

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND SELF HELP GROUPS IN INDIA

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Abstract: The concept of Self Help Group has its roots in rural areas and it has been mooted along the rural and semi urban women to improve their living conditions. In India, this scheme is implemented with the help of NABARD as a main nodal agency in rural development. It is self employment generation scheme for especially rural women, who don't have their own assets. The word 'empowerment' means giving power. According to the International Encyclopaedia (1999), power means having the capacity and the means to direct one's life towards desired social, political and economic goals or status. Empowerment provides a greater access to knowledge and resources, more autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan lives, more control over the circumstances which influence lives, and freedom from customs, beliefs and practices. Thus, empowerment of women not just a goal in itself, but key to all global development goals. Empowerment is an active multidimensional process to enable women to realize their identity and power in all spheres of life. This paper examines the women empowerment through SHGs and also explains the current position of women empowerment in India. The study made with the help of the secondary data and information obtained by through economic survey, census reports, journals, reports, periodicals and websites.

Keywords: Development, Employment, SHG's, Women Empowerment.

Introduction: The concept of Self Help Groups serves to underline the principle "for the people, by the people and of the people". The Self Help Groups is the brain child of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by Prof. Mohammed Yunus of Chittagong University in the year 1975. The activism within the women movement has influenced the government to frame policies and plan for the betterment of the country. The empowerment of women through Self Help Groups (SHGs) would lead to benefits not only to the individual women, but also for the family and community as a whole through collective action for development. Self Help Groups have linkages with NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) and banks to get finance for development. In turn it will promote the economy of the country by its contribution to rural economy. Self Help Groups are small voluntary associations of rural people, preferably women folk from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of solving the common problems through self-help and mutual help in the Self Help Groups.

Objectives: The objectives of the present study are:

1. To understand an origin and growth of Self Help Groups
2. To find out the income generating activities of Self Help Group.
3. To explore future strategies and to suggest measures for the better management of Self Help Groups.

Methodology: The Present study is mainly emphasis on women empowerment through the development of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in India and based on secondary source of data. Which were collected through various Annual reports and economic survey. Some information collected from the sources of

Journals, Periodicals, Books and Website. The collected data was analyzed by using simple analytical tool like average, percentage etc.

Women Empowerment in India: The year 2001 had been declared by the Government of India as "Women's Empowerment Year" to focus on a vision where women are equal partners like men". Because the Constitution of India grants equality to women in various fields of life. In the past, the position of women was miserable in the society and even women were not ready to undertake any assignment or job due to many reasons like fear, shyness, male dominance in the society and *purda* system but time has been changed now. Women of today are not like the early days. Now, they are always ready to come forward and want more economic independence, their own identity, achievements, equal status in the society and greater freedom. And Government of India has provided enough support for Self Help Groups (SHGs) so that proper attention should be given to their economic independence through self employment, entrepreneurial development and well being that ultimately leads to its contribution. SHGs have been emerged as a powerful instrument in order to eliminate poverty and for the empowerment of women in the rural economy. Income generating activities of SHG's are enormously increasing following support by commercial banks, co-operative banks, regional rural banks, NABARD and NGO's. In this way, SHGs are important to reduce rural poverty and to increase gainful employment. Keeping this in mind, the present study analyses the empowerment of women through the SHGs.

Origin of Self Help Groups (SHGs): The origin of Self Help Groups (SHGs) is the brainchild of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, founded by Prof. Mohammed

Yunus in 1975, who tried out a new approach to rural credit in Bangladesh. Grameen gave loans without asking borrowers either to provide collateral or engage in paper work. In India NABARD initiated SHGs in the year 1986-87 But the real effort was taken after 1991-92 from the linkage of SHGs with the banks. A SHG is a small economically homogeneous affinity group of the rural poor voluntarily coming forward to save a small amount of money regularly, which is deposited in a common fund to meet the members' emergency needs and to provide collateral free loans decided by the group. The SHGs have been recognised as useful tool to help the poor and as an alternative mechanism to meet the urgent credit needs of poor through thrift (N. Thalavaipillai and S. Nadarajan 2010).

Review of the Literature: There are numerous studies made both by Indians and Foreigners to examine the empowerment of women and their related issues. Some of the important studies in this regard are as follows.

Pattanaik (2003) in her study reveals that SHGs are continuously striving for a better future for tribal women as participants, decision-makers and beneficiaries in the domestic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life. But due to certain constraints like gender inequality, exploitation, women torture for which various SHGs are not organised properly and effectively.

