CHAPTER V

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5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter is, indeed a quintessence of the empirical and in-depth analysis of the multifarious possibilities and potentialities of the globally recognized and accepted concept of social capital with the objective of finding out how far it accelerates the process of development particularly at the rural level. The study pre-supposes that social capital can best be generated in all aspects mainly through the formation of Self-Help Groups which is relatively a new paradigm for collective life of the people especially of women at the rural level. It includes the observations and findings that have crystallized from the enquiry on the topic of study. It also contains certain recommendations and suggestions with a view to providing necessary information to the governments and NGOs concerned while they will have to deal with those issues in the future course of actions. Here an earnest attempt is made to assess the real position of poverty as a living evidence of the level of rural development.

As the study progressed, several inferences concerning the subject were drawn and the deeper the research delved into the field, the vaster its scope and sweep seemed to evolve and various conclusions were arrived at, although all the minute details are not explicated here as they have been dealt with at length in the previous chapters. This chapter epitomizes only the central themes of the study.

At the outset, the study led to a nutshell form of conclusion that SHGs contributed much to the social capital generation and the social capital thus generated determines the true level of rural development especially in the case of the remote regions of the political system. Therefore an enquiry into the factors
which either directly or indirectly influence the formation and active performance of SHGs, the various factors which condition the nature and extent of the social capital and also the factors that contributed towards the attainment of rural development constitute an integral part of this academic probe.

Here the study brings to light certain notable as well as interesting inferences as per the profile of the respondents. One among them has been that women belonging to the age category of 41-50 are more inclined to be active participants in matters other than their household affairs. Thus the study came to the understanding that the age factor influences women in their willingness to take active role in the collective embrace of the society. Another notable result of the enquiry has been that among the major religious denominations, the Hindu community shows much enthusiasm to come forward and play active roles in micro organizations like SHGs. The other side of the picture is that the Christian community has been partially interested whereas there is almost total negligence from the part of the Muslim segment. Here it seems that the Muslim women are more or less indifferent to interacting freely with the members of other communities. The most striking revelation of the present investigation has been that, the more the educational competence, the less the chances of reaping the benefits of collective life leading to the formation of social capital. The impact of the factor of financial status has been assessed as part of the present study and the result is that the low income groups evince greater enthusiasm to exploit the resources of social capital. Thus, it seems that economically sound stratum of society has been playing only a negligible role in the generation of social capital by means of collective life.
On the basis of the thorough examination of the facts gathered from primary and secondary sources, systematic analysis of the data collected from the field investigation, it is to be especially noticed that almost all the hypotheses on the basis of which the whole edifice of the present study is rooted, have been corroborated by the findings. As a natural outcome it is equally relevant to notice that the thesis is in no way an exception in nullifying some aspects of its own hypothesis. Therefore, it seems that it is just and reasonable to bring about the major findings and remarks of the conclusions reached out of the study hand–in-hand with the much thought out points of hypothesis which in a sense provided the strong foundation for the present academic venture. The following portion attempt at the hypothesis-wise analysis arrived of the findings carved by the research.

### 5.1.1 SHGs have a Vital Role in the Generation of Social Capital in Kerala

The foremost and most important among the major points of the hypotheses has been that of the contention that SHGs have been playing a vital role in the process of social capital generation especially in the rural Kerala. This very hypothesis paved the way for a multi-pronged investigation into the innovative concept of SHGs in terms of the factors and forces which contributed to their origin, growth, development and popularity associated with the public life of ordinary people especially women.

