INTRODUCTION

All over the world there is a realization that the best way to tackle poverty and enable the community to improve its quality of life is through social mobilization of poor, especially women into Self Help Groups. Women in developing country like India are the major source in agriculture, food production and rural development. Their share of labour is particularly significant in view of the fact that they perform agriculture work in addition to long laborious work in household maintenance. Despite women's crucial role in agriculture and food production their potential for accelerating rural development has not been well understood. Women especially tribal women despite their equal role in economic activity were deprived of their justified social position in the society.

Status of the Tribal women in India

A Tribal Woman occupies an important place in the socio- economic structure of the society. In non-tribal societies, women are not treated as beast of burden: they are found to be exercising a relatively free and firm hand in aspects related to their social life\(^1\). Though tribal women are away from the mainstream of national life, they are not kept away from the impact of socio- economic changes affecting the neighbourhood or society in general. In the process of change, the tribal woman whether she likes it or not, is force to adopt certain norms, which may even take away her freedom, her control over whatever primitive production factors the family possess, her control over production, her house, family and children and even her own life. The process of such an allegation has an impact on tribal woman. Tribal woman's life is tagged on to her male partner. Tribal community all over India has been subjected to various forms of deprivation such as alienation from land and other forest resources. Since British rule, which however did not cease with India gaining independence, as apart of tribal society, she has to suffer and yet survive for the sake of her children and her community.
The General Background of Tribal Population

Next only to Africa, India has largest tribal concentration in the world. 8.2% of the total population of the country is tribal. An amalgam of 636 tribes and sub-tribes are found in the country. Each tribe has its own distinct characteristics, life pattern, life style, culture and economic formation. Women in these groups exclusively represent distinct identity in their dress, nomenclature and actual roles discharged by them. The most common characteristics are- they are backward, faces consequences of poverty, high rate of illiteracy, ignorance and unawareness related to their rights and hard work.

Tribal women in India, through their labour contribution in agriculture and other allied sectors have increased considerably over the years. Beside undertaking various agricultural activities including ploughing, the tribal women collect minor forest produce such as leaf, gum, fruits, seeds, herbal plant material useful for the domestic purpose such as broom grass etc.2 her labour contribution in mines and mineral collection stands no less important than that of the men folk of the tribal working class. The major contribution of the tribal women labour is found in the construction industries including development projects3. Here also they face discrimination in the pay. The differential pay structure between male and female labourers is prevalent all over the country and wage exploitation of women labour is clearly seen in Tendu leaf plucking, construction and building operation.

Expansion of industrialization to the tribal regions, further resulted in the two way process of change i.e., immigration of the outsiders into tribal region and emigration of the tribal into urban region. A mass of tribal began entering urban and metropolitan area every year in search of livelihood. There are reports that women in groups are taken by contractors to the Gulf Countries, Nepal and other markets where their fate had proved to be untold misery and at times fatal4. Thus the two way process of migration has further resulted in the degradation of status of tribal women more than that of their man folk.

The problems of women to a greater extent are linked to the large scale land alienation in tribal areas. Several studies describe the massive land
dispossession even during the British Rule. This process had been recently accentuated even after independence and continued to increase despite the promulgation of so called Land Transfer Regulation and implementation.

Dispossession of tribal land renders the women subordination to others (land lords, money lenders, etc). In agriculture she has to participate as wage labourer in transportation, harvesting and threshing the crops. The status of tribal women in this context turned inversely to the former situation in which she had been all the white relatively independent in the process of her participation in agriculture. Thus the process of land alienation turned to be the loss of the means of independent survival of their part and created the situation of dependency of the tribal women on various proprieties section of the society. The tribal women status is severely affected by the change in the land structure as land alienation and dispossession of the movable and immovable property from their hands to non-tribal affluent class.

Land and forest are the twin major sources of living of the tribal and very close to their life. The alienation from land and other factors led to the alienation of tribes from the forest. Large scale deforestation in tribal areas has favoured imbalance in the ecosystem (soil erosion, desertification, loss of forest produce) and led to severe stress on the tribal women's life. During the decade 1972-82 the total forest area in the county diminished by 2.79% (from 5,55,180 sq. km to 4,63,470 sq. km). The percentage of total forest area fell from 16.89 to 14.0 % during this period. The loss of forest resources and decrease in the average rainfall and its subsequent result on the tribal economy and agriculture make the role of the women further difficult as her family as a whole is subjected to severe impacts of the drought.

