

# WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS: A STUDY OF KANCHIPURAM DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

**Prof. Dr. Sundari Suresh**  
Professor, ITM Business School, Chennai

**Abstract:** Women empowerment is a process in which women challenge the existing norms and cultural, to effectively promote their well-being. The participation of women in self-help group (SHGs) made a significant impact on their empowerment both in social and economic aspects this study addresses women empowerment through self-help groups in TamilNadu. The information required for the study has been collected from only secondary sources has been followed full paper. The SHGs have had greater impact on both economic and social aspects of the beneficiaries.

**Keywords:** Woman Empowerment, SHG Movement, Socio-Economic Development, Tamilnadu.

**Introduction:** *I make no distinction between man and woman, women should feel just as independent as men. Bravery is not man's monopoly.* - M. K. Gandhi.

Nowadays, the role of women is very important. In the industrialized countries, women over the years have improved the role in the society since the 20th century. The scheme of micro financing through SHGs has transferred the real economic power in the hands of women and has made them independent. The performance of SHGs across several countries in approaching towards the eradication of poverty in empowerment of women has been moderately successful. In India, during the 9th five year plan the government had given due recognition on the importance and the relevance of the Self-help group method to execute developmental schemes at the grassroots level.

**Self Help Groups (SHGS):** Self-Help Group is a group of people from the same socio-economic background up to 20 members. These groups are promoted by Government agencies or NGOs with the aim of solving the common problems of group members either financial or social through mutual help.

**Review of Literature:** Sahu and Tripathy (2005), in the book titled, "Self-Help Groups and Women Empowerment" views that 70 per cent of world's poor are women. 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. The conclusion drawn is that women can lift themselves from the morass of poverty and stagnation through micro finance and with the formation of Self-Help Groups.

Sinha (2005), in the study, "Access, Use and Contribution of Micro-Finance in India: Findings from a National Study" observed that micro-finance is making a significant contribution to both the savings and borrowing of the poor in the country. The study suggested the main use of micro-credit is for direct investment depending on household credit requirements at the time of loan disbursement.

Survey (2005), under the title, "Gender Inequality and Women's Empowerment" observed that women are seriously disadvantaged and the findings for women indicated significantly higher illiteracy rate, lower proportion with primary or secondary and above education, lower proportion not working to earn, low or non-existent media access and far younger age at marriage. The study concluded that common and root cause is the deeprooted patriarchy culture that ascribes a low status to women in all dimensions, the power is maintained by the society and accepted even by many women.

Basu (2006), in the study titled "Microfinance and Women Empowerment: An Empirical Study with Special Reference to West Bengal" examines two basic research points i.e. woman tries to be in safer investment projects linked to her desire to raise her bargaining position in the household and the other point that women empowerment is examined with respect to control of saving, control over loans, control over purchasing capacity and family planning.

**Swain and Wallentin (2007)**, in the study, "Can Microfinance Empower women self-help groups in India", investigated the status of women with respect to the control of resources, changes in behaviour and the decision-making. The study concluded that SHGs, where a majority of groups are linked with the help of NGOs that provide support as financial service and specialised training, have a great ability to make a positive impact on women empowerment and empowerment is to be pursued as a serious objective by SHG programmes in particular and the larger microfinance community in general, greater emphasis needs to be placed on training, education and creating awareness in order to achieve a larger and long lasting empowerment.

**Sharma (2007)**, in the study, "Micro-finance and Women Empowerment" examined that empowerment is an indicator to built broadly in eight criteria's, i.e. mobility, economic security, ability to make small and large purchases, involvement in major household decisions, relative freedom from domination by the family, political and legal awareness, participation in public protests and political campaigns. The study concluded that the micro-finance industry promotes the dual objectives of sustainability of services and outreach to the women and poor when deciding to fund specific MFI donors and other social investors in the sector consider both objectives, but their relative importance varies among funders.

**Umar et al. (2008)**, in the study titled, "The Experience of Microfinance banks operation in their operational Location" observed improvement in the condition of women through the provision of skills acquisition and adult literacy spread by microfinance banks.

**Dasgupta (2005)**, in the study, "Microfinance in India: Empirical Evidence, Alternative Models and Policy Imperatives" commented that a paradigm shift is required from "financial sector reform" to "microfinance reform". While the priority sector needs to be made lean, mandatory micro credit must be monitored rigorously. The study concluded space and scope have to be properly designed for providing competitive environment to micro-finance services.