The above mentioned contention forced the researcher to go deep into the details of the origin and evolution of SHGs particularly from a historical mind of analysis. Thus, on the basis of the detailed enquiry it becomes clear that the
SHGs themselves may be the direct offshoots of the changing trend as to the very notion of development especially at the rural level. Here it is to be noticed that from the very beginning of our nation as an independent sovereign state, efforts have been made by the governments to implement several schemes and projects with the objective of uplifting the socio economic conditions of the life of the rural masses. Fortunately or unfortunately the governments have seldom succeeded in reaching their final lap of rural development. From an objective point of exploration it seems that the main reason for the unsatisfactory attainment of the objective of rural development is the fact that governments have failed to take into confidence the rural people along with them while initiating and executing schemes and projects with the desired objective of rural development. Therefore, from the very experiences of the past six decades it is felt not only by the experts and academicians but also by those who have any interests in this regard that the very theme of development has to be re-defined by giving due emphasis to the issue of the psychological enlightenment of the rural masses who are the real targeted group. Here what is implied is that any aspect of development becomes meaningful only when the targeted group itself is fully and conscientiously able to be active participants in such schemes and projects. It further implies that instead of imposing schemes and projects upon the rural people, what is desirable is to provide a conducive atmosphere to them so that they may be able to come forward with a plan of action of their own for the same purpose or objective which is bound to be sustainable in the true sense of the term.

The above mentioned hypothesis has been seriously dealt with in the present study and on the basis of the data collected, it can be rightly assessed that
the active and vibrant performance from the part of SHGs acts as a positive source of inspiration towards the social capital generation in Kerala. Therefore, the study undoubtedly proved that Self-Help Groups have a vital role in the process of social capital formation. This argument can be substantiated by the fact that both the governmental and non-governmental organizations have been relying more upon organizing such groups for the purpose of implementing schemes and projects aiming at the developmental needs of the rural people. Here it is to be especially noticed that SHGs have a difference of their own from the like minded groups in the sense that they have succeeded in providing a sense of adjustment especially to the highly marginalized sections of the community who happened to live with the barest minimum requirements of life. Actually Self-Help Groups came into being, has been functioning and will have to function on the basis of the widely acknowledged slogan that ‘self-help is the best help’. Again SHGs are different in the sense that they offer unrestricted freedom of involvement and participation to its members. In other words, the members of SHGs are likely to feel a sense of flexibility during interaction. At this juncture, it seems that one of the major findings of the study may be that SHGs have been proved as the basic structural arrangements capable of evolving a strong sense of reciprocity which binds the members having different mindsets together. Thus the emergence of SHGs can be considered as a revolutionary turning point in the generation of social capital which in turn helps the process of rural development.

As per the findings of the study it can further be acknowledged that the SHGs have succeeded in bringing about greater level of associational life among the rural people. Again it can be concluded that active involvement and participation along with SHGs widened the horizon of political knowledge and
civic awareness on the one hand and a greater level of confidence in governments at different levels as well as interpersonal trust on the other hand which are treated as basic ingredients necessary for the generation of social capital.

5.1.2 Social Capital Generated through the Intervention of SHGs is Limited to the Lower Strata of Society

The second notable foundation in the form of a hypothesis upon which the study had started is the contention that social capital generated through the intervention of SHGs is limited to the lower strata of the political system. It is a naked truth that SHGs by and large have played a vital role towards addressing the socio-economic challenges of the deprived and marginalized sections of the social order. In other words the primary concern of SHGs from its very inception has been the upliftment of those belonging to the below poverty line segment of the society. Therefore, it could be found without much effort during the study that the social capital generated through the SHGs has been limited to the lower strata of the society.

However, on the basis of the analysis of the information collected, it can be narrated with a conclusive evidence that though SHGs have emerged and have been functioning as an agency meant for the final goal of reducing poverty of the rural masses, the message which the concept of SHGs has generated has been far-reaching and multi-dimensional in implications. From the empirical analysis of the study it becomes clear that the real significance of SHGs may not be its economic implications but the fact that it puts forward an invaluable message to the whole social order. Thus, the real worth of the concept of SHGs has been that it succeeded in spreading a message, the effect of which cannot be limited to any
particular strata or section of society. On the contrary it stands for a supreme message of oneness which shall be a pre-requisite for the transformation of the present social order into a civil society which in turn leads to the generation of social capital. Here it is to be concluded that the legitimate authorities and governments shall be ready to make use of this concept and its resultant message as a panacea not only for reducing poverty but also for the enlightenment of the entire society capable of generating some sort of social capital in the true sense of the term.

