Self-Help Group and Women Empowerment in Rural Area of Allahabad

Summary
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The concept of women’s empowerment is the outcome of important critiques generated by the women’s movement, particularly by ‘third world’ feminists. They clearly state that ‘women’s empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power relations that result in women having less control over material assets and intellectual resources’. Women participate in their own oppression so firstly they must become aware of the ideology that legitimizes male domination. Scholars assert the empowerment process is possible only when the new ideas and information will come from external agents. With new consciousness and the strength of solidarity, women can assert their right to control resources and to participate equally in decision-making. Women’s empowerment became a force that is an organized mass movement which challenges and transforms existing power relations in society.

In India, women empowerment has evolved through three phases: welfare, development and empowerment. For the welfare of women, the Indian government has launched the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) scheme (1953) for providing primary health care facilities and implementing welfare programmes for women.

Therefore, through the SHGs above three phases are visible in Indian society. As reviewed in literature that SHGs programme plays an essential role to the help of women in attaining economic independence and empowerment of women at every sphere of life. These self-help groups are bound to make not only a change in empowering women but also tap the hither to unutilized powers of women for development of the society as a whole. The government of India has adopted the programme of microfinance to SHGs, which was the brain child of Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh for the empowerment of women in 1992 (Yunus, 2003).

So the present study operationalizes the process of empowerment through SHG in terms of decision-making that who propose the decision,
who oppose and how women convinced to him/her to fulfill their will and then who take final decision after the resistance of family members in the issues related to group family and community.

This study focuses on following research questions-

- In the formation of SHGs, how exclusion, inclusion and primordial relation become effective?
- In the functioning of group what are the new norms emerge in the interaction process when the groups are functioning?
- How rationality and mutual support come out among the women in the process of functioning of group?
- What are the differential level of empowerment of women in terms of physical movement beyond the family, child bearing, extension of medical facilities to children and pregnant women and differential impact on the dependency on moneylenders of the women before and ten years after joining the SHG?

Sample of six Self-Help Groups (SHGs) from three villages namely Hathiganha, Rampur and Tikri from Allahabad District selected for the study. The sample of six self-help group is selected on the basis of caste hierarchy in which two groups comprises totally OBCs women e.i. Maurya caste, two SCs groups comprises totally Scheduled Caste specially Pasi women and other two are mixed caste group in which one group comprises Thakur, Nai, and Chamar caste of women and second mixed group comprises caste of Patel (OBC) and Pasi (SC) women. Each two group selected from each village that is OBCs group from Hathiganha village, SCs group from and mixed group from Rampur village purposively selected for the study.

Data is collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary source of data is collected through interviews, observation, case study and narrative methods.

The findings of the study reveal that, at the time of formation of SHGs, women face resistance by their husbands and elderly members of the family
to join self-help group. The resistance is observed at the family level more in the case of OBC and less in the case of SC and mixed groups. These findings indicate that there is resistance from the male member of the family in everyday activities, the women over come from these resistances to peruse the common goals. In the meetings of SHG women discuses and communicate about their problems with each other. However, ten years after joining the SHGs, women have increased their social capital in terms of interacting with facilitator of SHG, group members, officials of bank and block development which further promoted their knowledge interacting with others. Such enhanced social and cultural capitals facilitated the autonomous decision-making even in the context of resistance from elderly women and men in undergoing tubectomy and adopting family planning programmes.

Ten years after joining the self-help group member’s movement beyond the home and village has increased in terms of visiting the bank, block office, government and private hospital, pachayat office and weekly market places all alone. The decision for such movement is taken by the women member alone.

The socio-economic changes have been observed in sample SHG members. The comparative analysis of different sample SHGs reveals that OBC member families have reduced their dependency on moneylenders after formation of SHGs but members are individually become less economically independent because they mostly lend money from the SHG for their husbands/sons business. They have taken loan only for animal husbandry which can be proceed with the help of husband while SC women has taken loans for their self such as lease of land, petty shop keeping, along with animal husbandry.

This increased physical mobility increases the participation in community level programmes. SC women are participating more in health related programs at community level and also help to the neighbours at the time of crisis while OBC and mixed group women are limited to their own
group members and not to the village people. It indicates that SC women are more aware about their community rather than OBC and mixed groups.

So the process of participating in group meetings and the group-based interactions may foster social capital. The patriarchal values in some extent become weak. It indicates that, increased social capital and knowledge gave them awareness about their life which reduced the significance patriarchal values to a certain extent.