FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the collected data is presented in a systematic manner in the earlier chapters. The present chapter gives the findings of the study based on the analysis of the primary and the secondary data collected. An attempt is made to present the findings in association with the objectives of the study.

6.2 FINDINGS BASED ON OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The study was undertaken with six important objectives.

1. TO UNDERSTAND THE OUTREACH OF MICROFINANCE THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS.

- It is now crystal clear that the concept of microfinance is well accepted worldwide. It is looked upon as an important breakthrough for the upliftment of the sectors which needed emergent attention. It is a path of bringing the economically weaker segments of the society in the mainstream of development. Microfinance has now taken the shape of a big tree with many branches. Various agencies like the government, RBI, bankers, NGOs; academicians etc. are working on strengthening of this tree.

- The outreach of microfinance in India can be understood very well from the progress of the SHG-Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP) of NABARD as it is one of the largest microfinance programmes of the world. The SBLP started in 1992 on an experimental basis with just 255 SHGs credit linked. This programme gradually gained momentum and upto 2006 more than 22 lakhs of SHGs were
credit linked under the programme (refer table no. 4.4). A total of 11297.5 crores of rupees were disbursed as bank loan among the SHGs upto 2006.

- However the growth in number of credit linked SHGs is observed to have lost its pace in recent years. The growth rate was as high as 248% in 1999-00. This growth rate has diminished gradually to just 38% in 2005-06. Similar diminishing trend in the growth of credit disbursed to the SHGs is observed from 238% in 1999-00 to 65% in 2005-06 (refer table 4.4).

- As on 31st March 2009, the programme has to it’s account around 61.2 lakhs of savings linked SHGs (refer table no.4.13). This programme has provided access to basic banking operations to not less than 612 lakhs of unbanked population of India. A total amount of 5545.62 crores rupees is deposited with the banks in the form of savings of SHGs. This shows the result of the habit of savings inculcated by the population through SHGs.

- The growth of SHG-Bank Linkage programme, though impressive was uneven. The regional spread was characterised with non-uniformity. Majority of the credit linked SHGs were concentrated in the southern regions for years together. The degree of concentration was as high as 71% in 2001. With the continuous efforts made by NABARD and the supporting agencies, the degree of concentration reduced gradually to 54.3% in 2006 (refer table 4.5). However, the southern region still dominates the microfinance field with 46.2% of the total savings linked SHGs (refer chart 4.11). The status of saving linkages is poor in the northern and the north eastern regions. Hence it is necessary to intensify the movement in these regions.

- The growth in credit linkages within SHGs also is alarming. Here too, the southern region has the larger piece of the cake. The number of credit linked
SHGs is very high (66.4%) in the southern regions over the rest of the regions (refer chart 4.12).

- The credit linkage of SHGs is done through three models. Of these under the second model SHGs are formed by formal agencies other than banks like NGOs, but are financed directly by banks. This model has retained it’s major share in the total credit linked SHGs. Upto March 2006, almost 74% of the total credit linked SHGs belonged to this model.

- Over last 2-3 years, the MFI-Bank linkage model is looked upon as a potential model. Here the banks advance bulk loans to MFIs for onlending to the SHGs and other small borrowers. The amount of loans disbursed to these MFIs has been growing at a high rate. The growth rate for the year 2008-09 was of 89.4% over the previous year.

- The SBLP mainly relies upon the well-spun banking sector of India. The banking sector comprises of commercial banks, RRBs and Co-operative banks. Among these three agencies the commercial banks are on the forefront in both saving-linkages as well as credit-linkages (refer table 4.19).

- Of the total SHGs, 48.6 lakhs are women SHGs, which account to about 80% of the total SHGs (refer table no. 4.21). 80% of the total savings of SHGs with banks are deposited by the women SHGs. This shows that the women are on the forefront of the microfinance sector. This brings to light the fact that women are assumed to be better customers of credit. The faith shown in women to become active and reap benefits from the group –credit mechanism becomes evident from this. Not less than 486 lakhs of women from India are brought under the umbrella shelter of SHGs and have developed the habit of savings. This in itself is an example of resources being accessed by the women.
The state of Maharashtra has been one of the upcoming states in the microfinance sector. The number of credit linked SHGs in Maharashtra state was as low as 10468 in 2001. This accounted to only 3.97% of the total credit linked SHGs. The SHG-linkage gained momentum and by 2006, Maharashtra had 5.87% of the total credit linked SHGs. By the year 2009, almost 11.2% of the total savings linked SHGs were in Maharashtra. For the year 2008-09, Maharashtra witnessed a growth in credit linkages at 45.6% and that in amount of loan disbursed to SHGs at 61.27%. This reflects the fact that various agencies in the state are actively working for better performance.