5.1.3 Social, Economic and Political Factors Sometimes Adversely Affect the Formation of Social Capital

The study takes the stand that social, economic and political factors sometimes adversely affect the formation of social capital as the third major hypothesis of this academic effort. This contention was taken on the basis of the *suo-moto* conception that there are explicit chances of having direct impact of factors like social, economic and political upon the generation of social capital especially of the rural women. However, as the research digs deeper in to its sources in the form of facts and data, it comes out with the result that the hypothesis has been subject to nullification. Considering the socio-economic and political relevance of the hypothesis, the study made an earnest effort to enter into the details of the socio-economic and politico-cultural backgrounds of the respondents and tried to assess and analyse how such factors have been playing their role in the process of social capital formation. At the outset, the study revealed the fact that the socio-economic and politico-cultural factors have a negligible role in determining the amount of social capital being generated. In a nutshell, it can be stated with some accuracy that women evince a greater level of
mental maturity to override the artificial barriers that may develop in their social life, mainly as a result of becoming active participants in groups like SHGs.

5.1.4 Social Capital Formation through SHGs Helps the Process of Women Empowerment in Kerala

Any serious research on SHGs that too composed of women will not be complete if it neglects the relevance of the concept of gender equality and women empowerment which are invariably interlinked. Therefore, the present academic effort took up the issue of women empowerment likely to be attained by women as active participants in the functioning of SHGs. Here the researcher emphasized the concept of women empowerment in the sense that it was incorporated as a major hypothesis of the enquiry. This hypothesis is based on the strong acceptance of the fact that women have a positive role in the different aspects of the social life. SHGs and the resultant micro-financing system have emerged as the effective channel of social capital generation on the general understanding that women have been able to contribute much to the working of such micro-level organizations at their doorsteps and also to administer and manage the financial resources of such units. On the basis of this argument, the present study wanted to go into the details of the actual working of SHGs constituted by women and how far they are able to manage the various activities of such groups including the administration of their financial matters.

The study came to a notable finding that women were highly motivated to the SHGs by their economic interests. That means they were more or less attracted to such organizations to facilitate their day to day economic needs. But at the same time it is equally relevant to note the finding that though women were
motivated to be active members of SHGs just for the purpose of meeting their financial difficulties, the fact remains that once the SHGs geared to momentum, they started generating sufficient source of energy to the womenfolk so that they might be able to take part in the activities of their group life with greater enthusiasm.

The study revealed the fact that SHGs provided wider opportunities to the ordinary rural women to come together and share their common views with a sense of greater freedom. In that sense, it can be rightly assessed that SHGs act as an effective means of communication which provide them ample inputs in the formation of their mindsets and thinking pattern. It is a fact that as active members of SHGs now they are almost aware of what is actually happening around them especially in the local surroundings. Such varied information contributed to a great extent to impart a sense of confidence among them which in turn supports them to be active in their group life in the true sense of the term.

On the basis of the information obtained from the direct interactions with the members, office-bearers, animators and the elected representatives concerned, it becomes crystal clear that the multifaceted activities of SHGs forced them to come out of the four walls of their family bondages. With no exaggeration it can be acknowledged that this changed situation placed them at the portals of a new horizon of women empowerment.

The level of empowerment and enlightenment of any section or group of any society can be reasonably evaluated and judged only on the basis of an understanding as to the level of participation in the making of decisions with which they are directly or indirectly related. Involvement in the process of
decision making, for the purpose of the present study, does not imply more or less an equal share on the part of each and every member of SHGs in all major and minor decisions arrived at in the groups. On the contrary, for practical purposes, it implies the chances enjoyed by the members to express their views and opinions in the discussions and debates leading to some sort of decisions. Again, participation in the decision making process may be affirmatively explained and assessed by taking in to consideration whether they are really satisfied with the decisions taken by the groups concerned.

