



# WOMEN PRISON ADMINISTRATION IN TAMIL NADU: CHALLENGES, WELFARE MEASURES, AND THE PATH TO REFORM

**C.K.SURESH**

Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration  
Government Arts College (Autonomous), Coimbatore

**Dr. S. KASIM NASHEER**

Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration  
Government Arts College (Autonomous), Coimbatore

## ABSTRACT

Women's prisons in Tamil Nadu represent a unique and often overlooked dimension of the Indian correctional system. This paper examines the administrative structure, welfare provisions, and systemic challenges facing the five exclusive Special Prisons for Women operated by the Tamil Nadu Department of Prisons and Correctional Services. Drawing on recent news reports, judicial interventions, and government policy documents, this study analyses critical issues including the absence of female superintendents in violation of state orders, the lack of post-release tracking for children who accompany incarcerated mothers, and the expanding scope of vocational rehabilitation programmes such as beautician training. The findings underscore the need for strict enforcement of gender-sensitive administrative norms, an integrated child welfare framework, and sustained investment in livelihood-oriented rehabilitation. This paper recommends urgent policy measures to align prison administration with constitutional guarantees of dignity and the principles of restorative justice.

**Keywords:** Women's prisons, Tamil Nadu, prison administration, female superintendents, rehabilitation, children of prisoners, correctional services, prison reform

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The incarceration of women raises distinct legal, ethical, and administrative concerns that differ substantially from those governing the imprisonment of men. Women prisoners frequently face compounded vulnerabilities — as primary caregivers, as victims of prior abuse, and as individuals with limited access to

legal representation. In India, the recognition of these vulnerabilities has led to the formulation of specific rules and facilities for female inmates under the Model Prison Manual and various state-level regulations.

Tamil Nadu has established a network of Special Prisons for Women with the explicit mandate of providing gender-sensitive custodial care, rehabilitation, and eventual reintegration. However, a significant gap persists between policy intent and on-ground implementation. Recent judicial scrutiny, investigative reporting, and administrative audits have revealed structural deficiencies that demand urgent academic and policy attention.

This paper seeks to document and critically analyse the current state of women's prison administration in Tamil Nadu. It addresses three principal dimensions: (i) the administrative and staffing structure, with particular emphasis on compliance with state orders mandating female leadership; (ii) the welfare provisions available to inmates and their children; and (iii) the rehabilitation programmes designed to facilitate reintegration. The paper concludes with evidence-based recommendations for reform.

## **2. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF WOMEN'S PRISONS IN TAMIL NADU**

### **2.1 Institutional Framework**

Tamil Nadu currently operates five exclusive Special Prisons for Women, with a combined capacity of 2,018 inmates. These facilities are located at Puzhal (Chennai), Vellore, Trichy, Salem, Madurai, and Coimbatore. The prisons function under the overall supervision of the Tamil Nadu Prison Department, with oversight vested in the Deputy Inspector General of Prisons (Range).

The institutional design of these prisons reflects a commitment to gender-sensitive administration. State rules and government orders mandate that these facilities be headed and staffed predominantly by women officers. This model is predicated on the recognition that incarcerated women require a safe environment in which they can raise grievances without fear or inhibition.

### **2.2 The Crisis of Female Leadership: Violation of Government Orders**

Notwithstanding the explicit policy framework, the actual administration of these prisons has been in significant non-compliance with the state's own directives. As of the most recent judicial review, only two of the seven Special Prisons for Women — those in Chennai and Cuddalore — are managed by female superintendents. The remaining five facilities in Vellore, Salem, Madurai, Trichy, and Coimbatore are administered by male superintendents, in direct contravention of Tamil Nadu Government Order No. 785, dated October 7, 2009.

This systemic non-compliance was brought before the Madras High Court in October 2024 through a Writ of Mandamus filed by Advocate P. Pugalenth, Director of the Prisoners Rights Forum. The Court directed the state government, the Director General of Police, and the DIG of Prisons to explain the absence of female superintendents within two weeks. The petition further highlighted that the position of Deputy

Inspector General of Prisons (Women Prisoners) had remained vacant for over a decade, despite a government order requiring the promotion of eligible female officers with five years of service.

The consequences of this administrative failure are not merely procedural. Female inmates at prisons presided over by male officers have reported an inability to raise personal and sensitive grievances at weekly meetings. This effectively silences a category of complaints — relating to healthcare, dignity, and safety — that are fundamental to the humane management of women's correctional facilities.