Deforestation resulted in the destruction of soil, water, vegetation apart from various food staples which tribal are accustomed to use as food in the lean season. Food is no more available freely to tribal children. This led to scarcity of food and starvation. Deforestation has thrown up new problem for the tribal women. She has to spend twice her energy for domestic labour, as she has to spend 6-9 hours in household work like fetching water, collection of fire wood and fodders from the forest. Under such miserable condition tribal woman has committed suicide. They are further exploited by the contractor, trader and officers in operation of collection, sell and purchase of
commodity. The changes in land relation, forest economy and penetration of
the outsiders into the tribal area have reduced the tribal to the status of mere
labourers and further led to wage exploitation. Tribal women along with man
folk, experienced restriction on their occupational structure and income
returns. Non payment, under payment, discrimination in allocation of the work
and export of the women to distant places adds to the misery of tribal women.
Change in the environment and traditional ways disturbs them mentally and
makes them physically weak.

The large scale prevalence of the tribal bonded system is attributed to
many structural and administrative reasons. But the adverse affects of bonded
labour is felt more on tribal women. The migration and impoverishment of the
tribal family make tribal women more insecure. While her husband works in
the field of landlord in the private firms of petty industrialist, she is ordered to
work at their home. Her children often work as servant to the landlord. The
condition of female child of such bonded family is worse as they are subjected
to sexual harassment at the hands of the members of the landlord’s family\textsuperscript{11}.
Some other study indicates that even tribal women in Worli were kept as
domestic worker and a means to fulfill the lust of the landlord. The plight of
tribal women is worsening with the expansion of industrialization. Encircled by
the poverty, helplessness and prolonged indebtedness, tribal women are more
exploited in these conditions. They remain as accompanying object of their
husband who was in bondage with landlord and other affluent people\textsuperscript{12}.

The tribal is subjected to from of harassment from the outside social
environment than at home. These forms of harassment are largely understood
as offshoots of several consequences of the operation carried out by the
various exploiting classes, this led to the disintegration of status of tribal
women as they are often insulted, humiliated and raped by the people of the
dominant class. These sections comprise traders, forest and excise officials,
contractors and police.

Exploitation of the helpless- tribal- women may result in the tribal
unrest. Women in the tribal area are principal objects of both the organized
violence of state apparatus as well as of the private violence of the
exploitative classes.
The political and economic situation of the tribal requires careful analyses of social structure of the tribal area along class line. In our country different forms of social formation exits. The different socio- economic formation existing tribal regions thus give rise to different stages of their development. A broad classification of tribal region thus can be made along the following lines, so far as tribal women are concerned:

- Tribal region where food gathering is still being done in the remote forest areas and food production has not yet started as a source of livelihood.
- Tribal region where food production through clearing of forest acquires importance even though food gathering may also exist.
- Forest/semi-forest area where tribal do cultivation.
- Tribal region where mining and other extraction industries have unsettled and tribal are working as wage labour.

The nature of exploitation and consequent alienation of tribal women from nature and their mode of living may be different in these forms of region. They are being exploited by bureaucrats system or middlemen or trade union movement of tribal.

**Social changes**

Tribal community shares certain common features such as group solidarity, cooperative endeavour and reciprocity of obligations, vital to their economic lives which are rarely found among non tribal. These characteristics are the products of communitarian living and collective possession of land, forest and other resources. In work like transplanting and weeding operation, hunting operation, all men and women produce collectively but share equally. During celebration of rituals superstitions, worship of God, marriage and festival men and women collectively participate.

Tribal system is popularly known as indigenous system and their culture, tradition, social practices, occupation pattern are grown and strengthen from their own experience. But once the outside element starts penetrating into the tribal system it experiences tremendous change both from within and outside. The social order which used to regulate the interaction of tribal men cannot withstand the presence of intruder.
As far as women position is concerned the penetration of alien culture has harmed them more than any thing else, affecting their peaceful lives. This start right from the birth of female child in a tribal family itself. Child marriage is practiced in the tribal community. Girls were free to choose their life partner but due to acculturation the girls have now lost their freedom and parents and boy have become the deciding factor.

Several types of marriage are in practice and most of them were not expensive and used to the advantage of women. But during recent time marriage are arranged. Different rituals of Hindu marriage have entered the tribal system and tradition. Among all tribes, the bride price or dowry was to be paid to bride by the father of the bridegroom. But now the process is changing.

**Meaning and concept of Empowerment.**

Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which build both individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.\(^{14}\)

The concept of women's empowerment is the outcome of several important critiques and debates generated by the women's movement throughout the world, particularly by the third world feminists. Its source can be traced from the interaction between feminism and the concept of "Popular Education" developed in Latin America in the 1970's (Walters; 1991). Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities.\(^{15}\) The concept of women's empowerment has its roots throughout the world in women's movement.

