

## CHAPTER – V

### POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SHGs

Self-Help Groups which were originally established to produce economic benefits for members eventually became an associational framework for collaborative actions that produce public goods. As a result a range of other community-level organizations emerge where often members of the Self-Help Groups are recruited.

Role of Self-Help Groups in strengthening local governance and political democracy can be described by the fact that a number of Self-Help Group members are being elected in the Panchayati Raj system in India, the lowest tier of local democratic governance.

It is only when women Self-Help Group members achieve a level of economic autonomy that they could achieve a level of social equality within and outside family. Political empowerment is the consequence of socio-economic empowerment.<sup>93</sup>

It is perceived that increasing women's access to micro-finance services will in itself lead to individual economic empowerment through enabling women's decisions about savings and credit use, enabling women to set up micro-enterprise, increasing incomes under their control. It is then assumed

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<sup>93</sup> <http://new.nic.in/pdfreports/SHG-Delhi.pdf>

that this increased economic empowerment will lead to increased well-being of women and also to social and political empowerment.

There are apparent synergies between Self-Help Groups and local politics since through membership of Self-Help Groups, or Self-Help Group clusters and federations, village women can gain experience of relevant processes. They also become more 'visible' in the village, which is important for campaigning.

Besides social and economic empowerment, political aspects also were looked into by the present study. Some of the indicators for the political empowerment looked into were willingness to contest elections, assuming leadership, willingness to vote, and frequency of attending meetings of Grama sabha.

## **5.1 WILLINGNESS TO CONTEST ELECTIONS**

The willingness to contest elections is a result of encouragement from the family members and friends, the political leanings and activities even before they were members of Self-Help Groups and the confidence of winning the elections. Before joining Self-Help Groups, 49% of the members surveyed had expressed that they had the willingness to contest elections. After joining the Self-Help Groups, the proportion of women willing to contest elections had

increased to about 64%. Thus, Self-Help Groups are found to be effective means for encouraging poor women to participate actively in Grama Sabha.

**TABLE – 5.1**

**WILLINGNESS TO CONTEST ELECTIONS**

<b>Willingness</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>	
	<b>Before Joining</b>	<b>After Joining</b>
Yes	196 (49.00%)	255 (63.75%)
No	204 (51.00%)	145 (36.25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

**5.2 CONTESTING ELECTIONS**

Another area of political empowerment probed into was contesting of elections to Grama Panchayat.

In many Panchayats, it was found that in the election, the group leaders/members were considered candidates by political parties because of their proximity to and close contact with the local people and their awareness of each and every problem of the area.

As to actual contesting elections, only 21.25% of the 400 members surveyed had contested the elections before joining the Self-Help Groups while 65% had contested the elections after joining the Self-Help Groups.

**TABLE – 5.2**

**CONTESTING ELECTIONS**

• Contesting elections	No. of Members	
	Before Joining	After Joining
Contested	85 (21.25%)	260 (65.00%)
Not contested	315 (78.75%)	140 (35.00%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

**5.3 OUTCOME OF THE CONTEST**

Before joining Self-Help Groups, 85 women contested the local body elections and only 8 women (9.41%) had won the elections to the post of ward membership. It is to be pointed out that after joining Self-Help Groups, 260 women contested the local body elections and 87 of them (nearly 33%) got elected. Of the 87 elected women representatives, most of them (62) were elected as ward members in villages, 24 as *Sarpanch* (the head of the

*panchayat*) and one was elected at the block level. It clearly manifests the impact of Self-Help Groups in enhancing the political empowerment of their women members.

**TABLE – 5.3**

**OUTCOME OF THE CONTEST**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>	
	<b>Before Joining</b>	<b>After Joining</b>
Elected	8 (9.41%)	87 (33.46%)
Not Elected	77 (90.59%)	173 (66.54%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>260</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

**5.4 ASSUMING LEADERSHIP**

By holding responsible positions in various committees at the three-tier Panchayat system, the members had gained leadership qualities. The assumption of leadership before joining Self-Help Groups was found among just 8% of the members surveyed. After joining Self-Help Groups, about 71% of the members had expressed that they gained leadership traits. Thus, it is

clear that the Self-Help Groups had a role in developing leadership among their members.

**TABLE – 5.4**

**ASSUMING LEADERSHIP**

<b>Leadership</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>	
	<b>Before Joining</b>	<b>After Joining</b>
Leadership assumed	63 (8.25%)	282 (70.50%)
Leadership not assumed	367 (91.75%)	118 (29.50%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

**5.5 WILLINGNESS TO VOTE FOR A PARTICULAR PARTY**

The members of Self-Help Groups (or their families) often have political leanings and activities even before they were members of Self Help Groups. It is enquired whether the Self-Help Groups restrict their willingness to vote for a particular political party. The study showed that before joining the Self-Help Groups, 47.50% of the members had expressed that they had absolute willingness to vote for any political party at their will. However, this willingness was felt by 41.25% of the Self-Help Group Members under study

after their joining the Self-Help Groups. Thus, the willingness to vote is a little affected depending upon the political composition of the particular Self-Help Group.

**TABLE – 5.5**

**WILLINGNESS TO VOTE FOR A PARTICULAR PARTY**

<b>Willingness</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>	
	<b>Before Joining</b>	<b>After Joining</b>
Yes	190 (47.50%)	165 (41.25%)
No	210 (52.50%)	235 (58.75%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

## 5.6 VOTING

The respondents were asked whether they had voted during last elections to Assembly, Parliament and the Panchayat.