The Marathwada region has not been able to leave its mark in the microfinance sector. Under the SBLP, the credit linked SHGs in Marathwada are only 16% of the total SHGs in the state. Similarly the amount of loan disbursed upto year 2007 was only 1.75% of the total amount disbursed to SHGs in the state. This percentage increased to 18.8% by 2008 and 20.1% by year 2009 (refer table 4.23). Within the eight districts of Marathwada, Nanded district has the highest number of credit linked SHGs. There is growth in the SHG-linkages in Marathwada but at a slow pace. The growth rate was at 46.8% in year 2007-08 but reduced substantially to just 17.8% in year 2008-09. Such steep fluctuations in the pace of linkages are a matter of concern and need to be probed into urgently.

2. **TO IDENTIFY THE STATUS OF WOMEN.**

Gender discrimination has held its roots strongly in the evolution of the entire world. Over the passage of centuries the contribution of women though understood was least considered or rather was unnoticed. History has to its record many such evidences that have led to giving better status to women in society. Many organisations have come forth for the upliftment of women. Women are now being considered as an important aspect for the economic development of a nation. India too is not an exception. India was basically a land of radical
approach towards women for years together. Even today the scene is not changed favourably.

- The third chapter focuses mainly on the status of women across the globe as well as in India. The need for empowerment of women for upliftment and economic growth is emphasised in the chapter. The statistics as brought forward by United Nations Development Organisation clearly indicates the plight of women worldwide (refer section 3.4 of chapter III).

- India, though being a fastest developing nation, faces the grave problem of gender inequality. The women in Indian society have been the deprived segment of the society for generations together. The subordination of women can be directly related with low rate of life expectancy, higher illiteracy rates, and high unemployment rates along with the traditional and cultural barriers.

- The declining sex ratio questions the existence of women in India. (refer table 3.2).

- Further more the women in India have suffered a lot for getting access to education. Since independence the literacy rate for females has increased from 8.86 % to 54.16 % (refer table 3.3). Though there is growth in the literacy rate of women, almost half of the women population is still deprived of education. According to 2001 census the women in rural areas had a higher illiteracy rate than those in urban areas.

- In the year 1911 the proportion of female work force to female population was 33.7 % as well as the female proportion in the total workforce was 34.4%. Quiet surprisingly this proportion has substantially declined, to 16.4 per cent and 22.3 % respectively in 1991.
Consequently the need for their upliftment was felt on an urgent basis. This made the policymakers transform their strategy from welfare to development and then to empowerment of the women. The Indian government has strived far and wide for the upliftment of this important ingredient of the economy. Many institutions are set up especially for women development and empowerment. Variety of schemes have also been designed and implemented by the government from time to time. Legal protection is given to the women for effective control over the vices of society.

The status of women can be measured on the basis of Human Development Index, Gender Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure. India is a country with low HDI. Unfortunately, India has failed to seek a position above 115 in the world HDI ranking. As per the HDI ranking of 2008 India is at 134th position. This indicates the poor performance of India (refer section 3.11.1 in chapter III).

The women in Maharashtra are identified to be in a better state over and above the status of women at all-India level. They hold better life expectancy as well as a higher literacy rate (refer table 3.11). This brought Maharashtra at the third position at all India level in terms of its HDI (0.532) in the year 1991. However in 2006, Maharashtra went down to 8th position, thus indicating the need for intensified development measures.

The women from Marathwada region are found to be backward in all areas. None of the districts of Marathwada has HDI higher than that of the state of Maharashtra (refer table 3.13). Their literacy rates are far behind the state literacy rates (refer table 3.14). This indicates that the women in Marathwada are in dire need of better educational motivation. The employment rates of women in Marathwada too fail to exceed the state employment rates (refer table 3.15). A very high percentage of girls in Marathwada get married below the age of
eighteen years (refer table 3.16). This points out the extent to which women face exploitation in Marathwada.

3. TO EXAMINE THE ROLE OF SHGs IN EMPOWERING WOMEN BOTH SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY.

The study was undertaken with the important motive of studying the ability of group mechanism in association with credit to empower the women participants. 950 members of various women Self Help Groups from all eight districts of Marathwada form the sample for the study. 57.5% of the respondents belong to rural areas while 42.5% are from urban SHGs. Of the total sample respondents, 36.8% belong to young SHGs while 63.2% of respondents are associated with SHGs for more than three years.