As Mayoux (1998) suggests, empowerment is a process of internal change, or power within, augmentation of capabilities, or power to, and collective mobilization of women, and when possible men, or power with, to the purpose of questioning and changing the subordination connected with gender, or power over. Empowerment can range from personal empowerment.
that can exist within the existing social order. Thus this kind of empowerment would correspond to the right to make one’s own choices, to increased autonomy and to control over economic resources. But self confidence and self-esteem also play an essential role in change\textsuperscript{16}.

According to Chandra Shanti Kohil (1997) empowerment in its simplest from means “the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance”

“Becoming powerful” liberal meaning of the term “empowerment” is being used today in all spheres of life as a process to strengthen the elements of society. It is both a process and the result of the process. It is transformation of the structures or institutions that reinforce and perpetuates gender discrimination. It is a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as information resources. Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of declining female ratio in population.

Malhotra et al. (2002) constructed a list of the most commonly used dimensions of women’s empowerment, drawing from the frameworks developed by various authors in different fields of social sciences. Allowing for overlap, these frameworks suggest that women’s empowerment needs to occur along multiple dimensions including: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. Since these dimensions cover a broad range of factors, women may be empowered within one of these sub-domains. They give the example of “socio-cultural” dimension which covers a range of empowerment sub-domains, from marriage systems to norms regarding women’s physical mobility, to nonfamilial social support systems and networks available to women\textsuperscript{17}.

The ‘empowerment’ approach was first clearly articulated in 1985 by Development Alternatives with women’s for a new era (DAWN). This term received prominence in early nineties in Western Countries. In India the Central Government in its welfare programmes shifted the concept of development to empowerment only in the Ninth plan (1997-2002) and observed the year 2001 as ‘Women Empowerment Year’
Definitions

According to Adams (1996), "Empowerment is the means by which individuals, groups and communities to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. Dubhushi (1997) considered empowerment as exercising control over ones lives, firstly on resources of financial, physical and human and secondly on beliefs, values and attitudes.

Rappoport (1984) has noted that it is easy to define empowerment by its absence but difficult to define in action as it takes on different forms in different people and contexts. Even defining the concept is subject to debate 18.

The Social Work Dictionary (Barker, 1991), defines empowerment as "the process of helping a group or community to achieve political influence or relevant legal authority".

According to Zippy (1995), empowerment represents "a means for accomplishing community development tasks and can be conceptualized as involving two key elements giving community members the authority to make decisions and choices and facilitating the development of the knowledge and resources necessary to exercise these choices"

According to Pillai. J.K.(1995) "Empowerment is an active, multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not commodity to be transacted; nor can it be given away as aims. "Power has to be acquired and once acquired, it needs to be and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved."

The World Bank defines empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets" 19. The World Bank also identifies four key elements of empowerment to draft institutional reforms: access to information; inclusion and participation; accountability; and local organizational capacity.
As a general definition, however, we suggest that empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

We suggest that three components of our definition are basic to any understanding of empowerment. Empowerment is multi-dimensional social a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected.

While discussing empowerment Jo Rowlands (1997) has identified four different forms of powers.

Power over– control or influence over others which is an instrumentation of domination;

Power to– generative or productive power which creates new possibilities and actions without domination;

Power with– a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles problems together;

Power from within- the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self – acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, respect for and acceptance of others as equals.

Though the interpretation ‘Power to; and ‘Power with’ empowerment it concerned with the process by which people become aware of their interests and how those relates to the interests of others but also participates in decision making and influence such decisions.
It is difficult to measure empowerment. There is no single method for measuring it. It should be understood and defined through indicators. Indicators of empowerment should encompass personal, social, economic and political change. Empowerment is a term generally used to describe a process by which powerless people, conscious of their own situation, and organize collectively to gain greater access to public service or to the benefits of economic growth.

Empowerment is also the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power. The goals of women's empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality and to enable poor women to gain access control of both material and informational resources. It can change existing power relations by addressing itself to the three dimensions of material, human and intellectual resources. Empowerment cannot occur revolution but only as evolution.

Components of Empowerment

The components of empowerment with reference to women are as follows:

- Women's sense of internal strength and confidence to face life
- The right to make choices
- The power to control their own lives within and outside the home, and
- The ability to influence the direction of social change towards the creation of a more just social and economic order
- Nationally and Internationally.