Manimekalai (2004) in his article commented that to run the income generating activities successfully the SHGs must get the help of NGOs. The bank officials should counsel and guide the women in selecting and implementing profitable income generating activities. He remarked that the formation of SHGs have boosted the self-image and confidence of rural women.

Sahu and Tripathy (2005) in their edited book views that 70 per cent of world's poor are women. Access to poor to banking services is important not only for poverty alleviation but also for optimizing their contribution to the growth of regional as well as the national economy. Self Help Groups have emerged as the most vital instrument in the process of participatory development and women empowerment. The rural women are the marginalized groups in the society because of socio-economic constraints. They remain backward and lower position of the social hierarchical ladder. They can lift themselves from the morass of poverty and stagnation through micro finance and formation of Self-help Groups.

Satpathy and Khatua (2007) made an attempt to study the impact of Micro Finance in socio economic growth in KBK region of Odisha. Basing on the study of SHG Bank linkage programme made by NABARD, analysis was made to evaluate the success

rate of the programme in the backward KBK region of Odisha.

Anitha and Revenkar (2007) made an attempt to study rural development through micro credit, the growth of SHGs from 1992-93 to 2003-04, and agency wise SHGs linked on March 31, 2004. They concluded that the success of SHGs not only improve the economic status of women, but also brought lot of changes in their social status.

Vinayamoorthy and Pithoda (2007) made an attempt to examine women empowerment through SHGs in three villages of Tamil Nadu. They selected a sample of 398 members of 20 SHGs from Vellore, Thiruvannamalla and Dharampur districts of the state. The main objectives of the study were to examine the income, expenditure and the savings of the members after joining SHGs and the role of SHGs in providing credit. They concluded that economic activities of SHGs were quite successful.

Sobha (2008) made an attempt to evaluate the problem of self employed women. The study took 400 self-employed women as sample from Coimbatore Municipal Corporation limit to use scaling techniques. The study concluded that the problem faced by the beneficiaries of Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana is less severe than non-beneficiaries.

Murugan and Begum (2008) made an attempt to examine the predominant barriers to women entrepreneurs. The study was based on the primary data collected from the sample 100 entrepreneurs of Chennai City. The study reveals that social and cultural barriers are prominent formidable block for the development of women entrepreneurs. The study concluded that entrepreneurs with ability to plan and run a business to deliver quality products.

Gudaganavar and Gudaganavar (2008) made an attempt to examine the empowerment of rural women through SHG. They highlighted the process of SHGs in India from 1992-93 to 2006-07. They also highlighted the region-wise progress of SHGs and employment of women through SHGs. They concluded that no development was possible without empowerment of women.

Vasanthakumari (2008) made an attempt to examine the role of micro enterprises in empowering women in Kerala. The author took a sample of 328 micro entrepreneurs. The study revealed that these enterprises helped in empowering rural women economically, socially and individually. The study suggested giving priority to commercial viability of enterprises.

Kumararaja (2009) made an attempt to evaluate the performance of SHGs in Tamil Nadu. The study highlighted the progress of SHGs in India and in Tamil Nadu. It revealed that there has been a steady progress in the number of SHGs and amount of loan sanctioned. The study concluded that a timely and

regular check of the micro credit through SHGs will contribute to a healthy progress and to the overall development of rural women.

Sankaran (2009) made an attempt to analyse the trends and problems of rural women entrepreneurs in India. The study highlighted the conceptual aspects of trends and problems of rural women entrepreneurs in India. It concluded that women have creative ability, easy adaptability and ability to cope with setbacks.

Working Pattern of Self-Help Groups in India:

Women and SHGs in many parts of the country have achieved success in bringing the women to the main stream of decision making. The SHG in our country become a source of inspiration for women’s welfare formation of SHG is a viable alternative to achieve the objectives of rural development and to get community participation in all rural development programmes. SHG is also a viable organized set up to disburse micro credit to the rural women and encouraging them together into entrepreneurial activities. (Abdul, 2007). To alleviate the poverty and to empower the women, the micro-finance, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and credit management groups have also started in India. Self Help Group (SHG) is a small

voluntary association to form a group. It is informal and homogenous group of not more than twenty members. SHGs consist of maximum 20 members because any group having more than 20 members has to be registered under Indian legal system. That is why, it is recommended to be informal to keep them away from bureaucracy, corruption, unnecessary administrative expenditure and profit motive. In fact, it is a home grown model for poverty reduction which simultaneously works to empower and shape the lives of its members in a better way. Groups are expected to be homogenous so that the members do not have conflicting interest and all the members can participate freely without any fear. Self-help groups (SHGs) movement has triggered off a silent revolution in the rural credit delivery system in India. SHGs have proved as an effective medium for delivering credit to rural poor for their socioeconomic empowerment.

