



'SELF HELP GROUPS AND FINANCIAL FREEDOM OF RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA: A STUDY'

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'Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead to development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation'

-Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

Introduction:

India has varied heritage. In ancient India or Bharat, from Vedas and Puranas it can be easily observed that Indian Women were always been respected. Sarswati is the goddess of knowledge. Gargi, Maitreyee were known for their talent. Durga is worshiped for her courage and bravery. Laxmi is worshiped for being goddess of wealth. But from few decades back it is observed that women facing domestic violence, domination and oppression. Bhavari devi and Nirbhaya cases show that women in current era are not safe in society and even in their homes. Gender equality is a basic necessity for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Women have self-respect, they have their own perspective to look after any matter, they have control on their own lives. This needs to be accepted socially.

Statement of the problem:

Well-being of individuals, families, communities and overall economic productivity of the country is mainly depending on the status of the women in that nation. Near about 65 % population of India resides in rural area. 48 % of rural population are women. It is observed that last 2-3 decades back Indian rural women were uneducated. Majority of girls were forced to early marriage. After marriage they have to be pate their children, continuously engage in domestic and agricultural work. Being uneducated they have to serve on low wages. Status of these women reflected darker narrative. Currently this scenario is changing. Now girls are going to school, fewer girls are forced into early marriage but women are serving in various other sectors and laws are being reformed to advance gender equality. Role of Government in empowering women is vital. Government introduced various schemes like, MNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Mahila Shakti Kendra, etc.

Objectives:

1. To study status of rural Indian women
2. To study financial freedom of rural Indian women.
3. To study self -help groups.

4. To find conclusions.

Research Methodology:

The paper is based on gathering information about status of rural Indian women, role of self-help groups and financial freedom of these women published and unpublished study materials which include books, articles in various journals, various websites and you tube videos on the subject etc.

Rural Indian Women:

Despite all the social conventions and gender ideology women form the backbone of agricultural operations and majority of agricultural labourers are women. About 70% - 80% field work is done by women. Empowerment of rural women is necessary as it leads towards the achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But this is restrained by limited access to credit, health care and education, and many more such challenges. These are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering women is essential not only for the well-being of individuals, families and communities but also for overall economic productivity.

Financial Freedom:

Financial freedom refers to the state of being able to purchase what you want without having to worry about your bank account.

Financial Self-Help Groups:

SHG's are non-government organizations that have broad anti-poverty agendas. It is an informal association of about 12 to 25 local women. They play a major role in the upliftment of rural women by pooling small amounts of money and lending the money to the needy women. These loans have very low interest rates as compared to the banks and do not require any collateral. They pool their resources to become financially stable, taking loans from their collective savings in times of emergency or financial scarcity, important life events or to purchase assets. Once the SHG has completed about 1-2 years and the savings of the SHG are regular, they are eligible to receive loan from banks at lower interest rates under government schemes. They make women hopeful and self-reliant. The group members use collective wisdom and peer pressure to ensure proper end-use of credit and timely repayment. In India, RBI regulations mandate that banks offer financial services, including collateral free loans to these groups, on very low interest rates. This allows poor women to circumvent the challenges of exclusion from institutional financial services. This system is closely related to that of solidarity lending, widely used by microfinance institutions.

Need of SHG:

The SHG is a group of rural women who have volunteered to organise themselves into a group for eradication of poverty of the members by saving regularly and convert their savings into a common fund known as 'Group Corpus'. The members of the group agree to use this common fund through a common management. These groups function on the principles of co-operation and provide support to each other.

Villages face numerous problems related to poverty, illiteracy and lack of skills, etc. These problems cannot be tackled at an individual level and need collective efforts. They face many problems related to credit. These are because they are unable to provide collateral security to banks or any financial institutions which is necessary to obtain credit. They have irregular income sources hence they are unable to pay their instalments regularly. People from rural areas know each other very well and thus this helps in fulfilling the requirement of forming a group of 15+ members who help and trust each other. Considering the pros and cons from the

freedom is not having tons of money but being able to cover your expenses and still have enough money left to use it for your personal likings, interests and hobbies.

above information it can be observed that the formation of SHG's is the optimal solution for them. These groups make women to inculcate savings and banking habits and make them involve in financial activities. SHG's makes them educated about the financial transactions. Their involvement in these financial activities gives them the decision-making power about their money. They can help women in availing proper healthcare facilities for themselves and their family members. Consequently, it reduces child mortality and improve maternal health. With the help of SHG's, they improving their ability to combat disease through better nutrition. SGH's provide a medium to resolve conflicts through leadership and mutual discussion among the members. It has emerged as the most effective mechanism for poor rural household through the delivery of microfinance services for productive purposes. It helps women resolve household disputes, conflicts or domestic violence by seeking advice or help from other members of the group. It also helps in combating practices like dowry, alcoholism, etc. It builds confidence and capabilities of women and develop collective decision making among them. It also provides economic prosperity to women. Even though the SHG's face problems such as lack of accounting knowledge to its members which may result in misappropriation of funds, still they are able to make women financially capable. They are mainly working on mutual trust and understand hence the deposits of the SHGs are not secured or safe but still provide financial freedom to rural women. It is observed that women from rural area now can provide better education to their children, purchase home appliances, furniture, etc, even can plan for tourism. In short, they can do what they want to do. They are solving their financial problems with the help of Self-Help Groups.

Conclusion:

These SHG's empowered rural women and uplifted them with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition. Self-Help Groups are helping in progressing women towards financial stability. This scheme provided decision making powers to women to expand their boundaries. Women have equal right to control over the material, human and intellectual resources. It can be observed that Indian rural women are availing such right with the help of

SHG's. They can raise funds when they need. It is helping them in uplifting their standards of living. They can discuss with other group members and can avail intellectual guidance. It is also observed that these women who are member of any SHGs are attaining space in politics and even proving their capacity in other socio-economic issues.

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