Stromquist (1995), in her article on educational empowerment for women, interprets empowerment as a "socio-political concept that goes beyond formal political participation and consciousness raising. She argues that a full definition of empowerment must include cognitive psychological, political and economic components." She explains that;
The cognitive component refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms.

The economic component requires that women have access to and control over productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However, she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms.

The political entails that women have the capability to analyze, organize and mobilize for social change, and

The psychological component includes the belief that women can act personal and social levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live.

Empowerment as a process of a community or a group there of gaining autonomy and control over one's life. As a result of the empowerment, the empowered should become agents of their own development, exercising choices, selecting their own agenda and changing their status in the society. In the context of gender and development, empowerment should be viewed more as a process than as an end product. It is applies to the individual as well as the collective. At the individual level, empowerment involves building up the self-image and self-confidence as well as the critical faculties to think, decide and act. On a collective plan, empowerment means enabling women collectively to take control of their own lives, to set their own agenda, to organize each other and make demands on the state and the society for change.

**Process of Empowerment.**

Empowerment as an individual and collective process is based on the following five principles:

- Self-reliance
- Self-awareness
- Collective mobilization and organizations
Capacity building
External exposure and interaction

Empowerment is a long process. It has to pass through different stages. In first stage, women should be trained to look in to the situation from a different perspective and recognize the power relations that perpetuate their oppression. At this stage, the women share their feelings and experiences with each other and build a common vision and mission. In the second stage, the women tried to change the situation by bringing about a change in the gender and social relations. In the third stage, the process of empowerment makes them more mature to realize the importance of collective action.

As empowerment seeks to alter the gender and power relations, there could be a certain social or gender conflicts. The process of empowerment could also face certain obstacles emanating from the patriarchal system, traditional beliefs and political system. The results of empowerment, however, will not be confined to women. The other member of the families will also benefit from empowerment process.

In India, women are not the only marginalized section of the society. The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are still largely under-privileged in terms of wealth, education and access to basic services, in particular health services. Using the sociological analysis proposed by Andre Beteille (1999), India is the contradiction case of egalitarian political order and is a hierarchic social structure. Thus economic and social inequalities rooted in traditions and cultural norms need to be changed as political measures alone cannot bring empowerment. He points out that empowerment is invoked in the context of economic weakness and insecurity, particularly of marginalized, unorganized and other disadvantaged groups.

Measures of Empowerment

Empowerment is a planned and its nature and quality of relationship over time can be assessed. Changes in power relations were a definite part of
the empowerment process. There was a tendency to progress from dependency through independence towards increased interdependence. It is not difficult to measure empowerment; but the difficulty lies in achieving it.

The UNDP’s Human Development Report of 1995 introduced two new complementary indices: the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GDI indicator measures the inequalities between men and women in terms of access to basic needs. GEM evaluates women’s access to political and economic posts. Any meaningful attempt to measure empowerment would have to go beyond measuring the transfer of resources (physical, financial, human) to the least powerful.

**Journey towards Empowerment**

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<td>Exploited</td>
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<td>Insecure</td>
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<td>Dependence</td>
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If empowerment was to be measured in changed relationships, change would need to be detected in both sides of the relationship. Those who were involved in the process of empowerment were the right persons to measure their empowerment.

**Significance of Empowerment:**

The term ‘empowerment’ has gained significance and prominence recently among policy makers and researchers. In the field of women’s studies and social work it is viewed with holistic perspective and it can be classified as social, educational, economical, political and psychological empowerment. To quote Thomas and Pierson, empowerment referred to user participation in services and to the self help movement generally, in which groups took action on their own behalf, either in cooperation with or independently of the statutory services. Empowerment is concerned with how
people may gain collective control over their lives, so as to achieve their interests as a group and a method by which social workers seek to enhance the power of people who lack it.

**Strategies of Empowerment**

Empowerment can be activated through five strategies. Education to promote the level of awareness, knowledge, information and skills of a woman is an important part of the strategy. Awareness is a pre-requisite for challenging the forces of oppression status quo. It results in greater participation of women in decision making within and outside the family. The economic approach to empowerment seeks to alter the economic status of a women by attacking the forces which cause gender deviation of labour, gender gap in wages, lack of control for women over then material resources etc. The economic approach emphasizes development of women's skills, promotion of their savings and investment and enlarged economic opportunities. The third approach namely, development approach attributes poverty to their powerlessness and the lack of adequate access to health care, education and services resources. Another approach believes that women's empowerment requires awareness of a complex factor causing disempowerment of women. This approach advocates collective organization of women as well as gender sensitization, gender planning and strategy and consciousness raising activities. More recently, an organizational approach has been advocated which believes that organized women can alter the gender and social relations in favor of women both in public and private lives. Finally, political approaches to empowerment believes that women can be developed at par with the men, if politics are purged of violence, electoral malpractices, unscrupulous struggles, etc and were made value based. This would however, require greater participation of women in active politics.

