



SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS: A STUDY IN BALASORE DISTRICT OF ODISHA

Dr Dharitree Behera

Lecturer in Economics

Seemanta Mahavidyalaya, Jharpokharia, Mayurbhanj, Odisha, India

Abstract: The real India lives in her villages where more than two-thirds of India's populations pursue their livelihood. The labour participation rate in rural areas was 56.7 per cent of which women labour participation rate was only 37 per cent in the year 2022-23. Empowering marginalized populations, particularly those living below the poverty line and women, is the primary goal of Indian development efforts since independence. Despite government efforts, rural women, in particular, struggle with limited education, property rights, and resource access. Furthermore, there has been no significant development in the status of women in rural areas. Since 1980, the India's government has promoted Self Help Groups (SHGs) as a strategy of rural development for empowering women and alleviating poverty. The present study aims to explain the role of self help groups to empowering marginalized group of the society specially women. The present study is confined to the Baleswar district in Odisha. The primary objective of the study is to find out correlation between socio-economic variables and level of satisfaction of SHG members.

Key Words: Rural Poverty, Self Help Groups, socio-economic development, women empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

India resides in her 6,40,930 villages. Around 908,804,812 (2022), people live in these villages across the country. They constitute 68.80 percent of our total population of 141.72 crores (2022). Women constitute half of the rural population; therefore, women's development and empowerment is critical to the social and economic aspirations of the country. The main goal of the process of development in India is to empower the marginalized groups, particularly the poor and women. Since nineties Non-Government Organizations, Panchayati Raj Institutions and Self Help Groups are playing a major role as catalysts in the administration of rural development. However, they have been working as administrative mechanisms to expedite the process of development. Therefore, the study of Self Help Groups as agents of change is vital to the study of women's empowerment. Women, when empowered economically and socially, become a potent force for change.

1.1 STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

In India, gender disparities persist across several societal domains, despite the dynamic socio-economic context. Indian women's social destitution, economic servitude, and reliance emerge as exploitation in the

family, the workplace, and the political ground. While the influence of different developmental programs and policies enacted during the past few decades has resulted in a noticeable development in the middle-class women's economic status, Indian women's continue to face lower social standing. Furthermore, there has been no significant improvement in the status of women in rural India. In India rural women face educational barriers, uneven property rights, and little access to resource use. Therefore, women's empowerment must occur at a pecking order of levels, including the person, household, village, and society.

1.2 SELF HELP GROUPS (SHG)

Self Help Groups (SHGs) are familiar organisations of persons who work collectively to better their living situations. They are primarily self-governing and peer-controlled. People from equal economic and social statuses frequently seek assistance from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or government agencies to solve their trouble and improved their living standard.

The concept of 'Self Help Group' is a product of such empowerment approach. Self Help Group provided micro-credit which aimed at empowering women individually by adding some money to her personal purse. It was supposed that it would strengthen women from the beginning by enhancing their economic capabilities. Implicit in this effort is to make them financially literate and attain their financial inclusion in the process of their socio economic development.

National focus on Self Help Groups has encouraged many researchers to work on them. Virtual absence of such studies with regard to Odisha, the eastern state of the Indian Union has prompted us to take up the present study

2.REVIEW OF LITERATURES

M. C. Minimol and K. G. Makesh (2012) conducted study to determine empowering of rural women in Kerala through Self Help Groups. Their study revealed impact of participation and outcome of SHG. According to the study higher the participation rate, greater is the financial empowerment along with socio economic status. The significant result concluded that the concept SHG for rural women has to be strengthened as many of the SHGs have not achieved their objectives yet.

Professor K. Pavan and K. C. Subrahmany(2013) concluded in their study that women who join Self Help Group are more involved in decision making process about household purchase, consumption, education, marriage and personal financial choices. The SHG raise their social status in the area under study.

Kasthuri et. al. (2014) on a study found out that role of micro finance in assisting Self Help Group to empower women through income generation and saving. The women expressed satisfaction with social status they have achieved through SHG and saving.

Saravanan (2016) analysed the effect of Self Help Group on rural women in Tamil Nadu State considering their socio economic status from secondary data and other sources. They concluded that the empowerment of women focuses on holistic social development not just focusing on their economic needs. According to their study SHG give self-confidence, empowerment and economic status to the member of SHG. Therefore SHG is considered as means for rural development.

A. Gupta and Dr. L. M. Choudhary (2020) in a study found out that woman empowerment through Self Help Group is quiet possible. The impact of SHG is visible in Uttar Pradesh while calculating the effect from both primary and secondary data. The study covered 90 SHGs from 15 villages of two blocks in Jaunpur district of Uttar Pradesh. The study further revealed that due to joining in SHGs, rural women and weaker section of society enhance their knowledge, ability, awareness and participation in social activities.

Krishan Lal Grover (2022) in their study discovered that after joining SHG, the mean scores of several economic empowerment indicators improved. Women entrepreneurs' monthly income grew considerably after joining SHG in terms of earnings generation and contribution to family income. It is suggested that actions at the grassroots level should be aimed at altering the societal attitudes and behaviours that are strongly discriminatory towards women.