Progress of SHG-BLP: The Self-Help Group movement in India is a savings-first programme with credit being its logical corollary. Touching over 9.44 crore households, it has become the largest Microfinance programme in the world.

Table 1: Number of SHGs Savings linked with Banks (No. Lakh)

Region	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Northern	3.52	3.73	4.09	3.73	3.65
North Eastern	2.92	3.25	3.67	3.24	3.16
Eastern	13.74	15.27	16.26	14.71	14.69
Central	7.66	7.86	8.13	7.02	6.86
Western	9.46	9.61	10.62	9.06	8.97
Southern	32.23	34.89	36.83	35.41	36.96
Total	69.53	74.61	79.60	73.17	74.29

Region wise number of SHGs savings linked during the last five years is furnished in the Table 1 given above where, Northern Region includes cities like Haryana, HP, J&K, Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan; North Eastern Region takes figures of Assam, AP, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura; Eastern Region includes A & N Islands, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal; Central Region is comprised of Chhattisgarh, MP, UP, Uttarakhand; Western Region includes Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Southern Region includes AP, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamilnadu. As presented in table 1 it can be observed that in the last 5 year period SHGs had exploited the available potential for its promotion in southern states, but as far as progress is concerned it has more or less remained stagnant here as well. Another observation drawn is that despite the sizeable rural poor population available for coverage in the other regions, there is not much progress.

Income-Generation Activities of SHGs: Women’s self-help groups (SHGS) are engaged in a diverse

range of income-generation activities including, Animal Husbandry, Cultivation of vegetables, Manufacture of vermicompost, Trading in foodgrains, Making leaf cups, Making papads and Pickle, Running petty shops, small eateries, Manufacture of brooms, Fisheries, Group farming by taking land on lease, and Basket Making. Apparently income generating activities are depending upon availability of resources and marketing.

Major Findings:

1. Though, financial inclusion efforts have improved the outreach of banks in the rural areas, still the banks are not able to serve the SHGs adequately, largely, because of lack of sufficient bank staff, lack of proper attitude.
2. Microfinance in the form of MFIs, available to bulk customers, which are at parity with the SHG-BLP both in respect of Priority sector status and availability of refinance from NABARD, is gradually making SHG BLP less attractive to bank.

3. The information technology could not be provided to the desired extent to improve the quality of service to the SHGs as well as their book keeping and monitoring system.

4. Sustainability of SHGs had attracted attention in recent past, but exit of initial support mechanism has resulted in many SHGs failing to get further credit support from banks - mainly after the transfer of bank staffs initially connected in their linkages.

Suggestions:

1. The self help groups and its importance must be implementing as lesson of text book among school and college level education.
2. Self Help Group is a powerful tool to enrich the savings activities and eliminates poverty.
3. Wide publicity must be given about Self Help Groups and Sree Shakti Sanghas among rural masses and Non Government Organisation must facilitate marketing for the products produced by SHGs.
4. In order to strength the women empowerment, financial literacy has to be promoted
5. Rotation of responsibility has to be made compulsory, so that it will lead to women's empowerment.
6. It is suggested that the Non Government Organizations should be prevented from interfering with Self Help Groups movement. Steps should be taken to keep them as voluntary organizations and they should not be allowed to use extraneous influences.

7. Since majority of the women are ignorant of their legal rights, legal literacy classes should be organized.

8. In many of the Self Help Groups, the same person is continuing in the offices as group Secretary. So, rotation of the group's secretary is necessary for equitable exposure to the banking transaction.

Conclusion: The study was undertaken to identify women empowerment through Self Help Group. It is found that the socio-economic factor has been changed after joining the Self Help Groups. But the saving is increasing at earlier stage of life. There are emerging issues that need to be addressed to make the role of women in the long run. It is the clear that by involving voluntary organizations in social mobilization and creating an enabling policy environment, micro fiancé can achieve a vast scale and can become a rational movement. The self help group is important in re-strengthening and bringing together of the human race. We may conclude that the economic activities of Self Help Group are quite successful. Self Help Group concept has been mooted along the rural and semi urban women to improvethier living conditions. Even though SHG concept is applicable to men also in our country, it has been more successful only among women. To reduce poverty by enabling the poor household to access gainful self employment and skilled wage employment opportunities, resulting in appreciable improvement in their livelihood on a sustainable basis, through building strong grass-root institutions. Thus SHGs have been showing the way ahead to eliminate the poverty of India along with women empowerment.

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