Empowerment could take place in two levels, individual and collective. Individual empowerment is a process of personal empowerment involving self-esteem, dignity, self-respect and self-perception. But the problems affecting the collectivity of women require collective empowerment. Restructuring power relations, changing social values and norms require intervention at the collective level. Collective empowerment aims at
transferring collective conciseness, value in attitudes. The problem of securing better access to education skills and employment, material resources and political power can be tackle at only collective level. This requires effective organization among women, mutual help and certain amount of sacrifice.

Self-reliance requires acquisition of physical and mental strength through solidarity, sharing and caring for each other. Self-awareness, on the other hand implies knowledge of living conditions through collective effort, pooling and sharing of resources, time and experience. But the poor women need to acquire capacity to work in groups and to play different roles. They must have constant interface with outside world-the government officials, the politicians, civil society institutions and other groups of poor. The group must acquire the skills of interaction with external environment.

Indicators of women empowerment

The Draft Country Paper-India for the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in 1995 proposed the following qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating women’s empowerment:

(a) Qualitative Indicators

- Self-confidence, understands what she wants, express it and tries to get it, feels proud of herself has positive self-image.
- Articulation
- Awareness about health and nutrition, legal rights, political activities, government policies and programme
- Less burden of work and more leisure time
- Changing role and responsibilities within the family
- Decreasing in violence within the family
- Changing attitude towards traditions and customs like child marriage and dowry
- Physical mobility-walk free within the village, go to city or town, to bank, post office, go for shopping, cinema, exhibition and visit relatives
- Become member of women’s group or an other people’s organization
- Self-identity-identifies herself positively
- Decision making power within the family regarding number of children.
- Education of children, marriage of children, budgeting of the family, income and purchase or sale of family property
- Changed attitude towards women participation in politics and willingness to participate in the politics
- Control over individual and family income
- Access to resources like land, house, jewellery, house-sites, etc
- Access to information, knowledge and skills

(b) Quantitative Indicators

- Increase in age at marriage
- Reduction in fertility rate of number of children
- Becoming beneficiaries of development programme
- Visible changes in physical status/nutritional status
- Improvement in literacy level
- Becoming member of a political party or local self - government

Empowerment of Women in India

Indian Constitution in its fundamental rights has provisions for equality, social justice and protection of women. These goals are to be realized. Still women continue to be discriminated, exploited, and exposed to inequalities at various levels. So the concept of empowerment as a goal of development projects and programmes has been gaining wider importance.

By empowerment, women would be able to develop self-esteem, confidence, realize their potential and enhance their collective bargaining power. Women's empowerment can be viewed as a continuous of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components (Marilee, Karl, 1995). They are:

- Awareness building about women's situation, discrimination and rights and opportunities as a step towards gender equality. Collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group.
Capacity building and skill development, especially the ability to plan, make decisions, organise, manage and carry out activities to deal with people and institutions in the world around them.

Participation and greater control and decision making in the home, community and society.

Action to bring about greater equality between men and women.

Thus empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, greater decision making power and control and transformative action. The empowerment of women covers both individual and collective information. It strengthens their innate ability through acquiring knowledge, power and experience.

Constitutional guarantees, legislative measures and policies advocating women's concern and presented in various Ministries, documents namely Women and Child Development, Science and Technology, Ministries namely Health and Family Welfare, Labour, Rural Development, Employment, Urban Affairs and Employment, Agriculture and Welfare had listed out their programmes and achievements.

The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) had made its commitment to the objective of "empowering women as the agents of social change and development". The twelve salient strategies spelt out focused on empowering women by making women economically independent and self-reliant. It was being hoped that the strategies would be realized through the National Policy for empowerment of women. Remarkably Self Help Groups were considered to be one of the strategies to mark the beginning of major process of empowering women.

Committee on the empowerment of the women was constituted on April 1997 to improve the status of women. The Committee submitted its report on "Development Schemes for Rural Women" to Loksabha on 21 April 1999. The functions of the committee included examining the measures to secure women's equality, status and dignity in all matters and considering the reports of National Commission for Women.
Planning Commission (1999-2000) had given specific emphasis on empowerment of women, besides the continuation of important initiative programmes like Rural Women Development and Empowerment Projects (RWDEP) was introduced in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka and Gujarat for a period of five ears. The overall objective of the project was to enable empowerment of women by establishing Self Help Groups which will improve the quality if their lives through greater access to and control over resources.