As to actual voting in elections, about 71% of the 400 members surveyed had exercised their voting rights before joining the Self-Help Groups while about 93% had exercised their voting rights after joining the Self-Help Groups. It is, thus, noticed that membership in Self-Help Group has made them to realize the importance of exercising their voting rights.

**TABLE – 5.6**

**VOTING**

<b>Voting</b>	<b>No. of Members</b>	
	<b>Before Joining</b>	<b>After Joining</b>
Exercised voting right	283 (70.75%)	371 (92.75%)
Not voted	117 (29.25%)	28 (7.25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>400</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

**5.7 FREQUENCY OF ATTENDING MEETINGS OF GRAMA SABHA**

Participation in Grama Sabha is an indicator for political empowerment and participation in the decision-making bodies. Self-Help Groups are found to be effective means for encouraging poor women to participate actively in Grama Sabha. As already stated, only 8 members were elected in the elections before joining the Self-Help Groups and they used to attend meetings of Grama Sabha occasionally. After joining the Self-Help Groups, there was marked improvement in attending the meetings of Grama Sabha. In fact, 54 out of 87 members (about 62%) had attended the meetings regularly; 22 members (25%) had attended the meetings occasionally and 11 members (13%) had never attended such meetings.

**TABLE – 5.7**

**FREQUENCY OF ATTENDING MEETINGS OF GRAMA SABHA**

Frequency	No. of Members	
	Before Joining	After Joining
Regularly	-	54 (62.07%)
Attended occasionally	8	22 (25.29%)
Never	-	11 (12.64%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>87</b>

**Source: Primary Data**

**5.8 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AN ANALYSIS USING *Mc Nemar Test***

In order to test whether there is any significant difference in political participation among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups, the following null hypotheses were framed and tested using Mc Nemar test setting the level of significance at 5% (i.e., 0.05).

13. There is no significant difference in freedom to contest elections among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups.
14. There is no significant difference in actual contesting in elections among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups.

15. There is no significant difference in assuming leadership among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups.

16. There is no significant difference in freedom to vote among the sample members before and after joining the Self-Help Groups.

The P values are found out to identify a region of rejection. The P values and the results of the Mc Nemar Test are given in the following table.

**TABLE – 5.7A**

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AN ANALYSIS USING *Mc Nemar Test***

<b>Political participation</b>	<b>P value</b>	<b>Level of Significance</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Willingness to contest elections	0.01729	0.05	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
Actual contest in elections	0.02181	0.05	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
Assuming Leadership	0.02706	0.05	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
Willingness to vote	0.02014	0.05	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected

It is clear from the above table that remarkable improvement is noticed after joining Self-Help Groups in all the four variables governing political participation: willingness to contest elections, actual contest in elections, assuming Leadership, and willingness to vote. In all these cases, the P values are lesser than the level of significance and hence, the null hypotheses are

rejected implying that there is a considerable improvement in respect of these variables as a result of joining the Self-Help Groups.

## **5.9 PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL IMPACT**

Having seen that there is noted improvement in political participation by Self-Help Group members, it is analysed whether this improvement had resulted in improving certain general skills like speaking during public meetings, presenting programme in public meetings, freely and frankly speaking in Self-Help Group meetings, taking leadership positions in the Self-Help Group, going to government office / police station and talking to government officials / police.

The perception of the members of Self-Help Groups under study regarding the political impact has been analysed with the help of a scaling technique. For this purpose, the opinion of the members on six given skills has been extracted on a five-point scale. The weightage given for each opinion is: 'Very much Increased' (2 Points), 'Increased' (1 Point), 'No Change' (0 Point), 'Decreased' (-1 Point), and 'Very much Decreased' (-2 Points). By consolidating the scores obtained by every sample member for each skill with the help of the five point scale, the total scores have been computed. The results are given in the following table.

**TABLE – 5.8**

**PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL IMPACT**

General skills	Very much Decreased		Decreased		No Change		Increased		Very much Increased		Total Scores
	No.	Points	No.	Points	No.	Points	No.	Points	No.	Points	
Speaking during public meetings	4	-8	8	-8	38	0	94	94	256	512	590
Freely and frankly speaking in SHG meetings	8	-16	10	-10	48	0	108	108	226	452	534
Presenting programme in public meetings	6	-12	25	-25	76	0	96	96	197	394	453
Taking leadership positions in the SHG	14	-28	28	-28	84	0	92	92	182	364	400
Going to Government office / police station	18	-36	40	-40	233	0	47	47	62	124	95
Talking to Government officials / police	23	-46	40	-40	237	0	49	49	51	102	65

**Source: Primary Data**

The general skills that the Self-help Group members had gained as a result of their political participation had obtained the total scores as: speaking during public meetings (590 Scores), freely and frankly speaking in Self-Help Group meetings (534 Scores), presenting programme in public meetings (453 Scores), taking leadership positions in the Self-Help Group (400 Scores), going to government office / police station (95 Scores) and talking to government officials / police (65 Scores).

It is to be pointed out that the experience of “going to government office/police station” and “handling matters with government officials/police” as perceived by the Self-Help Group members was at the low ebb.

To assimilate, after joining Self-Help Groups remarkable improvement is noticed in all the four variables governing political participation of the members: willingness to contest elections, actual contest in elections, assuming Leadership, and willingness to vote. Handling matters with the government officials/police by the members of Self-Help Groups need to be given proper consideration.

## **CHAPTER – VI**

### **ROLE OF ANIMATORS**