism by using ethnicity to generate conflict and maintain a pluralist democracy (Harriss 2002). The DMK party continued to pursue many similar ideologies to the DK party. Under DMK, self-respect marriages were legalized and women's right to property was written into law, amongst other progressive accomplishments (Geetha 1998).¹

Additionally, following Periyar successive state governments made schooling widely available to disadvantaged groups by implementing subsidies beginning in the

¹ Self-Respect weddings opposed conventional Brahmin weddings, as they were conducted in a short time period as opposed to a few days, and their proponents were critical of lavish spending. Additionally, Brahmin priests were absent from Self-Respect weddings.

1950s and 1960s (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). Partly because of these efforts, Tamil Nadu has had higher levels of literacy than all-India for several decades, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Tamil Nadu and all-India male and female literacy rates drawn from the 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011 India census

	TN Male Literacy Rate	All-India Male Literacy Rate	TN Female Literacy Rate	All-India Female Literacy Rate
1951	31.70	27.16	10.10	8.86
1961	51.59	40.40	21.06	15.35
1971	59.54	45.96	30.92	21.97
1981	68.05	56.38	40.43	29.76
1991	73.75	64.13	51.33	39.29
2001	82.33	75.26	64.55	53.67
2011	86.81	82.14	73.86	65.46

These organized social movements and political parties provided an environment in which marginalized groups could fight back against established mores by helping them recognize their abilities and increasing their aspirations. Without leaders such as Periyar taking initiative on attempting to eliminate inequalities, minorities likely would have struggled to have a voice or take on practices granting them more autonomy, for example Self-Respect marriages. Additionally, Periyar’s ideologies strongly influenced the DK and DMK political parties, which enabled state-wide education implementation making education more accessible to marginalized groups.

Economic Aspects

While Tamil Nadu had broadminded social movements and high literacy rates, it struggled to progress economically until the 1980s. In the 1960s and 1970s, Tamil Nadu was one of four extremely impoverished states in India: “Through the early 1980s more than half of the state’s population was designated as ‘poor.’ Until the 1980s, Tamil

Nadu's poverty ratio, as then defined, was higher than that of all-India, declining noticeably only from the late 1980s" (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012, 13).

Despite the extreme poverty, Tamil Nadu experienced both agrarian reform (modernized farming) as well as a shift away from agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s. The state invested in infrastructure such as roads, medical facilities, and educational facilities. The roads in particular were vital to expanding accessibility of urban services to rural populations (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). The exposure and accessibility to a more modern culture and increase in economic wherewithal again allowed marginalized populations to raise their ambitions.

Additionally, Tamil Nadu has historically had higher participation of women in the workforce, potentially contributing to the overall higher status of women. In both the 1971 and 1981 census, the figures for the rural female working population was significantly higher than all-India percentages for rural women's work; Tamil Nadu was one of the highest states overall (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). The excessive poverty rural families faced was likely a large motivator for Tamil women to enter the labor force; the agriculture sector has been their largest employer for decades (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012).

Family Planning and Fertility Decline

Tamil Nadu also saw great success in implementing widespread efforts to decrease fertility rates, partially due to the social movements previously discussed. Periyar strongly advocated for family planning in his campaign for social reform as he saw it as a method to address gender inequality; his doctrines were very influential to the state's government (Antony 1992). Family planning garnered a strong commitment from

all levels of the government, promoting smaller families through mass media and advertising a small family as the modern family (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). The reason for the success of Tamil Nadu's family planning campaign is debated. Some scholars argue that Tamil Nadu's family planning programs were exceptionally efficient and unique, while others believed that the content and focus of the program was not different from that of other states, but was successful because of the excellent infrastructure and local management that allowed for better implementation than in other states (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). Regardless, family planning benefited the women of Tamil Nadu by providing more autonomy. Effective efforts to reduce family size enabled the role of wives to shift beyond being merely child bearers; mothers of fewer children had more time and opportunity to join the work-force and to take on other societal roles.

In addition to successful family planning programs, Tamil Nadu efficiently addressed the problem of infant mortality through its well organized health system. While most states in India chose to combine their medical and public health services, Tamil Nadu opted to keep them separate, bettering its public health system (Gupta, Desikachari, Somanathan, and Padmanaban 2009). Tamil Nadu has a separate Directorate of Public Health with its own budget and legislative underpinning, as well as a professional public health cadre managing a team of non-medical specialists and staff working solely on public health (Gupta, Desikachari, Somanathan, and Padmanaban 2009). The Deputy Director of Health Services is formally responsible and required to make interventions in the event of an infant death (Gupta, Desikachari, Somanathan, and Padmanaban 2009). This is one example of the Tamil Nadu health system successfully utilizing its staff to

protect public health. These successful interventions have put Tamil Nadu ahead of all-India for decades regarding infant mortality rates: “as early as 1961, the infant mortality rate in Tamil Nadu was 89 for males and 82 for females, compared to 122 and 108 for males and females, respectively, in India as a whole” (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012, 15).

Tamil Nadu’s fertility rates have been in a downward trajectory since 1901 but the decline didn’t speed up until 1961; the sharpest decline occurred between 1976 and 1981 (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). Tamil Nadu’s fertility has historically been much lower than that of all-India. Additionally, in 2006 Tamil Nadu’s fertility rate was 1.8, the lowest of any Indian state (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). The accessibility and knowledge regarding contraceptive use is a driver of fertility decline. The use of contraception increased from 24% in 1980 to 47% by 1993 and has continued to increase at a slower but steady pace ever since (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). Female sterilization and IUDs were the most popular methods of contraception (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012). However, the method in which these contraceptives have been implemented is controversial. In 1995, nurses and doctors in many public maternity wards were routinely inserting IUDs immediately following childbirth and abortions, sometimes unbeknownst to women or against their will (Van Hollen 1998). The reason for this behavior was related to the target-oriented family planning. However, in 1995 the Minister of Health and Family Welfare for Tamil Nadu declared that the target approach to family planning would be eliminated, partially to prevent forced IUDs or sterilization (Van Hollen 1998).