### **2.3 Technological Modernisation**

Amid these challenges, the Tamil Nadu Prison Department has also undertaken steps toward administrative modernisation. An Electronic Key Management System was introduced on a pilot basis at the Special Prison for Women, Puzhal, signalling an intent to incorporate technology-driven solutions in prison governance. Such initiatives, while promising, must be accompanied by parallel investments in human resources and gender-sensitive leadership.

## **3. WELFARE PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN INMATES**

### **3.1 Healthcare**

Upon admission, every female inmate is required to undergo immediate examination by a woman assistant surgeon. Gynaecological care, prenatal and postnatal support, and general health monitoring are integral components of the prison's medical services. These provisions reflect an acknowledgment of the specific health needs of women, particularly those who are pregnant or nursing.

However, challenges persist. The availability of psychologists within the prison system remains inadequate, and awareness of legal rights among inmates is reported to be low. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensuring that health provisions extend beyond physical care to encompass mental well-being and access to justice.

### **3.2 Hygiene and Basic Amenities**

The Department of Prisons provides free sanitary napkins to all female inmates, a measure that addresses a basic but often neglected aspect of women's welfare in custodial settings. Adequate hygiene provisions are a precondition for the maintenance of dignity and health in any correctional environment.

### **3.3 Children of Incarcerated Mothers**

Tamil Nadu's prison rules permit children below the age of six to reside with their incarcerated mothers. Nurseries and creches have been established at the Puzhal and Vellore facilities to provide age-appropriate care. The Prison Statistics India 2023 report published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) recorded 18 women prisoners in Tamil Nadu living with 22 children as of December 31, 2023 — accounting for approximately 1.4% of all women prisoners in India who live with children.

However, a critical gap exists in the system's response to children once they attain the age of six. Upon reaching this threshold, children are transferred to relatives, court-appointed guardians, or the Social Defence Department. Crucially, no official mechanism exists to track these children thereafter. An official from the Tamil Nadu Prison Department confirmed that enquiries regarding the welfare of transferred children are conducted only upon the specific request of the incarcerated mother on humanitarian grounds.

The Tamil Nadu Prison Rules, 2024, notified in November of that year, include provisions for the rehabilitation of released prisoners — covering counselling, employment assistance, and housing support. However, no corresponding provisions exist for the aftercare of children who have spent their formative years in prison. This omission represents a significant lacuna in the state's child welfare framework and warrants immediate legislative attention.

## **4. REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMES**

### **4.1 Vocational Training Initiatives**

Rehabilitation through vocational training has been a cornerstone of Tamil Nadu's approach to prison reform. These programmes are designed to equip inmates with marketable skills that can support their economic independence upon release, thereby reducing the risk of recidivism.

Among the more recent and impactful initiatives is the introduction of free beautician training at the Special Prison for Women (Puzhal-III) in Chennai. Launched in June of the preceding year in response to demand from inmates, the programme has trained 30 individuals to date. Following its success, the Department of Prisons and Correctional Services has sanctioned its expansion to the Special Prisons for Women in Vellore, Madurai, Coimbatore, and Trichy. The government has approved a budget of Rs. 8.80 lakh to establish training facilities at each location, at a cost of Rs. 2.20 lakh per unit.

The superintendent of Puzhal-III described the programme as having a measurable therapeutic effect: inmates reported improved self-esteem and emotional well-being as a result of participation. This observation is consistent with the broader criminological literature on the positive effects of skills-based interventions on the psychological state and post-release outcomes of incarcerated individuals.

### **4.2 Financial Support for Post-Release Livelihoods**

The Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society is positioned to provide financial assistance to inmates who complete the beautician training, enabling them to establish their own beauty parlours upon release. This represents a meaningful linkage between in-prison skill development and post-release economic empowerment — a model that merits broader application across vocational programmes in the correctional system.

### 4.3 Open Prison Proposals

The Tamil Nadu government has also considered the establishment of an open prison exclusively for women. Open prisons, characterized by a less restrictive custodial environment, have demonstrated positive outcomes in several Indian states in terms of inmate well-being and rehabilitation. The extension of this model to women would represent a significant step forward in the state's correctional philosophy.

