

Self-Help Groups' Contribution to Indian Women's Advancement

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Abstract: *The important role that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play in empowering women in India is examined critically in this article. SHGs have become influential grassroots organizations that support women's skill development, financial inclusion, and group decision-making. The paper examines the body of research on how SHGs affect women's social and economic empowerment. The success stories, difficulties, and policy implications of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in improving the lives of Indian women are highlighted in the conversation. The article's conclusion highlights the significance of ongoing assistance and creative strategies to fortify SHGs and guarantee the nation's women's ongoing advancement.*

Keywords: Help Groups, Women Empowerment, Financial Inclusion, Skill Development, Collective Decision-Making

I. INTRODUCTION

India recognizes that women are the main force behind economic advancement and that empowering them is essential to long-term, sustainable growth. However, historically, women in India have faced many challenges, including limited access to financial resources, education, and decision-making opportunities. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have developed into powerful change agents as a consequence of these challenges. SHGs with a local focus bring women together to address common issues, pool resources, and promote collective decision-making. The methods that self-help groups (SHGs) have aided Indian women in achieving political, social, and economic empowerment are examined in this article.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature evaluation drew on a number of studies and academic papers that examined the effects of SHGs.

One study that investigated self-help groups (McCrary, B. S., & Delaney, S. I., 1995)¹ looked at their advantages and disadvantages. Peer support and mutual assistance are crucial in these groups, they said, and they help with a lot of different mental and emotional problems.

In their 1976 article, Katz and Bender laid forth the background and potential future of self-help organizations in Western nations. In doing so, they illuminated the social factors that impacted the creation of self-help groups by tracing their roots and discussing their progress.

Research by Swain, R. B., and Wallentin, F. Y. (2009)³ examined how microfinance programs helped self-help organizations in India empower women. Through an examination of the benefits and drawbacks, their research determined how much these organizations aided in women's socioeconomic empowerment.

The larger social and economic effects of self-help organizations in India were investigated by Sundaram, A. (2012)⁴. Economic stability and improved member well-being were two ways these organizations helped disadvantaged communities grow, according to the research. By looking at the monetary and social impacts of self-help organizations in India, Deininger and Liu (2009)⁵ offered an economic viewpoint. They provided proof that these organizations helped alleviate poverty, increase income, and build social capital.

An extensive research on the quality and sustainability of self-help groups in India was carried out by Reddy, K. R., & Reddy, C. S. (2012)⁶. They shed insight on these organizations' capacity to promote enduring positive change by analyzing aspects that affected their efficacy and endurance. The importance of women's self-help organizations in community development was highlighted by Tesoriero, F. (2006)⁷ in a study conducted in South India. The research

emphasized the positive effects these organizations had on women's agency, decision-making, and community development. An up-to-date review of self-help groups in India, including all the different kinds and their purposes, was given by Singh, S., Ruivenkamp, G., and Jongerden, J. (2011)⁸. To better understand the many functions these organizations, play in Indian society, they dissected their internal workings.

The plan for Indian self-help groups was critiqued by Jakimow and Kilby (2006). Concerns about sustainability, gender dynamics, and empowerment were among the topics covered as they examined the method's advantages and disadvantages.

In his 1999 article, Karmakar, K. G. analyzed the microfinance scene in India through the lens of rural credit and self-help organizations. Microfinance was defined and discussed in depth, along with the needs that it aims to address, and the importance of self-help groups in this context.

To find out whether federating microfinance-based self-help organizations in India will make them more successful, Nair, A. (2005)¹¹ looked into their sustainability. This research looked at the pros and cons of various organizations coming together to create federations in order to make a bigger impact.

In their 2021 article, Kumar et al. brought attention to the fact that self-help organizations in India have helped women become more independent on a collective level. They demonstrated how women's agency and well-being were favorably affected by their involvement in these organizations.

Collectively, these works of literature from a wide range of disciplines enhanced our knowledge of self-help groups by illuminating their gendered, social, and economic aspects and by demonstrating how they have the ability to empower people in various settings, especially women.

III. DISCUSSION

3.1 Formation and Functioning of SHGs:

Usually, SHGs are established at the community or village level and consist of a collection of women who band together to tackle shared problems. Supporting women's access to banking services and economic development is SHGs' principal goal. Supportive housing groups (SHGs) allow women to gather regularly, save money, and have access to loans, which they may then use to launch businesses or other income-generating ventures.