While access to contraception enabled the occurrence of fertility decline, researchers believe that Tamil Nadu's fertility decline occurred because of the social and economic context of the state: "The state consistently contributed to raising aspirations in the general population through its strong commitment and sustained investment in establishing a modern welfare state, with free education at all levels, a subsidized yet strong public health sector, reservations for lower castes in educational and governmental institutions, and a successful noon meal program in schools" (Pande, Malhotra, and Namy 2012, 19). The rising aspirations of poor and marginalized groups are what drove women and couples to utilize contraception in an attempt to have small and therefore modern families.

Evolving Culture

Despite its progressive social movements, economic development, and successful family planning efforts, in many regards Tamil Nadu's culture has failed to evolve at the same rate. While women now face less discrimination and have more opportunity than in the past, "typical" gender roles persist. Additionally, when wealth is limited, men receive preference. Discriminatory attitudes towards girls' education faded 20 to 30 years ago; however, "when resources were scarce or when there was a need for child care support, the decision regarding who would continue schooling was directly related to gender role expectations. The girls stayed back at home to carry out housework and care for their younger siblings... The boys remained in school in preparation for their roles as future bread winners" (Ravindran 1999, 37). Likewise, when food supplies in a household are limited, men generally receive preferential treatment: "Girls were expected to control their desire for food, and a popular Tamil saying was often cited in this connection:

‘undir surungudal pendirkkazhagu’: to restrict one’s food intake is becoming of a woman” (Ravindran 1999, 38).

Likewise, power equations between married couples remain unbalanced. Many women still attempt to fit the role of a “good” woman by taking care of the house and children, being thrifty and maintaining family peace (Ravindran 1999). In some ways, Tamil women today face greater challenges than their mothers, as all household responsibilities lie on them but they do not have their daughters, mothers, or sister-in-laws at home with them due to changing norms of sending daughters to school and living only with the nuclear family. Evidently, the freedom women have to control their own finances, leave the home without permission, and make household decisions varies from marriage to marriage. However, this freedom is consistently defined by the husband and his willingness to grant it: “Men have a well-defined notion of what wives may be allowed to do, and the range of decisions they may be permitted to make” (Ravindran 1999, 42).

While Tamil Nadu’s social movements, economic development, and efficient government policies have made way for greater opportunity for women through education and awareness, the culture of Tamil Nadu is lagging behind. Indeed, some norms have changed over time, such as the acceptance of women going to school and working. However, for many women freedom is not in their own hands but in the hands of their husband, only receiving as much as he chooses to give.

Chapter 4: Evaluating the Data: the Strengths and Weaknesses of Tamil Nadu

Data collected regarding female empowerment and domestic violence in Tamil Nadu shows the state's successes as well as the holes in its progress. The National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS-3) administered in 2005-06 surveyed over 230,000 women and men age 15-49 throughout India. This empirical evidence shows in which categories Tamil Nadu excels regarding female empowerment, such as women's employment and women's media exposure. It also highlights areas in which Tamil Nadu is lagging behind, such as women's ability to make decisions concerning money and women experiencing domestic violence. Additionally, various researchers have interviewed women and men in Tamil Nadu, asking them questions about their household dynamic; this anecdotal evidence provides more detail on a micro-level of the experiences Tamil women face in their day-to-day life.

Women's Employment

Women's employment is an important indicator for the freedom of women in a society. If a woman is employed, she is more economically self-sufficient, therefore preventing her livelihood from depending on her husband. Additionally, "Not only can employment be a source of economic independence, but it can help to give women a sense of self-worth. Women's labour force participation outside the home also exposes them to the world outside the household and kin-group. In particular it has been cited as important for developing support systems other than kinship based ones" (Kishor and Gupta 2004, 705). Typically when a woman enters the workforce her network expands, again decreasing her dependence on her husband and his family. Table 3 provides information about women's employment rates by state.

Table 3: Women’s employment by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

Women’s Employment		
	Currently employed	Not employed in the 12 months preceding the survey
Tamil Nadu Rank of 29 States		
	6 (46.2%)	8 (50.2%)
Top 5 States		
1	Manipur (59.2%)	Arunachal Pradesh (27.3%)
2	Arunachal Pradesh (56.0%)	Chhattisgarh (30.9%)
3	Chhattisgarh (51.7%)	Manipur (35.9%)
4	Andhra Pradesh (49.6%)	Jharkhand (43.2%)
5	Gujarat (49.1%)	Rajasthan (44.6%)
Bottom 5 States		
25	Bihar (23.5%)	Himachal Pradesh (70.1%)
26	Haryana (23.1%)	Assam (70.2%)
27	Assam (22.5%)	Haryana (71.7%)
28	Delhi (22.1%)	Punjab (75.2%)
29	Punjab (20.9%)	Delhi (77.1%)

The percentage of women who were employed at the time of the survey varies from nearly 60% to only 20.9%. Of the 29 states, Tamil Nadu ranked 6th for current employment with 46.2% of women employed. In terms of all Indian states, Tamil Nadu is on the upper-end of women’s employment. Additionally, Andhra Pradesh, another southern state, is in the top 5 for women’s employment. Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, and Assam are all northern states and are all in the bottom 5 states for women’s employment. These ranks provide further evidence for the previously discussed regional disparities between the north and south. The lower employment levels for women in the north could also limit women’s empowerment due to lack of economic independence, lack of exposure to other walks of life, and a more limited personal network.

The empirical evidence regarding women’s employment in Tamil Nadu bolsters the concept that Tamil Nadu has succeeded in expanding occupational opportunities for women.