**Concept of Women Empowerment:** Empowerment is an active multidimensional process to enable women to realize their identity, position and power in all spheres of life. 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, belief and practices. Empowerment demands a drastic and basic change in the system of marriage and family, husband and wife relationship and attitude towards socialization and remarriage. Empowerment is a process that gives a person freedom in decision making.

Women's empowerment is not a Northern concept. Women all over the world, including countries in the South, have been challenging and changing gender inequalities since the beginnings of history. These struggles have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at injustice against women and there upon the consequences for the society. It would be yet another instance of imperialism to say all these women and men did not have minds of their own.

#### **Objectives of The Study:**

- To examine the demographic factors of the sample respondents
- To analyse women empowerment through SHGs
- To analyse the progress of SHG Bank linkage programme in the present scenario.
- To find out the effectiveness of SHG in women's development.

**Data Collection and Analysis:** The present study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. In order to collect and gather primary data questionnaires are prepared and presented personally to 200 women members of SHGs. Secondary data gathered from the records of SHGs and NGOs and government offices which were supplemented by the primary data collected from the group. Besides, different books, newspapers, articles, journals, magazines and web sites were also referred for the purpose. The sample members are selected from 20 SHGs from 10 villages of Kanchipuram District. The collected data are analysed by classifying and tabulating. The percentage tool is used to examine women empowerment through SHGs.

**SHGs Current Position in India:** The SHGs progress is steady in number since the launch. The SHG programme in India is the world's largest microfinance programme. SHG Bank Linkage Programme (SHG-BLP) introduced by NABARD about two decades ago, started from a pilot of linking 500 SHGs of rural poor has

crossed 8 million groups. This programme claims group savings of ₹37,000 crores and credit outstanding of ₹51,545 crores. Thus this model has emerged as the most successful model in the financial services. This saving model is a successful empowerment tool which has covered almost 10 crore households in the country. About 86% of the groups are exclusively women groups, which is a big impetus to women empowerment.

The SHG members have also learnt to become a good customer of banks with the training given under this programme. As per the Socio Economic and Caste Census out of more than 1794 lakh households in rural area, about 1337 lakh households are having a monthly income of the highest earning member of the households below ₹5,000. Which is about 75% of the total households. All these households seem to be in the economically backward and underprivileged category. These households constitute the potential segment of the SHG Bank Linkage Programme. Table 1 gives the progress of SHGs from 2012-13 to 2014-15. During 2014-15 about 2.68 lakh new SHGs were added, and the number of SHGs saving has raised to 76.97 lakh. It is observed from the table that there is an increase of 3.59% in the number of savings linked over the previous years, after a dip in 2012-13. The number of loan outstanding has gone up by 20%, against a 6% decline in the previous year. Table 2 gives the progress of Women SHGs from 2012-13 to 2014-15. The share of exclusive women SHGs in the total number of SHGs linked to banks grew from 84% to 86% (NABARD Report 2014-15). Figure 1 represents that almost one half (48%) accounts to the Southern region, followed by 20% in Eastern region.

**Table 1: Overall Progress under SHG-Bank Linkage Programme (2012-2015)**

(No. in Lakhs / Amt. in crore)

Particulars	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		%Growth (2013-14)		%Growth (2014-15)	
	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.
Savings of SHGs with Bank	73.18	8217.25	74.30	9897.42	76.97	11059.84	1.53	20.45	3.59	11.74
Bank Loans Disbursed	12.20	20585.36	13.66	24017.36	16.26	27582.31	12.02	16.67	19.03	14.84
Bank Loans Outstanding	44.51	39375.30	41.97	42927.52	44.68	51545.46	5.71	9.02	6.46	20.06

Source: State of Microfinance in India (2014-15), NABARD

**Table 2: Progress Of Women SHGS (2012-2015)**

(No. in Lakhs / Amt. in crore)

Particulars	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		%Growth (2013-14)		%Growth (2014-15)	
	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.	No.	Amt.
Savings of SHGs with Bank	59.38	6514.86	62.52	8012.89	66.51	9264.3	5.27	22.99	6.38	15.31
Bank Loans Disbursed	10.37	17854.31	11.52	21037.97	14.48	24419.75	11.02	17.83	25.69	16.07
Bank Loans Outstanding	37.57	32840.04	34.06	36151.58	38.58	45901.85	-9.34	10.08	13.27	26.97

Source: State of Microfinance in India (2014-15), NABARD

**Self Help Groups in Tamil Nadu:** Sasikumar D. (2009) stated in his article that the Government of Tamil Nadu established the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women Limited for the empowerment of women in December 1983. Tamil Nadu Women Development Project, funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, was started on an experimental basis during 1991-1992 in Dharmapuri district. It received its first growth thrust and was extended to all other districts in a phased manner under the State Budget. It is more popularly known as „MahalirThittam”. Government of Tamil Nadu initiated „MahalirThittam” throughout the State for the overall upliftment of women.