Along with the factor of decision making, factors like economic involvement and self-perception have also been taken into consideration as key elements which condition the nature and extent of women empowerment likely to be attained by being active members of the respective SHGs. SHGs provide wide opportunities for their members to involve themselves in the financial transactions which in turn influence their economic empowerment. The study also enquired into the level of self-perception acquired by the members by becoming active participants in their respective SHGs. On the basis of the empirical enquiry as per the indicators mentioned above, the research came out with the result that women are becoming more enlightened and empowered by making use of the innumerable opportunities available to them mainly by being active members of the SHGs at the rural level.

At this point of discussion it needs a special mention that the hypothesis related with the concept of women empowerment has been enquired into and analysed in a dual perspective in the sense of assessing the nature and extent of empowerment attained by the members in their respective groups on the one side and the same with respect to their respective families. Here the aim of the
researcher was to deal with the issue on a comparative basis. In other words, it is interesting as well as important to evaluate how far the empowerment acquired by women by being members of SHGs enabled them to be more active and capable of dealing with their household affairs. The result emerged from such a comparative analysis may be considered as one of the remarkable findings of the study. The study came to the conclusion that women are more enlightened and empowered in matters relating to their group life than their household affairs. Thus, it reveals the fact that women are not able to reflect their acquired position of enlightenment in their respective family atmosphere as effectively as they do in group life. Therefore, the conclusion in this regard is that it is a fact that women have succeeded in attaining a reasonable level of empowerment through their active participation in the SHGs but have failed to maintain the same within their respective families with the result that they continue to be the victims of the age old system of male domination at least within the four walls of family atmosphere.

5.1.5 Rural Development Leads to Poverty Reduction

The last hypothesis adopted by the study has been the contention that rural development in the true sense leads to poverty reduction. This argument was treated as a strong foundation of the whole structure of the thesis on the basis of the well established notion that rural development and poverty are closely interlinked in the sense that the higher the level of rural development the lower the chances of rural poverty. From the historical point of view, it can be rightly argued that from time immemorial, governments have been struggling hard to initiate and implement schemes and projects with the broad objective of attaining maximum extent of rural development. But it should be remembered that the
ultimate truth remains unchanged that rural development for the sake of rural development has no meaning unless it bears the eternal motto of alleviating poverty from the day to day life of the ordinary rural people.

Coming to the present study, the enquiry as to the level of rural development acquired in relation to the level of poverty reduction has been thoroughly looked into. Here maximum effort was taken to collect information regarding the economic advancement attained and also the social empowerment acquired by women mainly as a result of their direct relationship and attachment with the respective SHGs. On the basis of such a detailed enquiry it becomes clear that women attained a satisfactory level of economic advancement. It is evident from the study that as a result of their interactions with the functional aspects of SHGs, a good number of women succeeded in having a higher standard of living compared to their earlier position. It was mainly due to the fact that the SHGs provided them several opportunities to acquire additional skills enabling them to find out non-conventional employment opportunities. The system of micro-financing helped them to a very great extent to attain economic advancement which is explicitly revealed by the higher standard of living compared to their prior condition. At this juncture, it is to be especially acknowledged that the significance of the system of micro-financing needs to be emphasized in the sense that the collective life among the rural women and its resultant advantages have been its direct contribution. Now women are acquainted with the benefits of easy loans and peer monitoring and also feel a sense of relief from the clutches of local money lenders by making use of the system of micro-financing.
The assessment of rural development especially taking into account the rate of poverty becomes subservient if it knowingly or unknowingly underestimates or neglects the role of the factor of social upliftment attained by the people. Therefore, the study wanted to avoid that risk by giving due emphasis to the enquiry of the level of social development achieved by women through their involvement in their respective SHGs. The study comes out with the finding that women have succeeded in having a high rate of social advancement in terms of their greater sense of health care, legal understanding and education for themselves and their wards.

As the study went deeper, it came out with the reliable finding that women’s involvement in the SHGs helped them to accumulate greater amount of social capital which enabled them to become links in the chain of rural development. Moreover, the study came to the affirmative finding that rural development causes reduction of chronic poverty.