Media Exposure

In addition to employment, media exposure is another indicator of women’s empowerment. A woman’s exposure to the media is vital in developing countries: “Media exposure can be taken as a proxy for education, as in situations where the majority of women are illiterate or have little formal education; informal channels such as the mass media play an important role in bringing about greater awareness of gender issues” (Gupta and Yesudian 2006, 367). For example, seeing a woman on television provides an image of a working woman to women who may not be able to enter the workforce; additionally, lessons about gender roles and decision making are often provided through the storyline of a television show. Additionally, “Regular exposure to different mass media, particularly visual media, is likely to play a significant role in building women’s information base and their exposure to alternative images that can help to reinforce the value of women” (Kishor and Gupta 2004, 705). Table 4 identifies the exposure women by state get to different forms of mass media, such as newspapers, television, the radio, and the movie theater. Additionally, the survey provides data regarding the percent of women who are not regularly exposed to any media.

Table 4: Women’s exposure to media by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

	Reads a newspaper or magazine at least once a week	Watches television at least once a week	Listens to the radio at least once a week	Visits the cinema/theatre at least once a month	Not regularly exposed to any media
Tamil Nadu Rank of 29 States					
	11 (27.5%)	3 (81.4%)	4 (46.8%)	8 (7.9%)	5 (11.5%)
Top 5 States					
1	Mizoram (66.7%)	Delhi (89.5%)	Manipur (79.7%)	Manipur (18.1%)	Delhi (7.6%)
2	Kerala (59.6%)	Goa (87.3%)	Jammu &	Andhra	Goa (7.6%)

			Kashmir (58.5%)	Pradesh (17.7%)	
3	Goa (57.0%)	Tamil Nadu (81.4%)	Delhi (47.8%)	Delhi (12.8%)	Manipur (9.0%)
4	Delhi (47.0%)	Mizoram (79.1%)	Tamil Nadu (46.8%)	Sikkim (13.0%)	Kerala (9.5%)
5	Manipur (44.1%)	Andhra Pradesh (74.3%)	Goa (41.7%)	Karnataka (10.4%)	Tamil Nadu (11.5%)
Bottom 5 States					
25	Chhattisgarh (11.7%)	Assam (44.4%)	Haryana (19.0%)	Meghalaya (1.8%)	Chhattisgarh (47.4%)
26	Orissa (11.5%)	Madhya Pradesh (43.0%)	Chhattisgarh (18.4%)	Mizoram (1.8%)	Uttar Pradesh (47.5%)
27	Bihar (10.8%)	Uttar Pradesh (40.1%)	Rajasthan (13.9%)	Tripura (1.8%)	Rajasthan (53.1%)
28	Arunachal Pradesh (10.1%)	Jharkhand (31.8%)	Sikkim (13.7%)	Uttar Pradesh (1.6%)	Bihar (58.6%)
29	Jharkhand (9.9%)	Bihar (23.1%)	Jharkhand (12.7%)	Nagaland (1.1%)	Jharkhand (60.0%)

Tamil Nadu's state rank varied from 3rd (women who watch television once a week) to 11th (women who read a newspaper once a week) regarding the different forms of mass media. However, in terms of women who are not regularly exposed to the media, Tamil Nadu ranked 5th at 11.5%, meaning that it has the 5th highest percentage of women (88.5%) regularly exposed to the media. Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, the other three southern states, were also in the top five for varying forms of media, again exemplifying the well-being of South-India. However, Delhi, a northern state, was in the top five for every form of mass media and has the largest percentage of women (92.4%) regularly exposed to any media, potentially challenging the generalization that the north is much further behind.

The high ranking indicates that Tamil Nadu successfully made media accessible to a large population. The frequent and widespread exposure to the media likely provides

women increased knowledge about a woman's value and capabilities, therefore increasing female empowerment.

Decision Making

Involvement in the household decision making process is another indicator of a woman's empowerment: "An empowerment perspective does not imply that women take decisions 'alone'; it minimally requires that women participate in making the decisions that affect their lives and that the final decision reflect their strategic life choices" (Kishor and Gupta 2004, 697). As shown in the table below, the NFHS-3 survey addresses four specific types of decisions. Firstly, a woman's capacity to participate in decisions regarding her own healthcare is vital to her empowerment as it is her physical body and well-being that will be directly affected by these decisions. Additionally, a woman's involvement in decisions regarding both major household purchases as well as daily household purchases is extremely important because in most households the woman spends the majority of her time in the home. Lastly, it is important that a woman is able to make decisions about visiting her family and relatives as this will allow her access to people outside of her nuclear family and her husband's family. The rankings for each specific decision are shown in Table 5. Additionally, the table provides rankings regarding women allowed to go to three specified places alone, indicating another aspect of autonomy.

Table 5: Women's participation in decision-making and freedom of movement by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