**Table 3: Details of Self Help Groups**

1.	No. of SHGs	6.14 lakh
	No. of SHG Members	92.84 lakh
2.	No. of Rural SHGs	4.30 lakh
	No. of Members	64.51 lakh
3.	No. of Urban SHGs	1.84 lakh
	No. of Members	28.33 lakh
4.	Total Savings of SHGs	Rs. 6004.53 Crore
5.	No. of SHGs given Revolving Fund / Seed Money	5.23 lakh
6.	Cumulative credit availed by SHGs	Rs.38,064.56 Crore

**Strategies:** Adopted by Government of Tamil Nadu for Women Empowerment It was recognized that the main obstacles to empowerment has been the low level of educational attainments as well as poverty among women. Taking into account this fact, the Government of Tamil Nadu have framed various policies, designed specific interventions and implemented many programmes to eradicate poverty and to provide education to the vulnerable sections of the society.

**Women Empowerment through SHGs:** The empowerment of women through SHG provides benefit not only to individual women but also for the family and community as a whole. The major focus of women empowerment includes social empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment and gender justice along with demographical justice. Even though many international agreements affirm their human rights, women are still likely than men to be poor and illiterate.

**Functions of Self Help Groups:** In order to achieve the main objective, the self-help groups undertake various activities. These activities are:

**Savings** howsoever small they may be should be made in order to mobilize financial resource. The idea is to generate the habit of saving from whatever income is earned in the household

**Loaning and Repayment** in smaller quantities but in time. As a micro-finance institution the SHG should be able to provide credit to the members. It is also expected that the members return the money borrowed in time, in full, and with interest so that other members also benefit

**Member-oriented Action Programmes** are conceived and implemented which are recommended and demanded by the members. Most of these programmes are social and economic and even cultural. Such programmes are also usually the agenda of the development projects which promote SHGs.

Programmes can be educational, additional income generation, off-farm activities, labour-intensive activities, watershed-related and public works construction activities, harnessing water resources for drinking and irrigation, health, education, vocational training etc. etc. Development programmes can be directed at women, youth or farmers

**Liaison and Linkages** with financial institutions (FIs)/Government Organisations (GOs) and other agencies. The SHG considers developing relationship with the financial institutions e.g., cooperative bank or the rural branch of a commercial bank, or others, and also relationship with the governmental organizations and other development agencies

**Training and Capacity Building Activities** Self Help Groups need constant support, assistance, guidance and advice from the promoters and other development agencies. They need constant monitoring, training and education support in order to help them improve their working capacities and capabilities. The members might need some exposure and interaction. They might also need some equipment and technology support. Self help groups need to continue improve their capacities.

**Analysis of Result:** Analysis of the women empowerment through SHGs in this study is based on two dimensions: analysis of demographic information and analysis of women empowerment. The age, family system and number of dependents in the family etc., are analysed in demographic information. The reason of joining SHGs, purpose of loan, repayment of loan, income, savings, expenditure and powers in important decisions are analysed in women empowerment.

**Table 1: Age-Wise Classification of Beneficiaries**

Age	Number of Beneficiaries	%
Less than 20	20	10.0
20-30	59	29.5
30-40	61	30.5
40-50	36	18.0
Above 50	24	12.0
Total	200	100

**Source:** Computed Data

**Interpretation:** It is evident from the Table – 1 that the 61% of sample respondents are between 30-40 years of age and the 10.0% of sample respondents are less than 20 years. They constitute the highest and the lowest respectively in total sample respondents. This shows that maximum adult women in the age group of 30-40 prefer to join SHGs in the study area and this is more in number as compared to younger and older age groups.

**Table 2: Family System-Wise Classification of Beneficiaries**

Family System	Number of Beneficiaries	%
Individual	120	60
Joint	80	40
Total	200	100

**Source:** Computed Data

**Interpretation:** Table – 2 shows that 60 % of the woman respondents have individual family system where as 40 % have joint family system. This trend shows that joint family system has been losing its importance even in rural areas due to changing socio cultural system. The joint family system is the system that protects everyone in the family, irrespective of their age and income. However, due to change in the family system, the future of elderly people seems uncertain.