- A very interesting and positive change is observed among the saving pattern of the sample members of the SHGs (table 5.22). After joining SHG both the urban and rural respondents have shown 100% movement from no saving to saving category. In the pre-joining phase only 0.84% of the respondents were having monthly savings in the range of Rs.100-299. However after joining the SHGs 76.21% of the respondents had their monthly savings in this range. Thus a 90 times change is observed. Further the change for rural respondents is higher over that for urban respondents. This clearly indicates that participation in SHGs has surely led to better savings for the respondents.

- The internal credit facility is one of the unique features of SHG philosophy. In context of the loaning pattern of the respondents it was observed that almost 90% of the sample respondents have availed the benefits of internal credit. The credit was used mainly for domestic purposes. In very few cases the credit was used for productive purposes by the respondents. This indicates that the domestic
consumption needs of the respondents were highly unattended. This must have led to their internal loans being utilised mainly for domestic consumption purposes. In addition the internal credit was also used for meeting the health expenditure which is quiet unexpected for the respondents. A voluminous proportion of the respondents (table 5.26) show an in time loan repayment record, thus attesting the effective role of peer pressure.

- Direct loaning from the bank is found to be still a remote area for the SHG participants. Only 5.6% of the SHG respondents reported of bank borrowings. The reasons among others may be the shyness towards banking transactions prevailing among the respondents. The credit is required by the respondents mainly for domestic consumption and for this the banks are unable to provide loans. On the other hand it may be looked upon as a positive outcome of SHG participation. As the credit needs are efficiently met within the group probably the members are not needed to explore bank credit.

- Majority of the respondents have stated that their personal financial position has changed after joining SHGs. Thus the motive behind the SHG inception is achieved to a certain extent.

- When the members were examined on the platform of knowledge about the functioning of the SHG it was found that majority of the respondents from both urban and rural areas held adequate knowledge about the meeting calendar, rules and regulations of the SHGs, the bank account of the group, total loaning of the group and the penalty for late repayment. However it was observed that the objectives of the group were not clear among majority of the respondents.

- A stunning majority of the respondents were found to be using their voting rights. Majority of the respondents were observed to be actively participating in group
meetings. The percentage of regularity in attendance of meeting is higher among the rural respondents than that of urban respondents.

- 70% of the respondents have undergone some or the other training. Of these, majority are satisfied about the skill enhancement through the training (table 5.34 & 5.35). The quality of training programmes can thus be observed to be good. It further indicates that still 30% of the respondents have not received any training and the promotion agencies need to intensify their training and capacity building programmes.

- In terms of the benefits achieved from joining SHGs, it was found that majority of the respondents gained self confidence, inculcated the savings habit, got freedom from local moneylenders as well as economic independence from the SHG participation. 90% of the respondents opined that they played a better role in household decision making after being members of SHGs. Almost 50% of the respondents opined that SHG participation developed better health awareness among them. However 70% of the respondents stated no change in their employment as an outcome of SHG participation. In case of mobility, 86% respondents were of the opinion that SHG participation did not cause any drastic change in their mobility.

- The general awareness of the respondents is observed to be increased after joining SHGs. There is a more than 50% rise in the percentage of women reading newspapers after joining the Self Help Group. The percentage variation is higher among the rural respondents with 87% over that of urban respondents with 34% (table 5.40). The respondents are observed to be better equipped with knowledge of children health and care in the pre-SHG phase (table 5.39). After joining SHG they show a commendable rise with almost 92% having knowledge of child vaccination. The change in awareness of child vaccination is observed to be by almost 83%. The urban respondents underwent a change by 61.55% while the
rural respondents witnessed a change by 101.19%. Before joining SHGs only 6% of the respondents were aware of banking transactions. This shows very low penetration of banking concepts within the population. After joining SHG there is an appreciable rise in the percentage of respondents with banking knowledge. Now almost 70% of the sample is aware of banks and their transactions. **With the membership of SHG there is a phenomenal rise (more than ten times) in the knowledge of basic banking transactions among the members after joining the SHG.** The percentage increase for urban respondents is 800% while it is 1582% for rural respondents (table 5.40).

- The average General Awareness Index shows an increase in the awareness among the sample respondents by 168.73% (table 5.43). Though the GAI is higher for the urban respondents (70.13) than the rural respondents (65.2), the change among the rural respondents is higher than that among the urban respondents.