Women who usually make specific decisions alone or jointly with their husband regarding							
	Own health care	Making major household purchases	Making purchases for daily household needs	Visits to her family or relatives	Percentage who participate in all four decisions	Percentage who participate in none of the four decisions	Percentage of women allowed to go to 3 places alone
Tamil Nadu Rank of 29 States							
	10 (73.2%)	10 (63.3%)	7 (77.8%)	10 (76.7%)	9 (48.8%)	7 (8.2%)	3 (54.2%)
Top 5 States							
1	Mizoram (91.9%)	Meghalaya (82.5%)	Nagaland (87.2%)	Nagaland (93.7%)	Meghalaya (77.3%)	Nagaland (1.4%)	Mizoram (75.4%)
2	Nagaland (90.7%)	Nagaland (82.1%)	Arunachal Pradesh (86.7%)	Arunachal Pradesh (90.4%)	Nagaland (73.1%)	Mizoram (2.3%)	Goa (56.8%)
3	Meghalaya (87.5%)	Manipur (81.4%)	Mizoram (86.0%)	Mizoram (89.5%)	Mizoram (70.4%)	Arunachal Pradesh (2.7%)	Tamil Nadu (54.2%)
4	Manipur (87.4%)	Mizoram (79.6%)	Manipur (85.4%)	Meghalaya (87.3%)	Manipur (69.4%)	Manipur (3.4%)	Manipur (53.5%)
5	Assam (80.0%)	Sikkim (76.6%)	Meghalaya (84.1%)	Manipur (86.0%)	Assam (60.9%)	Sikkim (5.5%)	Jammu & Kashmir (51.0%)
Bottom 5 States							
25	Karnataka (53.3%)	Punjab (48.2%)	Uttar Pradesh (55.6%)	Uttar Pradesh (50.3%)	Tripura (30.2%)	Karnataka (26.9%)	Nagaland (25.4%)
26	Rajasthan (51.9%)	Tripura (48.1%)	Madhya Pradesh (54.9%)	Madhya Pradesh (50.2%)	Madhya Pradesh (29.4%)	Madhya Pradesh (27.1%)	Bihar (25.2%)
27	Madhya Pradesh (51.7%)	Jammu & Kashmir (44.9%)	Rajasthan (49.2%)	West Bengal (48.4%)	Chhattisgarh (26.8%)	Bihar (27.2%)	Uttar Pradesh (23.4%)
28	Chhattisgarh (47.9%)	Rajasthan (40.5%)	Jammu & Kashmir (46.9%)	Rajasthan (44.0%)	West Bengal (23.9%)	Rajasthan (31.4%)	Orissa (18.7%)
29	Jammu & Kashmir (43.5%)	West Bengal (37.5%)	West Bengal (46.9%)	Jammu & Kashmir (43.4%)	Rajasthan (22.8%)	Jammu & Kashmir (37.3%)	Chhattisgarh (17.8%)

Tamil Nadu ranks third for “percentage of women allowed to go three places alone.” Reinforcing the concept that women in Tamil Nadu have some level of independence, especially when compared to the other states in India. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu ranked in the top 10 states for each of the specific decisions surveyed and seventh for “percentage who participate in none of the four decisions,” at 8.2%. This means that 91.8% of Tamil women participate in at least one of the specific decisions. The relatively high frequency of women’s involvement in decision making in the household indicates increased female empowerment in Tamil Nadu. While the percentage of women involved in decision making for all four specified decision categories in Tamil Nadu is around 30% higher than the worst ranked state, there is still vast room for improvement. The top ranked state is between 10-20% higher than Tamil Nadu in each category. The status of women in Tamil Nadu would improve if an increased number of women were involved in decision making processes.

Additionally, the NFHS-3 surveyed women regarding their involvement in the decision making process about their own earnings as well as their husband’s earnings, as shown in Table 6. As previously mentioned, economic independence is vital to a woman’s autonomy. Having an income is not as significant to a woman if she is not included on the decisions about how the earnings are used. Likewise, participating in decisions about how her husband’s earnings are used further empowers a woman, and indicates a more balanced household power-dynamic.

Table 6: Women's participation in financial decision making and women's earnings compared to husbands' by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

Currently married women who report that they:			
	Alone or jointly with their husband decide how their own earnings are used	Alone or jointly with their husband decide how their husband's earnings are used	Earn more or about the same as their husband
Tamil Nadu Rank of 29 States			
	14 (87.5%)	7 (81.4%)	18 (22.1%)
Top 5 States			
1	Manipur (95.7%)	Nagaland (93.6%)	Mizoram (46.9%)
2	Nagaland (95.2%)	Manipur (91.6%)	Nagaland (34.2%)
3	Sikkim (94.8%)	Mizoram (89.1%)	Arunachal Pradesh (32.7%)
4	Delhi (93.0%)	Arunachal Pradesh (85.3%)	Assam (32.6%)
5	Goa (92.0%)	Delhi (83.8%)	Sikkim (29.9%)
Bottom 5 States			
25	Madhya Pradesh (77.1%)	Andhra Pradesh (61.7%)	Rajasthan (18.0%)
26	Rajasthan (75.3%)	Karnataka (61.2%)	Orissa (17.3%)
27	Tripura (75.3%)	Jammu & Kashmir (59.7%)	Madhya Pradesh (16.4%)
28	Karnataka (71.5%)	West Bengal (57.0%)	Andhra Pradesh (16.2%)
29	Andhra Pradesh (68.5%)	Tripura (50.3%)	West Bengal (14.0%)

Tamil Nadu ranked 14th for percentage of women involved in the decision making process regarding their own earnings. While this is one of Tamil Nadu's lower rankings, it should be noted that in terms of percent it only lagged behind the state ranked first by 8.2% and was ahead of the lowest ranked state by 19%. Tamil Nadu ranked seventh for the percent of women involved in the decision making process regarding their husband's earnings at 81.4%. Overall, the vast majority of Tamil women are involved in familial monetary decisions, furthering their empowerment. Additionally, the survey provided information regarding what percent of women earn the same amount of money or more than their husband; Tamil Nadu ranked 18th at 22.1%. This shows that a small amount of

Tamil women are able to match or out-earn their husbands, decreasing their empowerment. Likewise, this possibly contributes to an increasingly male-dominant household power dynamic, as in most Tamil households the husband is the main source of income.

The state ranking for women's involvement in decision-making in Tamil Nadu varies depending on the topic. Tamil Nadu ranks more highly comparatively to other states for decisions surrounding a woman's healthcare, household purchases, and a woman's travel to visit family. It ranks generally worse regarding women's involvement in overall economic decisions as well as earnings compared to their husbands.

Sexual Rights

Sexual rights are crucial to women's empowerment. When a woman does not have control of external factors, such as employment or decision making, control over her own body can provide a woman with a sense of empowerment. Both women and men were surveyed by the NFHS-3, as shown in Table 7, asking if a woman is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband in the three following scenarios: she knows her husband has an STD; she knows her husband has sex with other women; she is tired or not in the mood. A woman's right and ability to reject participating in sex whenever she wants gives a woman control of at least one aspect of her life: her body.