## 5. CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The foregoing review reveals a paradox at the heart of Tamil Nadu's women's prison system: the coexistence of progressively designed welfare policies and demonstrably poor compliance with those very policies. The following key findings emerge from this analysis:

- Non-compliance with the 2009 government order mandating female superintendents has persisted for over fifteen years, undermining both the administrative integrity and the lived safety of women inmates in five of seven Special Prisons.
- The position of Deputy Inspector General (Women Prisoners) has remained vacant for over a decade, signalling a structural neglect of the institutional architecture required to support gender-sensitive prison governance.
- The absence of post-transfer tracking mechanisms for children separated from their incarcerated mothers constitutes a child welfare failure with potential long-term developmental and social consequences.
- Vocational programmes such as beautician training demonstrate the capacity of the prison system to deliver rehabilitative outcomes when adequately resourced and systematically implemented.
- The Tamil Nadu Prison Rules, 2024, represent a step forward in formalising rehabilitation but leave critical gaps, particularly regarding the welfare of children of prisoners.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis presented above, this paper offers the following recommendations:

- Immediate enforcement of Government Order No. 785 (2009): The state government should issue a time-bound directive to appoint qualified female officers as superintendents in all remaining non-compliant Special Prisons for Women.
- Filling the DIG (Women Prisoners) vacancy: The long-standing vacancy in this senior post must be filled without further delay. This position is essential for coordinated policy oversight and grievance redressal for women inmates across the state.
- Establishing a child welfare tracking protocol: A standardised monitoring mechanism must be developed to track the welfare of children who leave prison upon turning six, in coordination with the District Child Protection Officers and the Social Defence Department.

- Embedding child aftercare in the Tamil Nadu Prison Rules, 2024: An amendment should be introduced to extend the rehabilitation provisions of the 2024 Rules to cover children who have resided in prison.
- Scaling vocational training: Successful models such as the beautician training programme should be expanded to cover a broader range of trades and should be integrated with formal certification and post-release financial support mechanisms.
- Psychosocial support: Dedicated psychologists should be appointed at each Special Prison for Women, and regular legal literacy workshops should be conducted to ensure inmates are aware of their rights.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Women's prison administration in Tamil Nadu stands at a critical juncture. The state has enacted progressive policy frameworks and introduced meaningful welfare measures, yet their implementation remains patchy and inconsistent. The persistence of male superintendents in facilities mandated by law to be female-led, the silence of the system on children who outgrow prison nurseries, and the limited reach of rehabilitation programmes all point to a need for renewed institutional commitment and sustained political will.

The recognition of incarcerated women as rights-bearing individuals — entitled to dignity, safety, healthcare, and a credible path to reintegration — must move from legislative aspiration to operational reality. This transformation requires not only administrative compliance but a deeper cultural shift within the correctional system: one that centres gender sensitivity, child welfare, and restorative justice as non-negotiable imperatives.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies of rehabilitation outcomes, the lived experiences of women inmates across facilities, and comparative analyses of open prison models. Such scholarship will be indispensable in building the evidence base for policy reform in Tamil Nadu and in other Indian states grappling with similar challenges.

**REFERENCES**

- [1] Pugalenti, P. (2024). Writ of Mandamus on Female Superintendents in Special Prisons for Women, Tamil Nadu. Madras High Court. Filed October 2024.
- [2] The News Minute. (2024, October 24). "Madras HC asks TN govt why women's prisons are run by men." Retrieved from <https://www.thenewsminute.com/tamil-nadu/madras-hc-asks-tn-govt-why-womens-prisons-are-run-by-men>
- [3] New Indian Express. (2025, October 20). "Children of woman prisoners in TN turn 'invisible' after turning six." Retrieved from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2025/Oct/20/children-of-woman-prisoners-in-tn-turn-invisible-after-turning-six>
- [4] DTNext. (2025). "Tamil Nadu women prisoners to get beautician training." Retrieved from <https://www.dtnext.in/news/tamilnadu/tamil-nadu-women-prisoners-to-get-beautician-training-840585>
- [5] National Crime Records Bureau. (2023). Prison Statistics India 2023. New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- [6] Tamil Nadu Government. (2009). Government Order No. 785, dated October 7, 2009: Appointment of Female Officers as Superintendents in Special Prisons for Women. Chennai: Government of Tamil Nadu.
- [7] Tamil Nadu Prison Rules. (2024). Notified in November 2024. Department of Prisons and Correctional Services, Government of Tamil Nadu.
- [8] Garud, R., & Bondar, A. (2025). "Women Prisoners and Their Rights: Special Need to Concern." Chanakya National Law University. Retrieved from <https://www.cnlu.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Women-Prisoners-And-Their-Rights-Special-Need-To-Concern-by-Prof.-Rajaram-Garud-Dr.-Anjali-Bondar.pdf>
- [9] Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. (2016). Model Prison Manual 2016. New Delhi: Bureau of Police Research and Development.
- [10] United Nations. (2010). United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (The Bangkok Rules). General Assembly Resolution 65/229.