- The SHG joining shows an increase in the ability of the members to go out to nearby village, town or city. It indicates the increased confidence level of the members. The need to seek permission, though marginally, has reduced after joining. After joining SHG a larger percentage of women are able to move alone (table 5.44). The mean percentage variation in mobility of urban respondents is 31.45 while that of rural respondents is 124.76. This shows that the rural respondents have experienced larger change over that of urban respondents (table 5.45).

- Quiet surprisingly after joining SHG the **average Mobility Index is higher for the rural respondents than the urban respondents.** The change for urban respondents is lesser than that for rural respondents (table 5.48). It can be inferred that SHG participation has favourably affected the mobility of the respondents in general and the rural respondents in particular.
The role of a woman in household decision making is an important indicator of her empowerment. The women members after joining SHGs are found to be playing an important role in household decision-making (table 5.49). It is observed that after joining SHGs higher percentage of women made small and large purchases on their own. They also decided about children education on their own. The increase in self decision making for small purchases is by 5.21 among urban respondents while it is 18.86 among rural respondents (table 5.50). The role of husbands is identified to be not very dominating in small purchase decisions. However in case of large purchase decisions before joining, the husbands were found to be very dominating. After joining SHGs the domination of husbands in large purchase decision making reduced drastically and joint decision making increased. Self decision making also rose from meagre 9.3% in pre-SHG phase to 25.5% in the post-SHG phase.

The change in average Household decision making Index is higher for rural respondents than for urban respondents (table 5.55). It thus can be inferred that joining of SHGs has brought greater change in the role of women in decision making in rural areas than in urban areas.

Positive change is also observed in the asset holding of the respondents. Similar trend is found in the access to resources of the respondents. Having a bank account and an insurance policy were assumed to be the indicators of resources, while possession of jewellery, mobile and land were the indicators of asset holding. Only 27 respondents held a bank account before joining an SHG (table 5.56). This figure rose to 110 (almost four times) after joining SHG. With the joining of SHG the members have realised the importance of banks and the benefits thereof. There is an increase though gradual in the access to banking services. The urban respondents underwent a lesser change than the rural respondents (table 5.57).
In the case of insurance policy, only 3.5% of the respondents had an insurance policy before joining which increased substantially to 49.5% (almost 14 times) after joining SHG. Thus, the value of the life of a woman within the household is being realised by the members of family. This in itself is a better evidence of empowerment of women. The urban-rural comparative analysis shows that the increase in possession of insurance policy is higher for rural respondents than their urban counterparts (table 5.58).

In the Indian culture, jewellery is the asset which a woman brings with her when getting married. Obviously majority of the women being married possessed jewellery even before joining SHG. There is a marginal increase in the possession of jewellery after joining SHG. This means that the credit through SHGs is not used by the women for purchase of jewellery. It may be inferred that the women are giving priority to domestic purposes. Here, the urban respondents show a higher change over the rural respondents (table 5.59).

Technology if used simplifies life of an individual. Majority of the respondents were not familiar with mobiles before joining SHGs. However after joining the number of respondents possessing and using mobiles increased by almost twelve times. This shows that the SHG intervention has also made the members technology-savvy. The comparative analysis of urban and rural respondents depicts that the urban respondents have higher percentage increase in possession and usage of mobiles than the rural respondents (table 5.60).

Having land registered in their own name was a rare feature before joining SHG. After joining SHG even, the change observed is very negligible. Majority of the respondents do not have land registered in their names. It shows that property still is not the domain of women in India (table 5.56).
• The average Resource Asset Holding index is higher for the urban respondents after joining SHG than the rural respondents. Also the percentage change in the RAHI is higher for the urban respondents than the rural respondents (table 5.64).

• On calculating the empowerment index for every individual sample respondent, it was observed that on a whole for all the 950 respondents together there is a convincing and favourable shift in the empowerment levels of the respondents (chart 5.48). A paradigm shift is observed in the respondents from very low and low empowerment categories to medium, high and very high levels of empowerment. 67% of the respondents lay in the low empowerment category in the pre-SHG phase. This has reduced substantially to 26% in the post-SHG phase. There is almost 11 times increase in the volume of respondents with high empowerment level. Thus joining SHG can be clearly observed to be a step towards enhancement of the empowerment of women.

The urban women were better empowered in the pre-SHG phase over the rural women (table 5.66). After joining SHGs the empowerment index of both urban and rural women changed positively. However the change is higher for the rural respondents than their urban counterparts (chart 5.48). This indicates that the SHG-philosophy has been better utilised by the rural respondents than the urban respondents.