In order to alter the scenario the year 2001, was declared as the Year of Women Empowerment and each month of the year was given importance by focusing on important theme on women empowerment process. The table below shows month wise theme:

**Table 1.1 Women Empowerment Year 2001**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Human rights for women</td>
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<td>February</td>
<td>Economic empowerment of women</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Social empowerment of women</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Women in difficult circumstances</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>Women and technology</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>Women and governance</td>
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<td>July</td>
<td>Women and education</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>Women and health</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>Nutrition</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>Women and media</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship in women</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Vision for the future</td>
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**Status of Women in Madhya Pradesh**

The state of Madhya Pradesh is one of the largest states in the country in terms of both population and geographical area. The states is endowed with natural resources and vary from region to region in its terrain and agro climatic zones. Culturally and historically too there are wide variations amongst the people of different regions of the state. For any attempt to
understand the development and social dynamics of Madhya Pradesh one needs to take account of the great political, social, economic, geographic, and cultural diversities in the state\textsuperscript{22}.

Inter-state comparison places Madhya Pradesh as a backward state in the country along with Bihar, Rajasthan, UP, Orissa in terms of per capita income as well human development index. It ranked 16\textsuperscript{th} in terms of per capita state domestic production at current price out of 19 states with only UP, Orissa & Bihar behind it (Economic Survey GOI 2001/1997). According to the Planning Commission estimates, the poverty rate was 37.7 percent in 1990-01 against the national level of 28%.

The introduction of self-help groups has been a recent and revolutionary change in the economic structure of our country. Since independence, India is suffering from severe socio-economic problems. Poverty has been a major threat to the economic development of our country. Therefore the planners and policymakers thought of identifying certain avenues and measures to check the wide spread poverty. One such solution is the formation of self-help groups (SHGs). In the name, it is clear that these groups are formed to help by themselves. The role of SHGs is very significant in present day context both in motivating women to save at least some money regularly and to use that amount as investment in some income generating activities.

As is evident, poverty has remained the vulnerable challenges in India’s development efforts to bring about a perceptible change in the quality of life of its teeming millions. India, being a developing country, a vast section of its population suffers from malnutrition, unemployment, and poor health care. This is particularly true in the case of weaker section of society namely women, children, schedule caste and schedule tribes.

In rural India, high rate of illiteracy and low economic status of women underline the need to accelerate their earning power by providing the income generating assets. Provisions of employment opportunities and income to rural women are one way to improve their nutrition, health, education and social status. In most of the developing countries greater emphasis is laid on the imperative need for development of rural women and their active
involvement in the main stream of development. In our countries continuous efforts are being made by the union and state governments to improve the status of rural women, especially those below the poverty line through different schemes of rural development.

Ever since independence, a number of innovative schemes have been launched for the upliftment of women in our country. There has been a perceptible shift from viewing women as critical agents for socio-economic development. Now the emphasis has shifted from development to empowerment.

Women constitute one half of the segment of pluralism in India. The 2001 census counted 49.65 crores females against the total population of 102.87 crores 27% of the rural women live below the poverty line. Enhancing women's economic productivity is an important strategy for improving the welfare of 26.1% (as on 2001) Indian households live below the poverty line. Hence, the emphasis is stressed on the empowerment of tribal women focusing on the following aspects.

♦ Direct involvement of women in programming and management.
♦ Effective collaboration with community organizations.
♦ Organizing and strengthening of women self help groups (SHGs).
♦ Sensitization and advocacy of Gender Just Society.
♦ Organizing women in different groups to undertake certain productive activities to earn their livelihood and to develop rural community.

