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## JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

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ISSN: 1305-578X

*Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3481-3485; 2021

# Women Water & Future-A Micro Study On Gender Inequalities And Exclusion

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### APA Citation:

Suba, S., Ilavarasi, S. (2021). Women Water & Future-A Micro Study On Gender Inequalities And Exclusion. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 3481-3485.

Submission Date: 27/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 24/12/2021

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### Abstract

Water is most essential for living things. However, increasing water pollution, ground water exploitation, privatization and improper management of water resources makes water more and more of a commercial product. Commercialization and deterioration of water resources has, in turn, led to acute water scarcity that questions the sustainable livelihood of human. The existing andocentric water management system poses threats to situations of un/underemployment, migration, food insecurity, poor water sanitation and feminization of poverty and labour. Water politics has been widening the gulf between powerful and power less in the name of caste, class, gender and market. This imbalanced power relationship marginalized women and children and make them more vulnerable. Social Exclusion of women's participation from the water management and governance worsens their access, control and rights on water even though they are closely associated with water as collectors, consumers and conservers. The embedded gender discrimination and division of labour in public and private spheres of society directly or indirectly alienate women from control over the resources in general, natural resources in particular.

**Keywords:** Water, Water Sanitation, Gender Discrimination, Ground Water Exploitation, Migration.

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## 1. Introduction

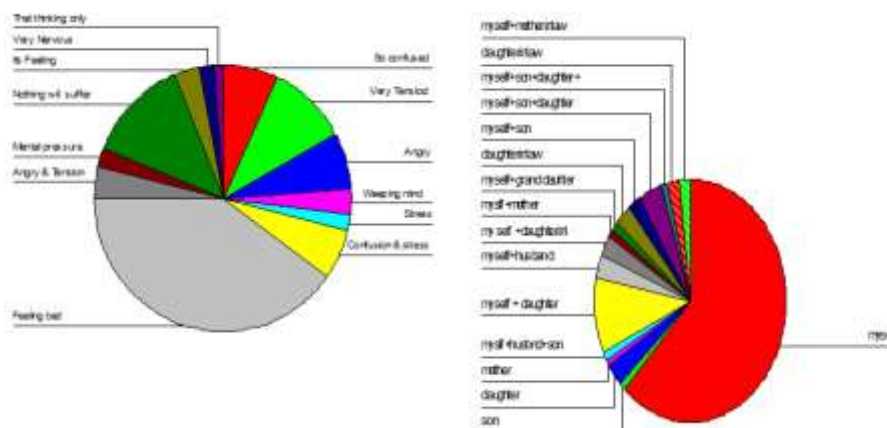
This research paper aims to explore how women are socially been excluded from the water governance and management system in the name of caste and gender at micro level, based on primary source of data collected from Cauvery river basin's Thiruvasi (wet) and Ayyamplayam(dry) villages of Manachanallur block of Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu. To understand the nexus of women, water and gender in different climatic region both dry and wet villages were chosen for research by using multistage sampling. From each village 50 women were selected as respondents. These villages are located 15km away from Tiruchirappalli City Corporation with the basic infrastructure such as road and electricity connectivity, primary school, health centre, public toilet constructed under Total sanitation, angawadi etc. People of both dry and wet villages were depended mainly agriculture and animal husbandry as their livelihood source. They were cultivated paddy, banana, and sugarcane in wet area. In dry village they were cultivated vegetables, paddy and grains due to insufficiency of water. Irrespective of locality landless people and researched women were depended on the daily wage works for their income.

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Farmers in wet village were relied on river and canal irrigation for cultivation; dry area farmers were depended on ponds, wells, tube and bore wells to meet their irrigational needs. Water is considered as a heart of people's livelihood sustainability in these particular villages.

