

SELF-HELP GROUPS : AN EVOLUTIONARY AND EFFECTUAL TOOL FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract: The women issues have received gigantic attention in the planning and intellectual discussions and forums at national as well as global platforms. However, the existing deficit in the formulation and execution of the policies has not changed the grass root situation to a satisfactory extent. Statistically the rate of literacy among women has increased and the educational and occupational patterns have also changed and widened with women entering the domain. In the background of the gigantic transformation, the core issue, which still remains unreciprocated, is that of women's right and empowerment. In the light of this backdrop, the present study intends to review the emerging perspective in the context of the socio-economic empowerment of women and changing paradigms of development. The research paper with the help of various secondary sources will deliberate upon the importance and impact of Self-help groups in women empowerment in India and how it has enhanced the socio-economic status of women in the Indian society. Efforts have also been made to suggest reforms for wholesome functioning of SHGs in the field of women empowerment

Key Words: Self-help groups, women empowerment, socio-economic status.

Introduction: SHG is an all-encompassing program of micro-enterprises covering all aspects of self-employment, organization of the rural poor into groups, planning of activity clusters, infrastructure build up, technology, credit and marketing. It emphasizes on activity clusters based on the occupational skills of the people and markets available. SHG refers to peer-controlled, self-governed, informal group of people having same socio-economic background and a desire to collectively perform common purposes. SHG is a group formed by the community women, which has specific number of members like 15 or 20. In such a group the poorest women would meet up for crisis, debacle, and social reasons, monetary backing to each other has simplicity of discussion, social collaboration and financial communication. SHGs are considered as a standout amongst the most critical devices to embrace participatory methodology for the monetary strengthening of women. SHG is a group of individuals that meets routinely to talk about issues important to them and to take a gander at arrangements of ordinarily experienced issues. The group could possibly be promoted by Government or non-Government foundations. The SHG is group of rural poor people who have volunteered to compose themselves into a gathering for destruction of neediness of the individuals. They consent to spare consistently and believer their reserve funds into a typical asset known as Group Corpus. The members from the group consent to utilize this common fund and such other funds that they may receive as a group through a common administration.

Theoretical Framework:

Functionalist theory: Emile Durkheim was the main theorist whose work revolved around how social order is possible or how society remains relatively

stable. Notable theorists include Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, and Robert K. Merton. Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how the social institution contributes to the stability of the whole society. Self-help groups are a part of society which has a function to fulfill similar to other social institutions like family, government, etc. A relationship exists between self-help groups and individuals in whom the SHGs help the individuals of the society by micro managing its resources and helping with the problems of the individuals.

Conflict theory: Conflict theory main profounder was Karl Marx, who focused on class conflict between the bourgeoisies i.e. the capitalists, the elite class and the proletariat i.e. the working class and the poor. According to Marx, if the changes made to appease conflict maintained a capitalist system, then the cycle of conflict would repeat. SHGs are formed to bridge the gap between the privileged class and the working class. The SHGs members are mostly village people with poor economic background who are working for the betterment of their society and community in order to bring the underprivileged section of individuals at par with the affluent class.

Feminist theory: Feminist theory emerged out of the women's movement and aims to enhance the position of women in society for the sole purpose of improving their position in society. SHGs were formed to achieve women empowerment in rural areas. SHGs have helped to increase the status of women in the rural society by making them self-independent and self-reliant. Thus the objective behind SHGs lies in the feminist theory of gender equality in the society.

Research Methodology:

Research Objectives:

- To study the importance of women empowerment in rural development
- To study the importance of SHGs in women empowerment
- To assess the performance of SHGs throughout India
- To evaluate the impact of SHGs and micro-credit and micro-finance on women empowerment
- To identify the factors required for the successful functioning of the SHGs for empowerment of women.

Methodology: To analyze the impact of SHGs in empowering women, it is proposed to use secondary data. The secondary data will be collected from the published and unpublished documents and browsing internet. Reliance will on the classified surveys and reports, relevant to the problem, available in the internet. The methodology opted will be universal and population study to analyze the impact of research problem in the rural areas.

Sources of data: The study is based on secondary data. The data is collected from books and literature review is done by online available studies and journals.

Data analysis and discussion: India has witnessed a significant growth in the number of SHGs as there is a rapid growth and threefold increase in the number of SHGs from 2001 having figures in 2 Lakhs to 2011 having figures in 6 Lakhs.

Gender wise Percentage of participation in Indian Rural Economy during year 2011-2012

	Self employed	Em-regular wage	Casual Labor
Women	59.30%	5.60%	35.10%
Men	54.50%	10.00%	35.50%

It can be inferred that women participation in rural economy is more as compared to men in respect of self-employment, less in respect to regular wage and equal in respect to casual labor in Indian rural economy.

The following data tables deals with the growth and performance of SHGs in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which is based on the secondary data and the primary data collected from the state and district-level functionaries.

Table 1: State wise number of SHGs

Serial number	Name of State	No. of districts	No. of villages	No. of SHGs
1	Andhra Pradesh	4	83	544
2	Gujarat	4	52	316
3	Chhattisgarh	4	42	252
4	Uttar Pradesh	4	93	558
5	Bihar	4	61	372
6	Total	20	331	2064

It can be inferred that UP has the highest number of SHGs followed by AP and Bihar. Chhattisgarh has the lowest number of SHGs in its state.