**Table 3: Numbers of Dependents of Beneficiaries**

Number of Dependents	Number of Beneficiaries	%
1-2	75	37.5
3-4	55	27.5
5-6	41	20.5
Above 6	29	14.5
Total	200	100

**Source:** Computed Data

**Interpretation:** Table – 3 reveals that out of the total woman respondents 37.5% of the respondents have 1-2 dependents, 27.5% have 3-4 dependents, 20.5% have 5-6 dependents and only 14.5% of sample respondents have above 6 dependents. This signifies that the Indian rural people are also moving towards one or two kids" norm.

**Table 4: Reason for Joining SHGs**

Reason	Number of Beneficiaries	%
Getting Loan	87	43.5
Promoting Savings	56	28.0
Social Status	39	19.5
Others	18	09.0
Total	200	100

**Source:** Computed Data

**Interpretation:** It is evident from the Table – 4 that 43.5% women have joined SHGs for getting loan, 28.0% to promote savings, and 19.5% for social status and the rest for miscellaneous reasons. This signifies that majority of respondents have joined SHGs to avail loan facility as compared to other reasons.

**Table 5: Purpose of Loan of Beneficiaries**

Purpose of Loan	Number of Beneficiaries	%
Personal	37	18.5
Agriculture	44	22.0
Business	67	33.5
Medical	30	15.0
House Improvement	22	11.0
Total	200	100

**Source:** Computed Data

**Interpretation:** In Table – 5 classifications has been made to show the reasons for which the woman respondents wish to avail loan. It is observed from the Table-5 that 18.5% of the sample respondents have taken loan for personal use, 22.0% for agricultural development, 33.5% for business reasons, 15% for medical purpose and 11% for housing improvements. This indicates that loan has been primarily taken by respondents for productive purposes like business and agriculture.

**Table 6: Repayment of Loan by the Beneficiaries**

Repayment Schedule	Number of Beneficiaries	%
In Advance	20	10
On Time	130	65
Late	50	25
Total	200	100

**Source:** Computed Data

**Interpretation:** In Table – 6 (Annexure) classifications has been made to show the repayment response of the woman respondents who have availed loan through SHGs. Table-6 reveals that 65% of sample respondents have repaid the loan on time, 10% in advance, while 25% have repaid the loan at a later date. This signifies that women respondents are very prompt in repayment of loan they borrowed through SHGs.

**Table 7: Monthly Incomes of Beneficiaries**

Income Level (Rs.)	Number of Beneficiaries			
	Before Joining SHG	%	After Joining SHG	%
Less than 1000	49	24.5	20	10.0
1000-2000	40	20.0	29	14.5
2000-3000	37	18.5	30	15.0
3000-4000	22	11.0	37	18.5
4000-5000	29	14.5	51	25.5
Above 5000	23	11.5	33	16.5
Total	200	100	200	100

**Source:** Computed Data

**Interpretation:** It is evident from the Table – 7 that income level of sample respondents have increased after joining SHGs. The monthly income of majority of sample respondent (24.5%) was less than Rs1,000 before joining SHGs, but this percentage of respondents is increased to 25.5% after joining SHGs. This signifies that the SHGs helped the member in increasing their income by taking up productive activities.

**Sustainable Livelihoods of Women Self Help Groups:** Sustainable livelihood approaches are people centered, recognizing the capital assets of the poor and the influence of policies and institutions on their livelihood strategies. In order to improve the decision-making of the poor, it is necessary for those attempting to assist them to recognize the heterogeneity of their local contexts. In this way, one-size fits-all development solutions become less important, paving the way for more pluralistic approaches. Rural livelihoods in particular are increasingly understood to involve a diverse range of strategies, both within and outside the agricultural sector. The role of women and youth in household income generation must also be considered to be one of growing complexity, including non-farm incomes such as remittances and wages from rural urban migration of family members. It is clear that for information and communication to benefit the rural poor, it

needs to be relevant in the context of the choices available to them and to assist them, to make decisions that lead to improved livelihood options.

**Conclusion:** Impact of Self Help Groups on income and employment of tribal women can be studied with reference to many factors such as socio-economic conditions of the respondents, constitution and functioning dynamics, decision making, collective and organizational efforts in resolving social issues and community problems, social empowerment, economic empowerment and political empowerment of the Women. The Self help group members have performed well in their business activities and also group activities and they have got employment, self confidence, improvement of family welfare and socio economic development of the members. Once the members attained the employment fulfilment they ultimately get the economical and also social status.

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