Table 7: Women's and men's sentiments regarding sexual freedoms by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

	Women						Men	
	Who agree that a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband when she:			Who agree with all of the specified reasons	Who agree with none of the specified reasons	Who agree with all of the specified reasons	Who agree with none of the specified reasons	
	Knows husband has an STD	Knows husband has sex with other women	Is tired or not in the mood					
Tamil Nadu Rank out of 29 States								
	24 (71.3%)	18 (77.9%)	13 (75.8%)	21 (62.8%)	21 (15.3%)	14 (73.2%)	19 (9.3%)	
Top 5 States								
1	Sikkim (94.9%)	Sikkim (93.4%)	Sikkim (92.8%)	Sikkim (87.1%)	Sikkim (1.6%)	Delhi (89.5%)	Mizoram (2.1%)	
2	Madhya Pradesh (89.7%)	Rajasthan (90.3%)	Jharkhand (89.9%)	Himachal Pradesh (82.8%)	Rajasthan (4.3%)	Jharkhand (83.7%)	Jharkhand (2.6%)	
3	Himachal Pradesh (89.4%)	Madhya Pradesh (90.2%)	Madhya Pradesh (89.9%)	Jharkhand (82.2%)	Chhattisgarh (4.4%)	Haryana (82.6%)	Manipur (3.0%)	
4	Rajasthan (89.1%)	Chhattisgarh (89.5%)	Chhattisgarh (87.8%)	Madhya Pradesh (81.8%)	Madhya Pradesh (4.4%)	Uttar Pradesh (82.5%)	Delhi (3.3%)	
5	Uttanchal (87.8%)	Jharkhand (89.4%)	Himachal Pradesh (86.1%)	Rajasthan (78.3%)	Orissa (5.2%)	Himachal Pradesh (81.7%)	Chhattisgarh (4.0%)	
Bottom 5 States								
25	Maharashtra (70.5%)	Maharashtra (73.4%)	Kerala (68.8%)	West Bengal (57.7%)	Kerala (19.2%)	Arunachal Pradesh (55.2%)	Andhra Pradesh (11.9%)	
26	Andhra Pradesh (69.9%)	Kerala (72.8%)	Andhra Pradesh (66.6%)	Meghalaya (54.1%)	Maharashtra (21.1%)	Meghalaya (53.3%)	Arunachal Pradesh (13.2%)	
27	Meghalaya (64.9%)	West Bengal (68.6%)	Jammu & Kashmir (62.4%)	Jammu & Kashmir (53.8%)	Meghalaya (21.6%)	Goa (48.0%)	West Bengal (19.0%)	
28	Tripura (57.8%)	Andhra Pradesh (68.1%)	Meghalaya (62.0%)	Orissa (47.6%)	Andhra Pradesh (23.4%)	West Bengal (47.9%)	Meghalaya (24.7%)	
29	Orissa (56.3%)	Tripura (60.8%)	Tripura (59.3%)	Tripura (41.7%)	Tripura (25.5%)	Tripura (41.3%)	Goa (26.6%)	

Tamil Nadu's rankings regarding the three scenarios vary from 13th to 24th. In terms of the percent of women who agreed that women were justified in rejecting sex in

all scenarios, Tamil Nadu ranked 21st at 62.8%. These rankings and percentages indicate that Tamil Nadu women have relatively low expectations about what their sexual rights should be. Researchers interviewed 66 Tamil women and 44 of their husbands, and concluded that “Many men seemed to believe that sex within marriage was their right, and that the women had no say in the matter.” (Ravindran and Balasubramanian 2004, 98). Additionally, “Several women reported that they would ‘lie like an inanimate object, like a piece of wood, while he went ahead’” (Ravindran and Balasubramanian 2004, 95). Evidently, the description of a woman acting as an inanimate object indicates a violation of sexual rights and a woman’s control over her body. Decisions surrounding sex provides evidence that Tamil Nadu is lagging behind in this area of women’s empowerment, as it is nearly 25% behind the first ranked state.

As shown in Table 8, NFHS-3 provided men with a variety of potential reactions to his wife denying him sex: getting angry and reprimanding her, refusing her financial support, using force to have sex, or having sex with another woman; men were asked if they felt entitled to respond in these ways. A man’s sense of entitlement to his wife’s body provides information about household power-dynamics and a possible lack of respect.

Table 8: Men’s reactions to wives’ withholding of sex by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

	Men who agree that when a wife refuses to have sex with her husband, he has the right to:				Men who agree with the right to all four behaviors	Men who agree with the right to none of the four behaviors
	Get angry and reprimand her	Refuse her financial support	Use force to have sex	Have sex with another woman		
Tamil Nadu Rank out of 29 States						
	15 (18.0)	24 (8.4)	23 (6.8)	16 (4.0)	25 (1.9)	15 (79.0)