4. TO EXAMINE THE CONSTITUTION AND THE FUNCTIONING OF WOMEN SHGs.

In order to achieve this objective the constitution and functioning of 211 SHGs was studied. For the purpose a separate questionnaire was administered to the leaders of the SHGs. The sustainability of any group is largely affected by the constitution of the group. In general it was observed that the credit component of
the SHG-mechanism acted as a strong bondage for the members of the group. The findings from the study of the groups are presented as follows:

- SHGs from all the eight districts of Marathwada were incorporated for the study. Majority of the groups (63%) had membership of 11-15 members while 34.1% had membership of up to ten members (mostly with ten members). The SHGs with 16-20 members were very less with only 2.8% of representation. This means that on an average 10-15 members are treated to be ideal for group formation and smooth functioning.

- Cent percent of the SHGs under study were homogenous in their economic composition. 66.4% of the groups had mixed caste representation while 33.6% had single caste representation. This shows that Self help philosophy is no more restricted within the shackles of caste and creed.

- It was found that the SHGs are formed for multiple reasons. Improving the socio economic status of the women members was the prominent reason of group formation registered by 94.31% of the groups. 78.67% of the SHGs are formed also for promoting thrift and lending among members. Almost 70% of the groups recorded one of the reasons for their formation as undertaking community development activities. 55% groups were also promoted for initiating income generation and asset creation.

- With regards to the functioning of SHGs (table 5.14) all the sample groups had their bye-laws framed. Majority of the groups held monthly meetings and only one group recorded fortnightly meeting. The records of meetings were maintained in almost all the groups. In 73.5% of groups internal lending commenced six months after establishment. In case of 17.55 of SHGs the internal lending started
between 3-6 months. 9% of the SHGs reported to have started internal lending within 3 months from establishment.

- The loaning behaviour of the groups was also examined. It was found that majority (78.2%) of the SHGs had availed loans from an external agency. The groups in rural areas were observed to be more active in loaning over those in urban areas. It was further found that the SHGs relied highly on banking sector for borrowings. In only one case the borrowing was from co-operative societies. No delays were experienced in loan sanctioning by majority of the SHGs. However, a higher number of SHGs from urban areas reported delays in loan sanctions as compared with those from rural areas.

- In most of the SHGs the loans borrowed were equally distributed among the members (table no.5.15). In 20% of the groups the loans were utilised on the basis of need of the members, while in 11% of the SHGs the loans were used for the group’s income generating activity. It is also observed that the frequency of refinance is higher among the rural groups than the urban groups. This shows that the rural groups are better confident about repayment as well as are better benefitted with the credit facility.

- In context of entrepreneurial orientation of the groups (table no.5.16) it was found that almost 70% of the groups had received training for IG activity, while only 37% reported of having group business. The NGOs were found to be playing a leading role in imparting training followed by government officials from MAVIM and DRDA. Majority of the rural groups were satisfied about the training imparted while 18% of urban groups reported dissatisfaction towards the training imparted. The literacy aspect of the groups is found to be largely neglected by the promoting agencies as no literacy programmes are conducted. This may be mainly due to the assumption that literacy is to be taken care of by the government and there are specialised programmes and schemes of literacy and adult education run
by the government. In addition it was also noticed that there was a lack of marketing support and provision of exhibitions and fairs for the groups under study.

- The benefits reaped out of SHG participation were analysed on two aspects viz; benefit to the society and benefit to the member. It was observed that only 40% of the SHGs were socially active while the rest did not undertake any socially beneficial activity. The urban SHGs were far behind the rural SHGs in executing their responsibility towards the society (table 5.17). Almost all the SHG leaders opined that individually the members were largely benefitted from SHG participation. It can be inferred that self help is being achieved; however it still needs time and efforts for helping the society round.

- Majority of the population in the sample (47.4%) belongs to the age group of 30-40 years. 29.2% of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-30 years. Therefore the age group of 20-40 years is found to constitute more than three quarters (76.6%) of the total sample size. The participation of the age group upto 20 years is significantly low in the sample population (0.7%). Similarly the representation of higher age group is sparse with only 4.5% of the respondents belonging to age group of above 50 years. It is thus inferred that the SHG participation is dominated by women from age group 20-40 years.