Table 2: Caste-wise Distribution of SHG Members

Serial No.	Caste	All Men	All Women	Mixed	Total
1	ST	148	376	123	647
2	SC	241	428	114	783
3	Backward	109	274	42	425
4	Forward	18	140	13	171
5	Minorities	11	2	25	38
6	Total	527	1220	317	2064

Most number of SHGs members belongs to ST caste followed by SC and backward caste. The participation of forward caste members are significantly less.

Table 3: Formal Education of SHG Members

Education	All Men	All Women	Mixed	Total
Illiterate	130	200	109	439
Literate	347	880	167	1394
High School	23	136	6	165
College	21	18	27	66

The level of education or formal schooling of SHG members is an important characteristic for the functioning of the group. Education will impact maintenance of records, starting of development schemes, linkage with banks, etc. Most number of SHGs members is literate with some of them having high school education. Illiteracy rate is significant in SHGs members. Very few SHGs members have college education. The level of education is high among the women members as compared to men.

Table 4: Allocation, Fund Available and Total Expenditure

Serial Number	State	Allocation	Fund Available	Total Expenditure
1	Andhra Pradesh	2251	4184	2233
2	Bihar	1401	2105	2074
3	Chhattisgarh	899	1001	1442
4	Gujarat	723	760	639
5	Uttar Pradesh	2405	3584	2809
6	Total	5367	7871	5522

It can be inferred that UP has spent the maximum fund on various activities followed by Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Gujarat has spent the least amount of fund on SHGs activities.

Summary of findings:

- ❖ Participation of women as SHGs members are more as compared to men.
- ❖ Over the years there is rapid increase in number of SHGs in India.
- ❖ The participation of ST and SC caste as SHGs members are more as compared to forward caste.
- ❖ The formal education of SHGs members is less with least number of college graduates followed by high school graduates. The level of illiteracy is high among SHGs members.
- ❖ There is a disparity among the allocation and expenditure of funds amongst different states of India.

Impact of Self-Help Group In India:

1. Saving and Financial Decision Making: One of the primary benefits of participation in a SHG is the opportunity to save on a regular basis, access and participate in the management of these savings. 2. Access to credit: A result of participation in SHGs is an improvement in a women access to credit. The financial mobility due to participation in the SHG has led to an improvement in the quality of life, according to some of the successful groups. 3. Employment: The implementation of SHG has generated various employment opportunities for the poor. The program helped many participants in improving their economic conditions. The National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (Nabard) will create Rs.15 billion fund to provide women's Self-Help Groups in economically weaker districts of the country. 4. Decision-making within the household: The SHG program increased involvement in Decision-making and awareness about various programs and organizations. The attitude of male members of the families has changed and they encourage women to participate in the meetings. 5. Increased Participation in local government: Due to SHGs, women now know about local political

institutions and Gram Panchayats and have knowledge to report their grievances in correct forums. 6. Communication Level of Members: Microfinance movement is having a good impact on members as their ability to express their feelings has made people more confident. 7. Change in Family Violence: Involvement with SHG has reduced family violence especially due to reduction in economic difficulties. 8. Increased interaction with Outsiders: In the Pre SHG period 25 per cent of the SHGs members interacted with officials whereas after associating with SHGs, 91 per cent SHG members now interact with the outsiders. This interaction has helped them to communicate their problems. 9. There is an increased nutritional status with female social and economic empowerment in program areas.

Recommendations and conclusion:

Suggestions:

- The efforts should be made to form SHGs for women in rural and tribal villages and slums to uplift women by government agencies, NGOs, educational institutions, and other service organizations of civil societies. Both state and Central government should work together to enhance the perception of SHG without selfish motives, political biasness and taking into account the welfare of the womenfolk by incorporating a vital strategy for women empowerment in the national policy and developing effective implementing machinery and allocating more grant in the budget.
- NGOs, educational institutions and social service organizations which are engaged in the works of development and promotions of SHGs should be encouraged at all levels with adequate financial grants and appreciation and awards.
- Conductive network and harmonious atmosphere should be established among Government Agencies, NGOs, Banks, Other service organizations for effective functioning of SHGs.
- Banks and other financial institutions should work with open-minded and service motives to encourage SHG among women in order for development and growth of India.

- SHGs should be firmly encouraged to undertake income generating activities for group members.
- SHG should engage in manufacturing products such as electronic and electrical goods, readymade garments, and handicrafts to get a hold of market in other countries.
- In order to encourage SHGs for women empowerment mass media via newspapers, TV, radio, etc can play a significant role by creating awareness in the public and among women about the qualities of SHGs by publishing success stories of SHGs, case studies, achievements of NGOs and Government efforts etc. SHG can be encouraged to form cooperative societies to promote Cottage and Village industries for which raw materials and resources are abundantly available rural areas.

Conclusion: The SHGs and micro enterprises had major impact on social and economic life of rural women. The study concludes that there was an increase in self-confidence, self-reliance and independence of rural women due to the involvement in the entrepreneurial and other activities of SHGs. Now women entrepreneurs are aware of opportunities available to them, but there is scope for improvement in it. Raised literacy level could be helpful for the SHG members to understand government policies, gaining and understanding technical required skills. The Self Help Groups have proved the way for economic independence of rural women. Therefore, it can be concluded that the self-help groups contribute immensely and substantially in pushing the conditions of the female population to its new heights.

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