## 2. Women's Burden of Water

In almost all the society, water is considered as a primary responsibility of women; collecting, using and storing for the purpose of fulfilling domestic needs. Due to the water scarcity and with the stereotypic roles of women in rural areas they walk long miles and cities they wait long hours to bring water for drinking and cleaning needs of their families. The water crisis translates into an increasing burden for women as water providers and water related disasters increase women as care givers also carry a disproportionate the burden of health problems. Also, the water crisis affects the socio-economic conditions and positions of the women. The roles of water collection take more time affected their routine activities and make them more tired. This process restrained women to spend time in taking care of their personal things and prevented them to participate in the formal productive sector. Irrespective of area, both in studied village the research participants i.e. women were expressed that they were involved themselves (Dry 94%: Wet 86%) in water collection for their household needs. During the time of illness their water collection was shared by their family's female members (50%: 56%) like daughter, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, grand daughter and relative girls. Besides that they have pointed out due to this sex role assignment women were pressurized under the conditions to unable to take food in right time and take care of children, extending the time of household chores; especially in dry area women were lost their wage since late to arrive the place of job providers. Generally, both the dry and wet areas women were encountered with various kinds of psychological problems such as confusion, Tension, Angry, Weeping mind, Stress/Pressure feeling bad when they met water scarcity and water crisis than physical pains. The kind of gendered notions i.e. responsibilities associated with water forced women to experience either invisible or immeasurable miseries. Considerable proportion of women (dry:95%: wet52%) were acknowledged that they had primarily depended common property resources (CPRs) like ponds, rivers and grazing lands for their livestock management from very long period but presently the quality and quantity or CPRs are deteriorated due to improper maintenance these resources. The depletion of CPRs also made them to depended more market sources for getting inputs for livestock management. This trend was drastically increased in wet village and also emerged as new phenomenon in dry village than earlier. In order to acute drought in dry village and shortage of rain fall in Cauvery river basin wet village, and poor maintenance as well as shrinking of CPRs were compelled the women to access market sources for their livestock management also to feel economically burdened. In these villages, livestock management is considered as a secondary occupation again they were directly or indirectly under the pressure to lose their secondary employment and spent more time and money to collection of water, fodder and other things which are needed for livestock management. This situation makes women as dependent, burdensome and marginalized to participate in different development spheres of society.



## 3. Gendered Social Exclusion of Women and Water

Naturally women are closely associated with the sectors of water i.e., Domestic, Productive and Environment as drawers, users and managers but women's involvement in water related issues are limited as this is considered as a field of expertise that continues to be dominated by men (Vandhana Shiva, 2003). Also, local management committees like irrigation committee or farmer associations is usually dominated by men, where women's concerns are lack or absent in most of the department because of their gender. In India, access to water for Irrigation and collective management of irrigation is linked to land ownership; the right to exploit groundwater belongs to the person who owns the land. So, landless people, particularly women are typically excluded from such initiatives, in terms of access to water, or to decision making on how water is to be used judiciously (V.Ratna Reddy & S.Mahendra Dev ed.,).

In the respective researched villages women did not possess any land entitlement jointly or individually. Absence of landholding was closely intertwined with their knowledge on water table, condition of village water reservoirs/sheds, water management committee, ground water exploitation, commercialization water and water taxation. Almost all the respondents from both the wet and dry villages were unaware about the ground water table. Majority of the women (Dry 78%: Wet 96%) were not involved in any kind of discussions and meeting related to water resource management with in their own household as well as community. Since many of decisions pertaining to water management are taken by the *panchayat* and *gramashaba* where men are dominated women were unable to participate in decision making process and they added that due to the reasons like household responsibilities, uninformed of meeting time, lack of knowledge on *gramashaba* and less importance given by the male members to hear or response the women's voices usually women were unable to participate in policy or project planning. However, women of dry and wet villages were actively participated when ever the primary drinking water resource i.e. street taps were repaired through lodging complaints to *panchayat* office, make efforts to immediate intervention and some time spare the maintenance cost based on the emergency needs. But in the case of maintenance of community-based water reservoirs women's participation was nil; they were never consulted in any decision-making process except using the village womenfolk as supportive assistants during renovation / reconstruction and digging of ponds etc, Each and every matter pertained that was either dictated or decided by male counterparts of the village. Similarly, the same kind of trend was adopted at the time of common village rain water harvesting system construction. In this process women are never informed and consulted; very meager numbers of women have heard about just the information only. No women aware on village watershed management committee, norms to form the committee and its functions. Also, the participation of women in water management affairs was very negligible and they were ignored by the *panchayat* even though women are rightful citizens, voters, water providers and who are facing everyday water crisis than men. By this kind gendered division of practices existed in public and private spheres of the society leads to alienation of women from the social and community reproduction.

#### 4. Conclusion

The representation of masculine approaches and exclusion of women from water management and governance tend to priorities the men's control as well as their perspectives and concerns. The assumed perceptions related to public private divide drawn by the society leads to separation of water needs, governance and management as domestic and production. Hence policy perceptions have emerged based on this conception where men are in the domain of productive water use and women are in the sphere of domestic use. Power based patriarchal control over prevent dalits and marginalized persons to access the basic domestic water rights like drinking and sanitation in many parts of rural India. Despite the ongoing efforts to include the all the stakeholders, women are still in periphery of macro and micro decision-making process or most of the time excluded from the entire process in name caste, class and gender. Particularly in micro level planning institutions like *panchayats* or *gramasabha* women's voices, knowledge, views, experience are never taken into account and their citizenship rights also denied especially water affairs, it is treated as economic and productive good, as well as the natural resources, freedom, autonomy of women to access, control and rights of natural resources are control over by male. Such continuing practice of "exclusion of women" will increase the exploitation of ground water resource, improper maintenance of traditional water reservoirs and burden of women in one way, on the

other it leads water conflicts/war at different levels of society i.e. between micro and macro or haves and have-nots. These consequences will rigorously affect the future of women and children at all levels of life as well as the development of nation as a whole.

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