Top 5 States						
1	Delhi (4.0)	Chhattisgarh (1.6)	Chhattisgarh (1.8)	Chhattisgarh (0.2)	Chhattisgarh (0.2)	Haryana (94.2)
2	Haryana (5.3)	Delhi (1.8)	Jharkhand (1.9)	Jharkhand (0.7)	Delhi (0.2)	Himachal Pradesh (90.4)
3	Himachal Pradesh (6.8)	Haryana (2.2)	Haryana (2.3)	Orissa (0.7)	Jharkhand (0.2)	Delhi (89.6)
4	Kerala (11.4)	Uttaranchal (2.3)	Delhi (2.4)	Assam (1.4)	Arunachal Pradesh (0.3)	Jharkhand (85.7)
5	Arunachal Pradesh (12.6)	Himachal Pradesh (2.7)	Assam (2.7)	Uttaranchal (1.5)	Kerala (0.3)	Assam (85.4)
Bottom 5 States						
25	Bihar (28.9)	Meghalaya (9.0)	Punjab (8.9)	Bihar (9.0)	Tamil Nadu (1.9)	Andhra Pradesh (63.1)
26	Andhra Pradesh (31.1)	Manipur (10.1)	Manipur (9.8)	Andhra Pradesh (9.5)	Meghalaya (2.0)	Jammu & Kashmir (62.4)
27	Madhya Pradesh (31.8)	Mizoram (10.1)	Tripura (10.4)	Sikkim (10.1)	Sikkim (2.1)	Mizoram (60.8)
28	Mizoram (32.3)	Sikkim (13.9)	Madhya Pradesh (10.7)	Madhya Pradesh (11.1)	Bihar (2.4)	Madhya Pradesh (60.6)
29	Jammu & Kashmir (35.0)	Bihar (15.1)	Bihar (15.1)	Mizoram (12.1)	Punjab (3.1)	Bihar (59.5)

Tamil Nadu ranked overall poorly regarding this issue landing in the bottom 50% of states for all rankings, as shown in the above table. For men who agreed that all four responses are appropriate, Tamil Nadu ranked in the bottom five. However, it should be noted that this was a relatively small percentage of men at 1.9%. Even so, 18% of Tamil men agreed it was acceptable to reprimand his wife, 8.4% deemed refusing his wife financial support acceptable, 6.8% said they could resort to forced sex, and 4% reported they were then entitled to have sex with other women in the scenario of their wives refusing sex. This further indicates that Tamil Nadu is lagging behind many other Indian

states regarding women's sexual rights, as for many women denying sex results in some form of punishment.

Domestic Violence

Beyond having sexual rights, a woman's freedom from domestic violence is crucial to her autonomy and empowerment, as she will be unable to act independently if she fears violence. Some women feel that their husbands are entitled to beat them in certain scenarios. This indicates societal norms are in place that deem domestic violence acceptable under certain circumstances. A woman is not fully empowered if she does not believe in her right to be free from domestic violence (including emotional, sexual, and physical violence) in all scenarios. Table 9 provides information regarding under what circumstances women believe her husband is justified in hitting or beating.

Table 9: Scenarios in which women and men deem domestic violence justified by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

	Women							Men	
	Who agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if:							Who agree with at least one specified reason	Who agree with at least one specified reason
	She goes out without telling him	She neglects the house or children	She argues with him	She refuses to have sex with him	She doesn't cook properly	He suspects she is unfaithful	She shows disrespect for in-laws		
Tamil Nadu Rank out of 29 States									
	27 (43.0%)	24 (54.2%)	25 (38.0%)	12 (12.5%)	25 (24.9%)	2 (12.1%)	16 (42.7%)	21 (65.5%)	15 (52.0%)
Top 5 States									
1	Chhattisgarh (11.2%)	Delhi (13.5%)	Himachal Pradesh (13.3%)	Himachal Pradesh (3.5%)	Mizoram (1.7%)	Delhi (11.0%)	Himachal Pradesh (19.7%)	Himachal Pradesh (28.3%)	Uttaranchal (23.4%)
2	Himachal Pradesh (11.2%)	Chhattisgarh (14.7%)	Delhi (14.4%)	Delhi (4.2%)	Goa (7.7%)	Himachal Pradesh (11.6%)	Goa (21.6%)	Delhi (32.3%)	Assam (25.4%)
3	Delhi (12.9%)	Himachal Pradesh (16.5%)	Chhattisgarh (15.9%)	Chhattisgarh (5.8%)	Delhi (7.8%)	Chhattisgarh (12.0%)	Chhattisgarh (23.2%)	Chhattisgarh (33.0%)	Delhi (27.7%)
4	Goa (14.2%)	Bihar (21.4%)	Goa (17.2%)	Arunachal Pradesh (7.5%)	Chhattisgarh (8.5%)	Tamil Nadu (12.1%)	Delhi (24.8%)	Goa (38.9%)	Himachal Pradesh (28.3%)
5	West Bengal	Madhya	Arunachal	Goa (8.3%)	Himachal	Goa	Jharkhan	West	Haryana

	(18.6%)	Pradesh (23.8%)	Pradesh (19.9%)		Pradesh (9.3%)	(14.3%)	d (31.6%)	Bengal (42.2%)	(32.7%)
Bottom 5 States									
2 5	Nagaland (41.8%)	Arunachal Pradesh (55.5%)	Tamil Nadu (38.0%)	Nagaland (18.4%)	Tamil Nadu (24.9%)	Sikkim (37.2%)	Aruna- chal Pradesh (55.9%)	Andhra Pradesh (75.3%)	Andhra Pradesh (72.9%)
2 6	Jammu & Kashmir (42.3%)	Andhra Pradesh (61.6%)	Sikkim (40.3%)	Gujarat (18.9%)	Jammu & Kashmir (26.6%)	Andhra Pradesh (47.2%)	Sikkim (58.2%)	Sikkim (75.7%)	Gujarat (74.1%)
2 7	Tamil Nadu (43.0%)	Mizoram (64.1%)	Nagaland (42.4%)	Jammu & Kashmir (24.0%)	Gujarat (26.8%)	Jammu & Kashmir (47.8%)	Ahndra Pradesh (60.8%)	Nagaland (78.9%)	Sikkim (76.2%)
2 8	Andhra Pradesh (53.9%)	Nagaland (64.1%)	Jammu & Kashmir (44.8%)	Karnataka (25.1%)	Karnataka (27.2%)	Nagaland (52.9%)	Mizoram (66.6%)	Mizoram (83.0%)	Mizoram (82.6%)
2 9	Manipur (57.4%)	Manipur (71.7%)	Andhra Pradesh (46.0%)	Andhra Pradesh (28.5%)	Andhra Pradesh (33.1%)	Mizoram (61.7%)	Manipur (75.5%)	Manipur (89.7%)	Manipur (85.0%)

With the exception of two scenarios, Tamil Nadu ranks in the bottom 50% of states for all scenarios and in the bottom five states for three scenarios. This indicates that norms are prevalent within Tamil communities leading women to believe that wife-beating is an acceptable response from men in particular circumstances. It should also be noted that both Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, two other southern states, are ranked in the bottom five for many of the different scenarios. This could indicate that norms about domestic violence are worse in South India than other areas of India, again contradicting the current beliefs about regional disparities.