The gist of this academic venture can be reasonably explained in a three dimensional interpretation of the core findings of the study as attributed below. Before going deep into those channels of interpretation, it is imperative to have an idea as to the general background of the peculiarities of Kerala society on the basis of which the entire journey of the academic investigation has been going on. Kerala society needs a special reference while comparing with the other units in the Indian federal structure and sometimes with the other developed countries of the world simply because of the fact that it evinces a higher standard of living in all walks of social life. Kerala society has been traditionally characterized by the positive presence of all the indicators necessary to judge any society as a developed one with higher standard of living. Occasionally certain
indicators resemble at par with some of the most developed societies of the world. All these achievements have been credited to its account by the Kerala political system without seriously hampering its age old feature of cultural multiplicity. This level of achievement has been widely acclaimed and popularized by the term “Kerala Model of Development”.

5.2 Three Dimensional Analysis

5.2.1 SHGs: Towards Social Capital Formation

The first dimensional interpretation arrived at as a result of the empirical analysis of the sources explored the fundamental fact that SHGs have been playing an invaluable role in uniting rural women for collective action with greater enthusiasm. It is a universally valid approach that SHGs have a positive spirit in generating social capital. Exactly based on this valid approach the present study wanted to highlight how far the SHGs have been able to make use of their positive spirit in the most distinguished socio-economic and politico-cultural scenario of the Kerala Society. As the research delved deep into the data and the facts, it came out with the clear picture showing that the SHGs have been successful in generating sufficient energy to induce ordinary rural women to come together for collective action. It is undoubtedly proved that SHGs provided them with greater sense of reciprocity and greater willingness to adjust with the changing situations. SHGs contributed much to change the behavioral pattern of rural women to a higher level of social acceptance. Thus the study undoubtedly proved with clear evidences that SHGs have been acting as vibrant agencies in the generation of social capital especially in the peculiar socio-political background of Kerala Society.
5.2.2 SHGs and Social Capital: Towards Rural Development

The second dimensional interpretation emerged in the form of a valuable finding is that social capital and rural development are inseparably linked with each other. It highlights the notion that social capital automatically grows towards rural development. It further implies that both are mutually complementary and contributory. Thus, one of the supreme revelations emerged from the research has been that unlike other forms of capital, the wealth in terms of social capital can be treated as ‘the capital’ which is likely to be everlasting especially in the matter of rural development. Such a varied type of social wealth or capital has been absolutely necessary for a society like Kerala for the purpose of successful removal of all the hurdles in the forms of caste, creed, religion, race, etc. in the path towards the final destination of rural development.

5.2.3 SHGs, Social Capital and Rural Development: Towards Poverty Reduction

The third dimensional interpretation of the research can be summed up in terms of the finding that rural development is for poverty reduction implying that there exists an inverse relationship between rural development and chances of poverty. As the research went much about the details of the system of SHGs, social capital and rural development, it is felt that the amount of social capital accumulated through the dynamic performance of SHGs motivated the attainment of a higher sphere of rural development. Here an astonishing output of the study is that rural development in the true sense of the term will remain an unfinished agenda if it fails to choose the means of social capital as its strong foundation. The study came to the assessment that the level of rural development
can be judiciously evaluated on the basis of the rate of poverty present at the rural level. Here also the study successfully found out the true level of rural development achieved as a result of the amount of social capital accumulated by means of SHGs and also came to the conclusion that the rural development becomes crystal clear by means of assessing the same with the help of rate of poverty.

Thus, in a nutshell, the study proved that the greater the involvement and participation of women in SHGs, greater the amount of social capital generated and greater the social capital accumulated, greater will be the level of rural development and further greater the level of rural development, greater the chances of poverty reduction. Thus, before concluding it is worth-mentioning that SHGs, which have emerged as an effective, vibrant and viable survival strategy for the rural womenfolk in India, and it will continue to be so in the future as well.

5.3 Recommendations

On the basis of an in-depth and threadbare analysis of the different aspects of the theme of social capital being generated through the vibrant functioning of SHGs towards the fulfillment of the dream of rural development, it seems rational and proper to present some recommendations that would uphold the real essence of the issues highlighted in the present study. The following points constitute the recommendations and suggestions resulted from the present study.