2.1 GAPS IN THE STUDY

Study in various poverty stricken areas have brought out mixed results, adding to the confusion about the role of microfinance through SHG in poverty alleviation and income generation. While some studies have pointed out that the SHGs program are successful in reaching the poor and improve their economic status through employment, some other studies have also highlighted that SHG program has increased the saving habits of the poor people but not has been able to achieve its real goal fully.

Therefore the present study relating socio-economic status of women and SHG programme in Baleswar district is an attempt to enable us to achieve certain insight into the working of self help groups as a tool for women empowerment at the village level. The findings of the study may throw some light on the strength and weakness of SHG programmes and may indicate solutions to the problem of rural women's empowerment.

3. OBJECTIVE

The primary objectives of the study are to find out correlation between socio economic variables and satisfaction level of members as being in SHGs and to find out the difference between levels of satisfaction among various groups.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Baleswar district was chosen for the study due to its significant number of Self Help Groups (SHGs), ranking third in Odisha with 31,268 SHGs, representing 5.81% of the total in the state. 100 SHGs were randomly selected for the present study. The present study based on primary data. The study encompasses 300 numbers of respondents. The respondents were selected randomly @ 3 from each selected SHGs, irrespective of their position. Data are collected through direct interviews with selected respondents.

4.2 Empirical measurement of Factors

Factors included were quantified depending on their relative merit in measurement scale. Further for better measurement of factors quantification was made using scoring analysis method.

To measure relationship between Socio Economic Variable and Level of Satisfaction, responses collected on three point scale like very much, much and little as a means of change on different parameters of SHG. The satisfaction level was measured on ten variables like annual income, engagement, decision making power, family support, saving, new investment, social mobility, contact with officials, family health and general education. The level of satisfaction was calculated taking 60% and above of the total score as high level, 30% and less as low level, and in between 31% to 59% as medium level. The satisfaction level contains ten parameters of change and the total score was 30. The classification was as follows.

Satisfaction Level	Score Assigned
Low	1
Medium	2
High	3

4.3 Statistical Procedure Adopted

Percentage was used in descriptive analysis for making comparisons. The Chi-square test was conducted to compare the effects of socio economic and SHG related variables and perception of the respondents as per the formula given below.

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where,

O = Observed value

E = Expected value

The significance of calculated χ^2 value was tested with the tabulated value of χ^2 at $(n_1-1) \times (n_2-1)$ degree of freedom under 0.05 level of probability.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Relationship between Socio Economic Variable and Level of Satisfaction:

To understand socio economic status there is need to analyse multiple aspect covering economic and social indicators. It is also known as economic analysis aiming at welfare of the people. It covers wellbeing related outcome for society of a given measure.

Socio-economic is a term that combines two aspects of society i.e., Socio refer to social factor and Economic refers to economic factors. It is used to describe the relationship between social economic conditions within a given community, religion or country. Socio economic factors encompass a wide range of elements that impacts and also being influenced by dynamism of social and economic indicators.

As the present study deals with SHGs in reduction of poverty, the need for SES analysis is of greater importance. Keeping such considerations in view, different parameters of SES have been studied in relation to SHG members and their level of satisfaction.

Study consists of 300 samples drawn from four blocks of Baleswar district for the purpose of correlation and comparison. The sample respondents were grouped into three categories i.e., high, medium and low in the scale of satisfaction. The parameters on which the satisfaction was measured are as follows.

1. Annual income
2. Engagement
3. Decision making power
4. Family support
5. Saving
6. New investment
7. Social mobility
8. Contact with officials
9. Family health
10. General education

The responses were collected on three point scale like very much, much, and little as a means of change on the above parameters as realised by member of SHGs. The level of satisfaction was calculated taking 60% and above of the total score as high level, 30% and less as low level, and in between 31% to 59% as medium level. Since there are 10 parameters of change the total score would be 30. The classification of table is given below.

Table – 1: Classification of respondents/ sample on basis of satisfaction

Satisfaction level	Range of score	Number	Percent
High	18 & above	180	60.00
Medium	10 to 17	75	25.00
Low	9 & less	45	15.00
Total		300	100.00

On the basis of above classification the correlation between socio economic variable and extend of satisfaction was estimated adopting Chi-square (χ^2) test.

The investigation examined as many as 13 socio economic variables and computerised data to determine influence of these variables on satisfaction level of SHG members working in different SHGs. The findings are given below.

Table – 2: Relationships between Socio Economic Variable and Level of Satisfaction

Sl. No.	Variable	Chi-square(χ^2) Value	Level of Significance
1.	Age	15.248	Significant
2.	Education	33.872	Significant
3.	Marital Status	11.524	Significant
4.	Caste	24.469	Significant
5.	Religion	11.030	Significant
6.	Economic Group	5.690	Not Significant
7.	Family Size	37.905	Significant
8.	Family Type	5.937	Not Significant
9.	Residence	15.908	Significant
10.	Major Occupation	20.467	Significant
11.	Annual Family Income	32.681	Significant
12.	Land Possession	53.553	Significant
13.	Social Amenities	89.894	Significant

(χ^2 = Significant at 5% level of Probability) Source: Computed from primary data

Explanation of table is as follows.