As previously emphasized, domestic violence limits a woman's autonomy through imposing fear. A woman's ability to make decisions is limited if she is aware that consequences such as violence may be the result. The NFHS-3 provided domestic violence rates for physical, sexual, and emotional violence across states, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Ever-married women who have experienced domestic violence by state drawn from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06)

	Ever-married women who have experienced:				
	Emotional violence	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Physical or sexual violence	Emotional or physical or sexual violence
Tamil Nadu Rank out of 29 States					
	21 (16.8%)	28 (41.9%)	8 (3.2%)	23 (41.9%)	23 (44.1%)
Top 5 States					
1	Himachal Pradesh (3.8%)	Himachal Pradesh (5.9%)	Meghalaya (1.6%)	Himachal Pradesh (6.2%)	Himachal Pradesh (6.9%)
2	Delhi (4.9%)	Jammu & Kashmir (11.5%)	Himachal Pradesh (1.8%)	Jammu & Kashmir (12.6%)	Meghalaya (15.0%)
3	Meghalaya (7.1%)	Meghalaya (12.6%)	Maharashtra (2.0%)	Meghalaya (12.8%)	Jammu & Kashmir (15.1%)
4	Karnataka (8.1%)	Nagaland (14.0%)	Mizoram (2.0%)	Nagaland (15.3%)	Delhi (17.2%)
5	Haryana (8.7%)	Sikkim (14.8%)	Delhi (2.1%)	Sikkim (16.3%)	Sikkim (18.8%)
Bottom 5 States					
25	Bihar (19.7%)	Rajasthan (40.3%)	Assam (14.8%)	Manipur (43.8%)	Manipur (46.2%)
26	Orissa (19.8%)	Manipur (40.7%)	Tripura (19.0%)	Tripura (44.1%)	Tripura (46.6%)
27	Madhya Pradesh (22.5%)	Tripura (40.9%)	Bihar (19.1%)	Madhya Pradesh (45.7%)	Madhya Pradesh (49.1%)
28	Tripura (22.8%)	Tamil Nadu (41.9%)	Rajasthan (20.2%)	Rajasthan (46.3%)	Rajasthan (50.2%)
29	Rajasthan (22.9%)	Bihar (55.6%)	West Bengal (21.5%)	Bihar (59.0%)	Bihar (60.8%)

Overall, Tamil Nadu ranked poorly for domestic violence. In particular, for physical violence it ranked second to last with 41.9% of ever-married women experiencing it at some point in their life. A variety of Tamil women and men described their experiences with physical violence. One woman stated, “He tortures me bit by bit. I should not answer back for anything. Should never leave the house, do all the work. If he sees me sitting even for a moment, he would say, ‘why are you sitting on your ass like

this and getting fat?’ so I have to get up and go away as soon as I see him entering the house, and keep standing or working. If not, I will get beaten. Even now I haven’t got any guts. I have a son and daughter married, and still” (Ravindran 1999, 43). In this case, the woman has little autonomy, as she cannot even sit down in front of her husband without the risk of being beaten. Another man stated, “Because she comes to work alongside me, and comes back with me, there won’t be much respect. She will not bow to my wishes. So one has to beat, to make her tow the line” (Ravindran 1999, 43). This indicates that in this household, the wife being in the workforce actually increases her risk of domestic violence, as her husband feels that it is necessary to maintain a male-dominant power dynamic within the household through abuse. A different man stated, “Once when I asked her to heat water for my bath, she was sitting in the neighbour’s house watching TV and gossiping. I had to hit her” (Ravindran 1999, 43). Evidently, the norms in place within this community deem domestic violence appropriate in cases of disobedience, such as that described previously. While Tamil Nadu excels in the rankings for some indicators of female empowerment, a gaping hole is made apparent regarding the status of women as Tamil Nadu has the second highest prevalence of physical domestic violence.

Tamil Nadu ranked better for sexual violence as the 8th best state with 3.2% of women experiencing sexual violence. Again, men in Tamil Nadu were interviewed about their sexual experiences and views: “She doesn’t object to sex usually, and I have it as I wish. If she objects when she is not well or when she is menstruating, I accept it. But if she objects for other reasons I don’t accept it and will have it by compulsion without her desire” (Ravindran and Balasubramanian 2004, 95). Another man stated, “Many times

my wife expressed reluctance because she was afraid of getting pregnant. I didn't accept her refusal because I was unable to control my feelings. I would force her into sex saying 'what is wrong if you conceive again?' Mostly, I was under the influence of alcohol and that affected my judgment, and I would feel bad in the morning for my harsh behavior.'" (Ravindran and Balasubramanian 2004, 95). Both men in these anecdotes acknowledge committing rape against their wives, while one expressed remorse and mentioned the use of alcohol, one did not. Again, this addresses the need to improve sexual rights in Tamil Nadu, as all women should have control over their bodies and there should be mutual respect and consent when participating in sex between husband and wife.