- A voluminous majority of the respondents (87.8%) belong to Hindu religion while 12.2% are of Muslim religion. No representation is observed of Christian religion in the sample population. The population of open caste is observed to be the maximum with 45.1% of representation. The backward class is with next higher percentage of 30.2 and the OBC representation is of 24.7%.

- Almost one fourth of the sample respondents are illiterates. 27.5% of the sample respondents belong to the middle school level while 20.4% belong to the SSC
level. The higher education representation is very less with only 6.9% HSC respondents and 1.7% graduate respondents.

- Majority of the respondents (94.8%) are married while 0.75% of respondents are unmarried and divorcee each. 3.7% of the respondents are widowed.

- 63.9% of respondents live in joint families while 36.1% live in nuclear families. It may also be noted that the percentage of respondents living in joint families is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. This confirms the declining joint family structure of urban areas. Majority of the respondents (64.6%) have 4-6 members in their family. Respondents with more than 6 members in family also show substantial representation with 30% of the sample size. Respondents having small families limited to 1-3 members are only 5.4% of the total sample size.

- Almost half of the sample respondents have two children while 27.25% have three children. 4.98% of the respondents have more than three children. Only 15.8% of the sample respondents have one child.

- Majority of the sample respondents were found to be earning either from their own labour or from business or from service or farming. The population with labour as occupation is maximum with 35.89% of representation. One fourth of the sample respondents are unemployed while 17.47% are engaged in farming as their occupation. It is also found that the percentage of unemployed respondents is as high as 40.35% in urban areas while only 13.74% of the rural respondents are unemployed. This shows that the earning women participate largely in the SHGs over those which are non-earning. It can also be inferred that the earning status of the women gives them a better opportunity of joining SHGs over their non earning counterparts.
5. TO STUDY THE SHG LEADER’S KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE FUNCTIONING AND PROFILE OF THE SHG.

The performance of a group is dependant on the leader of the group. An attempt was made to identify the knowledge of the leader about the functioning and the profile of the group. For the purpose a separate questionnaire was administered to the SHG-leaders. It was found that the leaders were well aware about the ideal manner in which the group should perform. A whole 100% of the leaders had the bye-laws of their groups framed. Almost 100% of the leaders maintained records of the meetings held at regular intervals (refer table 5.14). Cent percent of the leaders were well versed with the objectives of the group. Majority of the leaders (78.2%) had initiated the group to the extent of borrowing at least once from an external agency. The rural leaders excelled over their urban counterparts in the borrowing frequency (refer table 5.15).

The discussions with the leaders brought to light the inability of the leaders to motivate the group members to start any income generating activity of the group. Only 45% of the rural leaders reported of initiating IGA as an objective for formation of SHG. On the other hand a higher percentage of urban leaders (69%) had the intention of starting an IGA for the group (refer table 5.12). But interestingly it was found that only 33.3% of the urban groups had commenced a group business while a higher proportion of 41% of the total rural groups had initiated group business (seasonal or regular). The group leaders were found to be equally active in providing training exposure to the members both in urban and rural areas. In many cases it was found that the leaders used to attend the training programme and then disseminate the knowledge gained to the members of the group.
The leaders of rural groups were observed to be more active in social causes than the urban leaders (refer table 5.17). An overwhelming 99.05% of the sample respondents reported to be satisfied about their leader. This clearly shows the effectiveness of the leaders and their wide acceptance by the members.

6. TO STUDY THE PROBLEMS FACED BY THE WOMEN SHGs.

The major problem faced by SHGs from both rural and urban areas was the lack of skill training. In addition, variety in training the women members was also not taken care of by the promotion agencies. Very few groups were found to be actively carrying out an income generating activity. There was also a dearth of supplementary skill training like communication, marketing and selling. Delay in refinance was another problem faced by the SHGs. Many of the members of the SHGs were working as labour on daily wages or as agricultural labour. If these members had to go to the banks for basic bank transactions, they would be at a loss of their wages. Consequently the SHGs faced difficulty in managing with this aspect.
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 SUMMARY

The present research work has been divided into seven chapters. The various aspects dealt with in these chapters are summarized as follows:

The first chapter ‘INTRODUCTION’ provides a brief view of the philosophy of Microfinance. It discusses the role of Self Help Groups as an important and popular vehicle of microfinance. The major conceptual aspects of women empowerment are also highlighted in this chapter. The objectives, hypothesis and the research methodology of the study are also provided for in the chapter.