Need and Importance of the Study

Empowerment is closely linked to economic independence. Nothing succeeds better than the power of self-help. In addition, when efforts are supported by the private organizations the results could be extremely gratifying. Today Self Help Groups of Women in Madhya Pradesh focused around economic activities like savings, collective marketing, and promotion of individual enterprise and in the process moving into the main stream of society. In the process, leadership qualities blossom, discipline prevails and true democracy begins to function. This also helps add value to the work they do, to their families and their communities.
A social moment has begun wherein rural women started saving money by forming themselves into small groups and came together to decide all issues which affect their life. During the last 5-6 years, saving movement caught up the imagination of women as a means of self help groups through which they are trying to mould their destiny. The introduction of self-help groups has been a recent revolutionary phenomenon in the economic structure of our country. Ever since independence, India is facing severe socio-economic problems. Poverty has become the major threat to the economic development of our country. Therefore, the planners and policy makers thought of identifying certain avenues and measures to check the widespread poverty. One such solution is the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs). The very name indicates that these groups are formed to help each other. The role of self help groups is very significant in the present day context both in motivating women to save at least some money regularly and to use that amount to investment in income generating activities. Thus, it may be rated as the most successful anti-poverty programmes. Since so much is being said about the programme and contribution to women’s empowerment and the expectation continues to be high, the need for taking a look at the present status has been felt. Thus women empowered by economic independence can contribute to society and at the same time improve their standard of living and self esteemed can be demonstrated and taken to logical end where an empowered womenfolk will take their right full place in the path of the progress.

The Government of Madhya Pradesh has taken up the theme of Women empowerment as one of the main agenda item to tackle rural poverty through social mobilization. SHG movement through saving has been taken up by the Department of Panchayata Raj and Rural Development to mould the social life of the rural women.

Hence the present study “Tribal Women Empowerment through Self Help Groups with Special Reference to Mandala District, Madhya Pradesh” (A Sociological Study)” has been undertaken.
Objectives

The following are the main objectives of the present study:

- To study the process of participation of tribal women in self help group and understanding the factors responsible for facilitating sustainable interest of tribal women to engage themselves with the self help group concern.
- To analyze the role of self help group in the social, economic and political empowerment of tribal women.
- To study the socio-economic profile of the self help group members.
- To study the function of SHG.
- To assess the extent of awareness regarding the governmental programme.
- To study the nature of participation of women in SHG.
- To examine and evaluate the specific problem of beneficiaries with regards to savings, revolving fund, productivity, marketing, etc.
- To derive important policy issues pertaining to self help group movement to facilitate sustainable development efforts for tribal women.

Hypothesis

The following specific hypothesis has been formulated to meet the above objectives of the study:

- SHG leads to social empowerment of women.
- Economic empowerment of beneficiaries leads to social empowerment in the form of better nutrition, health and general awareness.
- SHG helps in promoting leadership and entrepreneurship qualities among the SHG members.
- SHG which is part and parcel of rural life is a good means of empowerment.

Methodology

Keeping in view the specific set of objectives enumerated, an in-depth study of Self Help Groups in Mandla District of Madhya Pradesh has been selected. In this regard methodology needs special emphasis. The study is based on collection of data from both primary and secondary sources in the district in Madhya Pradesh.
Sampling Design

The sampling design is formulated for the purpose of collection of primary data. Mandla District is in Jabalpur Region of Madhya Pradesh is selected purposely for the following reasons:

♦ The district is one of the backward district of Madhya Pradesh in terms of level of female literacy, female employment and other socio-economic parameters.
♦ The district is dominated by tribal and the District has good number of devoted NGOs.
♦ Familiarity and proximity of the district makes convenient to conduct study.

Mandla district forms the southern most part of Madhya Pradesh. It is one of the four tribal districts of the State. The District is divided into Four Tahsils namely, Mandla, Niwas, Nainpur, and Bichhiya and is further divided in to nine development blocks covering 1216 villages.

Multistage stratified cluster sampling method was adopted for collecting primary data by designing the sample from population. Self Help Groups are functioning in almost all the villages of the District. Since it is not possible to cover all the blocks in the inquiry and to keep the study within manageable limits without in any way minimizing its significance, four blocks (at the rate of one block in each Tehsil) have been selected for the study. They are: Mandla Tahsil (Mandla Block) Nainpur Tahsil (Nainpur Block) Bichhiya Tahsil (Bichhiya Block) Niwas Tahsil (Niwas Block). Within the study area again, two to three villages from each block and two- three SHG from each village were selected. A total sample of 24 SHGs has been selected. 4-6 members from each SHG i.e., 100 SHG members has been interviewed.
Schematic Research Design of Sample Selection

STATE

MANDLA DISTRICT

(Tehsil) Mandla
(Block) Mandla

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages in each block</th>
<th>Villages in each block</th>
<th>Villages in each block</th>
<th>Villages in each block</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 SHGs

Samples 24 SHGs (4-6 members per SHG total sample 100)
The details of the study area in the study is presented in the following table