Financial institutions, government agencies, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often play a supporting role in SHGs. When it comes to connecting SHG members with official financial services, training, and capacity development, these groups are indispensable. During SHG meetings, members voice their opinions on a range of topics, make decisions on savings and credit initiatives, and tackle societal challenges in a democratic manner.

3.2 Financial Inclusion and Economic Empowerment:

Supporting women's access to financial services is a major achievement of SHGs. When it comes to investing in income-generating businesses or dealing with crises, many women in India face significant challenges due to restricted access to official financial institutions. Women are able to get affordable loans via SHGs because of their combined resources and connections to banks and microfinance organizations. Because of this, they are able to put money into agriculture, education, and small enterprises, which helps their family's financial situation.

Women are able to escape poverty and diversify their income streams via the use of savings and loans from self-help groups (SHGs). When women have more money in their pockets, they may put more money into their families' healthcare, education, and general welfare.

3.3 Skill Development and Entrepreneurship:

When it comes to empowering women, SHGs are crucial. Workshops and training programs are often organized by SHGs, allowing women to acquire practical skills like organic gardening, tailoring, and handicrafts. In addition to increasing their earning potential, these abilities also promote independence and self-assurance. Some women who are part of SHGs decide to go into business for themselves as they acquire experience and knowledge; this helps boost the economy in their communities.

Women may become self-employed, run enterprises with added value, and provide jobs for their communities via SHG-based entrepreneurship. Other women look up to them and are encouraged to pursue economic independence as a goal of their own.

3.4 Collective Decision-Making and Social Empowerment:

Participation in SHGs fosters collective decision-making among women, giving them a stage upon which to express themselves and fight for what lies ahead. Through SHGs' democratic operations, women are given the capacity to question long-established gender conventions and take part in community-level decision-making. As a result of their work in SHGs, women have been able to get their communities better infrastructure for things like water and sanitation as well as better educational opportunities. The social fabric is strengthened and women are benefited individually by this empowerment.

Supportive housing groups (SHGs) have been essential in increasing women's political engagement, in addition to their work at the community level. A large number of SHG members have gone on to hold positions of leadership in local government, particularly in Panchayati Raj bodies. Participation from women in local governing institutions improves gender parity in decision-making, which in turn helps to address gender-specific issues and advance policies that are sensitive to gender needs.

3.5 Challenges and Policy Implications:

To guarantee their influence lasts, SHGs must overcome the obstacles they've encountered on their path to empowering women. Members of certain SHGs have a hard time keeping up with regular saves and keeping the group together, which makes it hard for the group to endure. This can be because of economic shocks, seasonal livelihood patterns, or members' movement. To overcome these obstacles, SHGs need continuous assistance and capacity development, including the provision of financial and technical resources.

Another factor that might impede the expansion of women-led businesses is the lack of marketing assistance and access to markets for SHG goods. Through partnerships with private sector businesses and government procurement programs, SHG goods may improve their market connections and open up new prospects.

Another problem that SHGs face is the red tape that prevents them from participating in government programs and receiving subsidies. To make government funding more available to SHGs, administrative procedures should be streamlined, monies should be disbursed quickly, and paperwork should be reduced.

Implications for policy include increasing financial assistance and capacity development for SHGs so that they can have a greater effect. Training, technical support, and connections to markets and value chains may all be provided by governmental and non-governmental organizations. To make SHG models even more successful in pulling women out of poverty, we should encourage innovation like digital financial inclusion and climate-smart businesses.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is no denying the impact of Self-Help Groups on the empowerment of women in India. In recent years, self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as potent tools for women's empowerment, particularly in the areas of financial inclusion, skill development, and group decision-making. Numerous women's lives have been changed for the better by SHGs, which have enabled them to become economically independent and socially empowered via the provision of finance, skill development, and entrepreneurial possibilities. To enhance and broaden the impact of SHGs across India, it is essential to maintain the backing of both governmental and non-governmental organisations. India has the potential to create a future where women have a significant impact via the implementation of new policies and creative methods. In order to achieve equitable and sustainable economic growth, India is making great progress by empowering women via SHGs.

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