The second chapter ‘MICROFINANCE- THE INDIAN SCENARIO’ deals with the lights and shades of the credit delivery mechanism in India. It then focuses the concept of microfinance, its need and importance and emergence in Indian context. It also details the applications of microfinance across the nation. The chapter ends on the note that microfinance is being experimented widely as a tool for effecting changes in the lives of women.

The third chapter ‘WOMEN EMPOWERMENT’ unveils the different faces of women empowerment. It gives the concept of empowerment and its importance in the life of a woman. It also elaborates the process of empowerment. Further the chapter highlights the status of women in India and in Marathwada as well.

‘SELF HELP GROUPS- PHILOSOPHY, EVOLUTION AND GROWTH’ is the fourth chapter. This chapter covers the concept of self help and the group mechanism. The functioning of self help groups is also studied in this chapter. A brief review is made of the evolution and progress of self help groups under various schemes and programmes.
The primary data collected from members of various women Self Help Groups is analysed, interpreted and presented in a systematic manner in chapter five titled as ‘DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION’. This chapter is divided into five sections viz; General profile of respondents, Functioning of SHGs, Empowerment (Area based and Age of SHG based), Role of influencers and Hypothesis testing.

The sixth chapter provides for the findings of the study at a glance.

Summary of the study, important conclusions of the study and the recommendations form the subject matter of the last chapter.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS

The present study was undertaken to identify the role of Self Help Groups in empowerment of women in Marathwada. An attempt was made to examine the extent of empowerment among the urban groups as against that among the rural groups. The data was collected through two structured questionnaires administered to the SHG-leaders and SHG-members respectively. The collected data was then scrutinized and encoded with the use of SPSS- the statistical package. The analysis of the said data was made on different parameters.

The main objective of the study was to observe any change in the empowerment of the women of the group. For this the pre-post methodology was used. Empowerment was tested on four parameters; General awareness, Mobility, Household decision making and Resource-Asset holding. It was found that the state of lives of women members underwent a substantial change after joining SHGs.

The findings of the study confirm the positive impact of the Self Help Group movement in the Marathwada region. The empowerment process begins with the
formation of the group. The group members gradually become aware about the various activities of the group. The spread of microfinance through the group approach is proving to be an effective tool towards empowering women. The women who at one time were confined in the four walls of their homes are now handling and managing various tasks in the outside world. They have gained a better place for themselves within their households as well as in the society. The general awareness among this deprived sector of the society is also undergoing a positive change. During face to face interactions the SHG members expressed their intention to continue with the membership. The reason being that they are now realizing the benefits and advantages of being in groups and sharing each other’s problems. The faith that they have shown in the group approach is evident from the findings of the study.

This study reveals that there is a definite shift of the women from lower level of empowerment to higher levels as an outcome of SHG participation. They are now better equipped with higher levels of awareness. Though not substantial, modest changes are found in the mobility level and pattern of the women. These women are gradually taking decisions on household matters on their own. In many cases their opinion is taken into consideration by the husbands or family members before deciding. The women are confident enough to decide the manner in which to lead their life. The use of mobiles at an increasing rate is the evidence of their being more confident. The importance of their existence is notified by them as well as their families. This is the reason behind increase in the number of respondents being insured. Thus the findings of the study attest to the positive impact of the Self Help group movement in the Marathwada region.

Empowerment is observed in both rural as well as urban areas. The empowerment of the members of the SHG is not influenced with the area (urban or rural) in which the SHG functions. However, the change in the empowerment is higher for the rural respondents than their urban partners. Thus, it can be concluded that SHGs are an effective tool of empowerment for women in both urban and rural areas.
In general the women from older groups are observed to be more aware about their surrounding. They are also better decision makers. In addition the members from older groups exhibit confidence as many of them operate their own accounts in banks, as well as use mobiles. They are aware enough to understand the importance of their lives for their families. Consequently a larger percentage of them are insured. Though empowerment is gradual, it can be inferred that empowerment enhances with the period of association with SHG. This is confirmed with the finding that the period of association and empowerment level of the member are related with each other. This depicts the fact that empowerment is an ongoing process. Hence it may be concluded that sustainability of the groups should be focussed upon. The longer the association with the group better the empowerment of women.

The education of the SHG-member influences her empowerment to a certain extent. It means that if SHG philosophy is clubbed with provision of education, it would result in a better empowerment status to the participant women. Educated women can reap better benefits from the group mechanism. Education gives a better understanding towards the usage of credit that forms a part and parcel of SHG mechanism. However, the enterprising mindset is not developed among these members. Saving is now a part and parcel of their lives but directing it to income generating activities is a path yet to be explored. Efforts need to be intensified by the agencies to transform these Self Help Groups into Self Enterprising groups.