**Table 1.2 Details of study area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Block</th>
<th>Name of Village</th>
<th>Name of Self Help Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mandala</td>
<td>Katra</td>
<td>Narmada Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Devdara</td>
<td>Maa Devi Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Palak Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Radhik Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shri Ram Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Shri Gaytri Self Help Group</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Nainpur</td>
<td>Pipartola</td>
<td>Durga Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Unnati Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Jharmau</td>
<td>Pragati Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Laxmi Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Jagrati Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Devdara</td>
<td>Kala Self Help Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bhichhiya</td>
<td>Mand</td>
<td>Har Narmade Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Abhishek Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Navjagrati Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Om Sai ram Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Srijan Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Avtar Self Help Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Niwas</td>
<td>Kusmi</td>
<td>Jai Laxmi Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Saraswati Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Rani Duragawati Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Narmada Self Help Group</td>
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<td>Savitri Self Help Group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Avanti Self Help Group</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Tools of Data Collection

The study has been based on collection of data from both primary and secondary sources. The following tools were adopted for the collection of data for the present study.

- Interview Schedule
- Personal Interview
- Focus Group Discussion
- Observation
- Official Documents

The primary data was collected from the sample respondents by adopting the method of Interview schedule and Observation. To elicit the required information, a well-structured schedule was designed with probing questions.

Interview Schedule was constructed and pretested. A total 100 SHG members were contacted in this regard. The schedule contained the question regarding demographic feature (social background, age profile, education, marital status, etc), participation in SHG (reasons for joining SHG, mobilizing force behind SHG, etc), SHG awareness on developmental issues, PRI's etc, impact decision making (financial and domestic), awareness on problems encountered while participating in SHG and ability to understand and solve them (incidence of positive changes, capacity to assess domestic problem and social benefits gained, etc), utilization of various public utility services implemented by the government especially after being exposed to SHG and impact of socio economic aspect on SHG (impact of family size and age).

Secondary data relating to the different aspects of Self Help Groups (the structural set up and functional aspects) have been collected from the official records maintained by NGOs, District Rural Development Authority (Zila Panchayat), Lead District Manager Central Bank of India, District Development Manager, NABARD State Institute of Rural Development, Jabalpur & Banks including RRBs, Co-operatives, & Commercial Banks Women Studies Centers, University Libraries. Books, articles in Journal, Paper clipping were also referred to draw secondary data.
Analysis of Data

The collected data was analyzed and tabulated. The data was scrutinized, verified and analyzed with the help of computers. Frequency and percentage were computed for interpretation of the data. Apart from tabulation and analysis, necessary graphs, diagrams are also incorporated in the study.

Chapter Scheme

The entire study has been divided into six chapters and a brief description of each chapter is presented below.

Chapter I - Introduction covering Status of women in the global perspective; development of tribal women with special reference to Mandla; Current scenario on empowerment of women in social (situation of women in politics, education, employment); empowerment of women in political; empowerment of women in legal (role of personal laws to determine women position in society- laws governing marriage, divorcé, inheritance, succession and adoption) and crime committed against women- domestic violence, family law, dowry, family courts; empowerment of women in economic-self employment through income generating activities, role of non government organization in entrepreneurship development. Need for the research; objectives; hypothesis; limitations; research methodology; expected outcome.

Chapter II - Profile of Mandala District.

Chapter III - Empowerment of women through self help groups- a new women movement for social change and development, origin of self help group, meaning, concept of self help group, objectives and characteristics of self help group, function of self help group, group formation process, leadership responsibility, meetings, savings and credit functions, fund management and record keeping in self help group, promotion
of self help group, categorization programme route of self help group in India, self help group in Mandala district.

Chapter IV- Review of literature- brief account of literature related to empowerment of women and self help group under the three heads- studies on empowerment and need for self help group; studies on characteristics of self help group; studies on effect of self help group.

Chapter V- Generalization. This chapter is devoted to the presentation of collected data. The data was collected in the simple frequency tables followed with a detailed description, observation and conclusion drawn from the findings. Chapter also contains graphs and photographs wherever necessary.

Chapter VI- Conclusion

Limitation of the study

Though care has been taken to understand the basic issue of the study in a comprehensive manner and designed the study to meet the objectives set for the study and attempted the analysis accordingly yet it is beyond the capacity of the researcher to meet certain requirement in this context. Consequently the study has following limitations:

- The stud was limited to the women members of the self help group.
- As the sample was very specific and related to the women self help group and their activities, the appropriate standard tests were not available hence the constructed schedule was pre-test and than canvassed in the field.
- The self help group established the minimum of three years back were interviewed for the purpose of data collection.
REFERENCES


10. Supreme Court and High Court Judgements Relating to Women and Children/edited by Charu Walikhanna and Nandita Rao. New Delhi, Serials, 2005,