- Age:** Age is being a progressive indicator has able to establish relationship with level of satisfaction. The sociologists are in view that, age of an individual has significant influence on his activities and performance for which significant result has been obtained.
- Education:** Education is the most important factor to decide progressiveness, output and achievement of persons. In all societies education is attached with maximum value because it provides knowledge, skill and attitude for better performance. The present findings are in conformity with many scientists who worked on rural poverty and livelihood.
- Marital Status:** Marital status indicates family burden and responsibility for which individuals are forced to opt for income generating activities. The hypothesis reflected in the study indicates significant relationship.
- Cast:** Caste continues to be a social factor in our society influencing people and their activities. In the present study caste is found to be significant although many of the social scientists have obtained negative result in this respect.
- Religion:** Religion is a belief of super natural power which has found to be significant in shaping activities and decision making process of the individual's under study.
- Economic Group:** The economic group like APL, BPL and Antodaya which were formed decade back found to have no relationship with satisfaction level of the SHG members. According to recent views of economists such classification does not hold good to provide accurate information and that is the reason for which it has failed to reveal relationship with satisfaction level.
- Family Size and Family Type:** Family size is found to be significant whereas family type is not. Family size stands for family strength and economic security because of total earning of the families. It is believed that bigger the family size higher the level of income and family prosperity which has proved indicating significant relationship with level of satisfaction.
- Residence:** Type of residence is a criteria to assess social economic status in villages. It has proved influencing to significant level of the group classified on the basis of satisfaction.
- Major Occupation:** The major occupations like farming, wage earning, business and service are significantly related with level of satisfaction confirming to the findings of many other social scientists.
- Annual Family Income:** Annual family income is arithmetical indicator of economic status. The hypothesis higher the income level greater the satisfaction has proved in the study.

11. **Land Possession:** Ownership of land has always been found significantly associated with level of satisfaction what has been reflected in the study.
12. **Social Amenities:** Social amenities indicate status of living and wellness of life. In these aspects the sample respondents are in better position for which significant relationship has been found between social amenities and level of satisfaction.

5.2 Difference between Groups of Levels of Satisfaction

Further analysis was made to find out difference between groups belonging to high medium, high low and medium low satisfaction level on 13 important socio economic parameters. The table given below reflects the analysis of differences.

Table – 3: Difference between Groups of Levels of Satisfaction

Sl. No.	Variable	High Medium	High Low	Medium Low
1.	Age	6.06	16.91	21.94
2.	Education	0.00	28.02	28.02
3.	Marital Status	5.95	5.67	0.30
4.	Caste	3.52	19.71	22.54
6.	Economic Group	1.43	0.71	0.72
7.	Family Size	13.85	15.88	2.35
8.	Family Type	8.06	4.39	12.10
9.	Residence	5.86	15.63	10.37
10.	Major Occupation	8.20	12.08	4.23
11.	Annual Family Income	0.38	28.96	29.23
12.	Land Possession	11.11	32.59	24.17
13.	Social Amenities	30.60	27.32	4.51

The result of the study is as follows.

The respondents who were categorized as high, medium and low, their socio economic background was computerised to find out the difference.

1. **High and Medium level of satisfaction:** In case of high and medium level of satisfaction the difference was observed in case of family size, land possession and availability of social amenities. In rural Odisha family size is attached with social values because of on the hypothesis of more the members more is the income and joint family system in Odisha are found to have more land so also they have more social amenities.
2. **High and Low level of satisfaction:** In case of high and low satisfaction level the difference was marked for the variables of case of age, education, caste, family size, type of residence, major occupation, annual family income, land possession and social amenities. The result indicates the difference between high and low satisfaction group on many accounts they have a differential status indicating the distance between high and low satisfaction level to which the sample women belong as per the classification.
3. **Medium and Low level of satisfaction:** In case, medium and low level of satisfaction the difference was observed in case of age, education, caste, family type, type of residence, annual family income and land possession. It is interesting to note that in social amenities medium and low group did not differ significantly.

On the whole in the variables like marital status and economic group all the three categories were almost same without any difference.

6. CONCLUSION

Self help groups have proven to be a powerful mechanism for socio economic transformation in India. By fostering financial independence, empowering women and building community resilience, SHGs have the potential to address pressing developmental challenges. With continued support from governments, NGOs and financial institutions, SHGs can further strengthen their impact and contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable society. On the whole the study reveals that there is need to examine the status of SHGs, correlating factors of socio economic variables, to remove lacuna in structure, function and activities and to strengthen motivational factors. In short the need for supervision, training, marketing facilities, introduction of new technology and cohesiveness among members are to be taken care of to strengthen SHG under study in the District of Baleswar.

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