1. On the basis of the empirical study it becomes clear that social capital constitutes the real wealth and capital in the true sense of the term, for a nation which looks forward to the objective of rural development. Hence
understanding the potentialities associated with the concept of social capital is of paramount importance. It is high time that the central government came forward to evolve a national policy on social capital.

2. On the basis of a detailed analysis of the different aspects of the formation, structural arrangements and functional performance of SHGs and also their direct impact upon the generation of social capital and rural development, it becomes a naked truth that SHGs are capable of transforming the thinking pattern of individuals which in turn helps the formation of civil society in the true sense of the term. Now what is seen in this regard is that SHGs have got wider acceptance and recognition but only at the lower stratum of the society. Here it is suggested that serious efforts have to be made by governments at different levels to establish SHGs like arrangements from the highest to the lowest stratum of the entire society, keeping in mind the conviction that the social capital thus generated shall be the true basis of development in the society as a whole.

3. The system of micro-financing through SHGs has proved highly successful not only in addressing the limited day to day financial difficulties of rural people but also in strengthening the social bond and reciprocity among the rural people which enabled them to contribute substantially to the generation of social capital. On the basis of such a finding resulted from the study, it is recommended here that the central government should give necessary instructions to the Reserve Bank of India to take positive steps to facilitate adequate financial assistance with maximum flexibility to the system of micro-financing through SHGs.
4. One of the most striking findings of the present academic attempt has been that the SHGs act as a starting point towards the generation of social capital as well as the attainment of a higher level of rural development. Therefore, it is nothing but a courtesy from the parts of legitimate authorities of the system to give them their due share at least by recognizing them as the basic units of rural development. Therefore, it is recommended that serious discussions should be held with academicians, experts and political parties to arrive at a consensus for a Constitutional Amendment exclusively meant for providing a constitutional status to the SHGs throughout the nation.

5. The study made a thorough examination as to the reasons for the successful implementation of schemes and projects initiated and implemented by the governments from time to time aimed at the objective of rural development. It was found from the research that the experiences so far underscored the fact that such schemes seemed to have attained the desired objectives provided that the governments were ready to take the rural people into confidence. The research further came to the conviction that SHGs have been acting as an effective structural arrangement capable of establishing a reliable confidence among its members towards the governments especially in the process of implementing schemes for rural development. Taking those facts into serious consideration, it is to be suggested that central and state governments shall be ready to consider SHGs as a viable institutional mechanism for the effective implementation of rural development schemes and projects especially for addressing the challenges of poverty persistent among the rural people.

6. On the basis of the in-depth analysis of the different factors and forces
which are likely to contribute either directly or indirectly towards the generation of social capital which is closely linked with the level of awareness possessed by the general public as to the fundamentals of the social life. Here it is the responsibility of the political system to impart basic political education to the people so that they may be able to involve themselves actively in the body politic and became active in the formation of social capital. In order to fulfill this objective, it is to be recommended that governments should think seriously about incorporating the issue of social capital as a major topic in the curriculum both at the school and the university levels.

7. The central theme of the present academic venture actually revolves around the multi-dimensional possibilities and potentialities of SHGs and their role in generating social capital. It was found from the study that both the governments and the NGOs emphasized the formation of SHGs for the womenfolk of the society as a bold step towards the final goal of rural development and poverty reduction. The real result of the study in this regard is that it revealed the fact that SHGs, no matter for whom it has been designed, invariably generates certain amount of social capital. Here taking those factors into consideration, it is to be recommended that governments and NGOs should be ready to give equal importance to male SHGs as well.

8. The real outcome of the whole investigation on SHGs, social capital and rural development has been that it has succeeded in bringing to limelight the supreme message of civil society which acts as a key to transform the present society into a highly qualified one. The concept of civil society encompasses the qualities of unity, reciprocity feeling of oneness, co-
operation fraternity, harmony, social networks, social norms etc. as the basis of social life. On the basis of the understanding of the concept of civil society, the last but not least recommendation is that the political system should take necessary steps to start serious dialogue with a view to effecting adequate structural adjustments to help the system resemble what is called a civil society.