

## **MOBILE PHONE USAGE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN POLLACHI TALUK**

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### **Abstract**

Mobile phone technology has emerged as a powerful catalyst for development and empowerment in rural India. This paper explores the transformative role of mobile phone usage in enhancing the socio-economic status of rural women in Pollachi Taluk, Tamil Nadu. As mobile connectivity becomes increasingly accessible and affordable, it offers rural women new avenues for communication, financial inclusion, access to healthcare and education, and active participation in household and community decision-making processes. The study investigates how mobile phone usage contributes to greater autonomy, improved access to government services, and the ability to engage in income-generating activities. It also highlights how digital access fosters confidence, self-reliance, and social connectedness among women who have traditionally faced limitations due to socio-cultural and economic barriers. Despite the immense potential of mobile phones, the paper also addresses persistent challenges such as digital illiteracy, affordability, gender-based restrictions, and lack of local language content, which continue to hinder full participation in the digital space. The paper underscores the importance of inclusive digital policies, targeted interventions, and mobile literacy programs to ensure that mobile technology serves as a sustainable tool for women's empowerment in rural communities like Pollachi Taluk.

### **Keywords:**

Mobile phones, rural women, empowerment, socio-economic development.

### **Introduction**

In recent decades, mobile technology has revolutionized communication, information dissemination, and service delivery across the globe. In the context of rural India, where traditional development mechanisms and infrastructure are often lacking or inefficient, mobile phones have emerged as one of the most accessible and impactful tools for social and economic transformation. Among the most affected and underserved demographics are rural women, who face systemic barriers due to entrenched gender norms, limited access to quality education, lack of mobility, and financial constraints.

Pollachi Taluk, located in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, is predominantly rural and agriculturally driven. The region has a substantial population of women engaged in informal and subsistence activities such as small-scale farming, livestock management, tailoring and home-based crafts. These women have historically faced marginalization from the mainstream economic and digital landscape. However, the increasing penetration of mobile phones in the area, aided by affordable data plans and government schemes, is gradually changing this dynamic.

This paper delves into the various dimensions through which mobile usage is contributing to the empowerment of rural women in Pollachi Taluk. It explores how mobile technology is fostering autonomy, expanding access to essential services, enabling income generation, and enhancing women's participation in decision-making. It also examines the barriers that need to be addressed to ensure equitable access to the digital world.

### **Socio-Economic Background of Rural Women in Pollachi Taluk**

Rural women in Pollachi Taluk predominantly belong to low-income households and are engaged in agriculture-related labor, domestic chores, and informal economic activities. A large proportion of these women have limited educational qualifications, with many having dropped out of school early due to poverty, household responsibilities, or social expectations. Their economic dependency on male family members has been a defining feature of their socio-economic status. In

recent years, however, changes are becoming evident. Women are gradually gaining access to basic education, vocational training, and digital tools. With the spread of mobile technology, women now possess the means to access information that was previously out of their reach. The integration of mobile technology into their daily routines has brought about a quiet but profound transformation. These developments are reshaping gender dynamics and empowering women to break away from traditionally imposed roles.

## **Role of Mobile Phones in Women's Empowerment**

### **Economic Empowerment**

Mobile phones have opened up new economic opportunities for rural women. Many women now engage in micro-entrepreneurship by leveraging platforms like WhatsApp Business, Instagram, and Facebook Marketplace to sell products such as pickles, handloom sarees, homemade snacks, and handicrafts. Access to mobile banking applications, Unified Payment Interface (UPI), and digital wallets has allowed women to manage finances independently, receive payments, and track expenses without relying on male intermediaries. Women are also using mobile phones to access market prices for agricultural products, connect with potential customers, and arrange transport and logistics. This digital inclusion boosts their bargaining power and reduces exploitation by middlemen.

### **Educational and Informational Access**

One of the most transformative aspects of mobile phone usage is access to education and information. Rural women, who were once cut off from formal learning opportunities, are now able to access a variety of educational content. They use YouTube to learn tailoring, cooking recipes, English language basics, and vocational skills. Health education has significantly improved, with women using their phones to search for symptoms, watch health videos, and receive vaccination reminders. Women are also using mobile phones to read or listen to news, participate in online awareness campaigns, and learn about their legal rights, including property rights, domestic violence laws, and entitlements under welfare schemes.

### **Social Connectivity and Emotional Well-being**

The ability to maintain social relationships through voice calls, SMS, and instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp has had a profound psychological impact on women. It reduces feelings of isolation, especially for those living in remote villages. Digital communication also helps women participate in support networks and online communities where they can share experiences and seek emotional support. It enhances their confidence.

### **Participation in Household and Community Decision-Making**

Access to timely and relevant information empowers women to contribute meaningfully to family decisions related to finance, education, healthcare, and investments. Participation extends beyond the household. Several women have begun to engage in local governance and community-level planning. Some have contested Panchayat elections and used mobile phones to campaign, manage logistics, and communicate with voters. This shift from passive participants to active decision-makers is a significant indicator of empowerment.

### **Barriers to Effective Mobile Use**

While mobile phones offer immense potential, several barriers limit their impact on women's empowerment in Pollachi Taluk. They are

#### **Digital Illiteracy**

Despite the spread of mobile technology, many women are unable to read text messages, operate apps, or troubleshoot technical issues. Most rely on children to help them navigate digital platforms, compromising privacy and limiting independent use.

#### **Financial Constraints**

Smartphones and data plans, although cheaper than before, still represent a significant expense for families living below the poverty line. When a family can afford only one device, it is usually controlled by a male member. Moreover, lack of charging facilities and poor network connectivity in some hamlets hinder regular use.

#### **Language and Content Accessibility**

Most mobile content is in English or Hindi, limiting comprehension among Tamil-speaking rural women. Moreover, there is a scarcity of culturally relevant apps or localized tutorials. This creates a digital divide within the already marginalized group.

### **Recommendations**

- **Launch Tailored Digital Literacy Drives:** Conduct workshops targeting rural women, focusing on hands-on learning in local languages. These should include app navigation, cyber safety, and using e-governance tools.
- **Promote Access Through Subsidy Programs:** Encourage government and CSR-backed schemes that provide affordable smartphones and free or discounted data packages.
- **Build Gender-Sensitive Content:** Develop apps and videos in Tamil with culturally relevant examples on entrepreneurship, legal awareness, and health.
- **Create Village-Level Digital Support Hubs:** Establish resource centers where women can get technical assistance, charge devices, and access Wi-Fi.
- **Strengthen Online Safety Nets:** Introduce digital helplines and complaint mechanisms that are accessible via mobile.

### **Conclusion**

Mobile phones have emerged as a transformative force in the socio-economic landscape of Pollachi Taluk, particularly for rural women who have long remained on the margins of development. These devices are not merely tools of communication, they are gateways to autonomy, learning, income, and participation. Mobile technology is enabling women to reshape their identities, aspirations, and communities. Despite significant hurdles like digital illiteracy, financial limitations, and cultural norms, the overall trajectory points towards increasing digital inclusion. With the right mix of policy support, technological infrastructure, and community engagement, mobile phones can serve as enduring instruments of empowerment. Empowering women through mobile usage is not merely about owning a device, it is about unlocking their full potential to contribute meaningfully to the digital era. Rural India stands at the cusp of a digital transformation, and empowering its women is key to making that change inclusive and sustainable.

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