Especially in a backward region like Marathwada empowerment of women is an urgent need. Hence thrust must be put on achieving sustainable development. Development should be inclusive in nature focusing not merely on economic growth but also on equity in sharing benefits. The wide gaps in human development should be catered to with great care. In this context Self Help Groups can act as important change agents for the participating women. They can effect both economic and social empowerment.
7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Microfinance is one of the developmental strategies that are being explored in every possible manner. Policy makers and economists are coming up with innovative and workable solutions for better implementation of the microfinance philosophy. Poverty alleviation and empowerment are considered to be the two major outcomes of microfinance. In India as discussed earlier microfinance is provided through Self Help Groups. Quantitatively we find a voluminous number of SHGs formed and working in India. Of these almost 75% are women SHGs. These SHGs not only provide for credit needs of the women but are equally capable of empowering them in many aspects. It has been a proven fact that economic independence gives way for empowerment of any individual, women not being an exception for the same. However, the poor women lead life under double curse; one of poverty and the other of being disempowered. Even if the woman is blessed with exceptional capabilities her arena of operation is restricted within the confines of four walls. These shackles needed to be broken and for this strong mechanism was needed. This came in the form of microfinance which has surely helped the women to come out of the age old barriers and develop a better attitude of the society towards them.

On the basis of the extensive research work carried out by the researcher, following suggestions are placed on record for enhancement of the process of women empowerment through the vehicle of Self Help Group:

1. In general though the growth of SHGs is impressive, it is necessary to focus on equitable or uniform growth in all states and regions of India. For this the government and apex bodies need to motivate and encourage the NGOs, local bodies and various developmental agencies for initiating the process of SHG formation.

2. The SHG-Bank Linkage Programme needs an up-scaling in terms of adding new areas like insurance, health and education. The programme may also look ahead towards graduating the SHG members to become direct clients of the banking system.
3. Federating the SHGs can be a step ahead for further development. A block level or taluka level federation of SHG members can strengthen the movement as well as motivate the members to come forward for helping self as well as others in the same spirit.

4. Banking should be made more member-friendly. Every official associated with microfinancing must have an exposure to sensitization programmes for better performance.

5. Introduction of e-banking products to the SHG members from urban areas and then gradually to rural belts can be a good initiative. This will ease the task of banking operations as well as the time required for bank transactions will also be saved.

6. Micro-credit card is being experimented in few parts of India. This must be introduced gradually in other parts of the country as well.

7. More training programmes must be undertaken by the promoting agencies. The programmes should be based on the need and local resources available for the members of SHGs.

8. Market support especially in the region under study (Marathwada) is necessary for the upcoming entrepreneurs. A proper and systematic link must be established between the SHG members and the market. This will facilitate the SHG members for purchase of raw material as well as sale of finished produce.

9. As, many of the SHG members are house wives, home based entrepreneurial activities need be promoted so that the members can make optimum utilization of their time and talent.
10. A common platform should be made available for the SHG members of different groups where they can share their experiences as well as difficulties.

11. The members in SHG cannot be independent without the support of their families. An orientation of family members can help the members in getting better support from their family.

12. The SHG members should be motivated to take up social and community based activities both in rural and urban areas. This will bring to light the real strength of group mechanism. This may also convince that the SHGs are equally beneficial for the society. And it will further lead to getting support of the family, community and society.

13. The Self help Groups now need to be transformed into Self Enterprising Groups. This needs external motivation. For this the government can make credit regulations such as, the loans that the SHGs would avail from banks for initial three years can be used in any manner and for any purposes. But after three years, the bank loans would be distributed among the group members in a manner like 75% of the loan for productive purposes and 25% for consumption needs.

14. Efforts should be made for inducing the SHG to undertake its own entrepreneurial activity.

15. Many fraudulent practices are creeping in the field of SHGs. To avoid such practices it is necessary that a proper regulatory mechanism should be evolved. Regular audits of the SHGs should be carried out. Legislative measures must be framed for making the working of SHGs disciplined.

16. In many cases it was observed that a woman held membership of more than one SHGs. This should be avoided. Because being in two groups, she fails to give her 100% participation in any of the groups.
17. Cross country linkages can be experimented as the next step. Performance standards need be laid for assessing the SHGs. Those groups with high scores may be permitted for cross country linkages. This will globalize the phenomenon of microfinance in the real sense.