Concluding Remarks

Deceivingly positive statistics surrounding women's education, literacy, and employment amongst other empowerment indicators would lead one to believe women's status and well-being is relatively high in the state of Tamil Nadu. However, its extremely poor domestic violence rates and rankings are a fatal flaw in the state's initiative to improve the status of women. While education and employment are vital to improving the lives of women and their ability to be autonomous, freedom from violence is a fundamental right: "The concept of human rights is one of the few moral visions ascribed to internationally. Domestic violence violates the principles that lie at the heart of this moral vision: the inherent dignity and worth of all members of the human family, the alienable right to freedom from fear and want, and the equal rights of men and women" (Thomas and Beasley 1993, 37). Increased access to education and employment greatly advantage women but women cannot fully reap the benefits of such opportunities if they are not free from domestic violence. While having a job provides a woman with

increased networks and her own income, these benefits are not nearly as meaningful or powerful if she lives under the authority of her husband due to fear of violence. Freedom from domestic violence is a fundamental right that should be built upon by other forms of empowerment. Contrarily, Tamil Nadu has excelled in other areas of empowerment but lacks the base necessary for these increased opportunities to reach their full fruition.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the past few decades, the discussion and focus surrounding development and women has shifted from improving a woman's well-being to improving her empowerment and agency: "No longer the passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help, women are increasingly seen, by men as well as women, as active agents of change: the dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of both women and men" (Sen 1999, 188). However, as shown through the case of Tamil Nadu, economic mobilization does not necessarily lead to social modernizations in all facets. More has to be done beyond increasing women's agency within a society to change the norms regarding marital power structures and domestic violence.

Social movements in Tamil Nadu such as the Self Respect Movement attempted to eliminate disadvantages imposed on people because of their caste or gender; additionally, it hoped to change the norms surrounding the behavior and treatment of these minority groups. The leaders of the movement successfully made institutional changes by gaining seats in the state government. Self-respect marriages were legalized, women were granted the right to property, and subsidies allowed disadvantaged groups increased access to education. These institutional changes were the successes of the movement. To the contrary, the movement's attempts to change the norms in Tamil Nadu were less effective at gaining traction; conventional marriages are still the norm in Tamil Nadu and the practice of self-respect marriages, which decreased the effects of the patriarchy, has nearly vanished.

Over the past century, Tamil Nadu has made great strides in terms of economic and human development. Both through literacy and employment we can see economic

mobilization occurring in Tamil Nadu. In 2011, Tamil Nadu's female literacy rate was 73.86%, 8% higher than the all-India average; its female literacy rate has been above the all-India average since 1951. Additionally, Tamil Nadu ranks 6th for women's employment. This indicates increased agency for women in Tamil Nadu, as many women now have education to utilize as well as access to employment, giving them personal income and improving their independence. Likewise, we see modernization in Tamil Nadu through various statistics, for example, women's exposure to media. Only 11.5% of Tamil women are not regularly exposed to any media, ranking Tamil Nadu the 5th best in the country in this regard. Unfortunately, data indicates that these improvements and changes are not aligned with the change of marital power structures in Tamil Nadu.

While improving the educational and economic status of women is beneficial, creating a strong stigma against domestic violence within the state is vital to decreasing the domestic violence rates. Relative to other states, Tamil Nadu ranked somewhat poorly for the questions "women who agree that a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband when she knows her husband has an STD, knows husband has sex with other women, or knows husband is tired or not in the mood." The percentages for these three questions in Tamil Nadu ranged from 71.3%-77.9% of women, indicating that 28.7% of Tamil women are not fully aware of the sexual rights they should have. Likewise, women in Tamil Nadu ranked poorly amongst the other states when asked if they "agree that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if..." with a variety of scenarios. 65.5% of women in Tamil Nadu agreed that a husband is justified in beating his wife in at least one specified scenario, meaning, only 34.5% of Tamil women believe they should be free from domestic violence in all scenarios. This demonstrates that more needs to be done to

educate women in Tamil Nadu about their rights. Likewise, 52% of Tamil men agreed they were justified in beating their wife in at least one specified scenarios. As previously discussed, freedom from violence is a fundamental right and it is vital for both women and men to know that all people should have this right if they do not already. Evidently, education efforts have failed to inform women and men of their entitled rights regarding marital violence, given that over 65% of women and 50% of men deem domestic violence acceptable in some circumstances. Engraining the concept that domestic violence is wrong in all circumstances into the minds of the people of Tamil Nadu is a crucial first-step to decreasing domestic violence rates

While it is now evident that there is the necessity to change the mindset surrounding domestic violence in Tamil Nadu, one must address means to implement these changes. Tamil Nadu's government's successful efforts to reduce fertility rates provide evidence that norms can change, if changing those norms is made a priority. A similar or at least equally widespread approach must be taken to change the norms surrounding domestic violence. Putting resources into a variety of widespread grassroots organizations would be a potentially valuable investment for the Tamil Nadu government as well as for international organizations. Domestic grassroots organizations can be an effective source for change: "Sustainable social change must be organic, and women's rights advocates should focus on educating women in low-income communities on their legal rights and protections. Fundamentally, international organizations are most effective in enhancing the status of women in India by providing grassroots organizations with critical resources to which they would not otherwise have access" (Scharer 2013, 62). Grassroots organizations have access to communities that outside organizations don't,

giving them the power of influence; if they could effectively over time utilize education to change the norms surrounding domestic violence in Tamil Nadu, domestic violence rates would likely decrease.

Arundhati Roy, an Indian Nobel Prize winning author, challenges all humanity “to never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you. To seek joy in the saddest places. To pursue beauty to its lair. To never simplify what is complicated or to complicate what is simple. To respect strength, never power. Above all, to watch. To try to understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget” (Roy, 1999). While much wisdom emanates from Roy’s call, the most important is to think critically about one’s life and surroundings, and to act! Roy encourages readers to not accept violence as a normal slice of life. As Roy alludes, change *is* possible, *is* necessary. Domestic violence rates will decrease when state governments go well beyond increasing women’s literacy and employment opportunities by implementing widespread education regarding domestic violence and women’s rights. Roy states, “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing” (Roy, 2003).

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