

# Elevating the Financial Status of Women through Self-Help Groups a Key to Socio-economic Development of Odisha: An Exploratory Study

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## **Abstract**

*Poverty and unemployment are the most important problems of any under developed/developing countries, to which India is no exception. Above this, the rate of growth of the financial inclusion of the beneficiaries in the mainstream economic activity is very low in India. This is primarily due to the slow growth rate of productive agents and of course, lack of new employment opportunities. To overcome this situation, an alluring scheme to give a push to the economic activity with less effort is “Self Help Group” (SHG). Self Help Group is a tool to remove poverty and create the women entrepreneurship with financial support in rural areas. The objective of the present research study is to examine the role of micro finance in enhancing women’s living standard/ entrepreneurial ability/ empowerment through SHGs. This study covered the areas of five selected districts of Odisha state of India. A structured questionnaire was administered to obtain information on selected variables on the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the members after joining the SHGs. Finally, the information from 612 member respondents representing cross section of population was collected from the SHGs of the area under the study. The data so collected has been analyzed by the application of suitable statistical techniques. The result reveals that the use of micro finance by SHGs has a significant effect on socio-economic conditions of its members.*

**Keywords:** *Micro Finance, Respondents, Self Help Groups, Women Empowerment.*

## **1. Introduction**

Poverty and unemployment are the major problems of any under developed country, to which India is no exception. Further, the development of a nation is very much dependent on the development of its rural masses. Micro finance is playing a significant role in alleviating poverty in rural areas and there by accelerating rural development. Since women are the sole family caretaker, emphasis should be given to the rural women to empowering them. Provision of micro finance to the rural SHGs is a way to raise income level and improve the living standard of its members. Various studies suggest that the Self Help Groups have paved the way for economic

independence of rural women. Thus, the Self Help Groups can contribute substantially in pushing the living conditions of the female population up and assist in poverty eradication as well. The level of poverty is in India high as compared to its counterparts in developing economies and therefore, the Self Help Groups movement can be a potential tool for poverty eradication in rural areas and empowerment of women among the poor. Micro finance programs are important institutional devices for providing small credit to the rural people in order to alleviate poverty. Further, the SHG-bank linkage is an effective mechanism to minimize the problems of inadequate access of banking services to the poor. Many studies also highlighted that SHGs have inculcated saving habits to its members. These studies also reveal that increased availability of micro credit to the poor through SHG-bank linkage program has helped in rural development and its people. Against this backdrop, an attempt has been made in this paper to analyze the impact of micro finance on the SHGs members and find out to what extent they have been benefited with regard to poverty alleviation and empowerment of women.

Mohammed Yunus first started and established Self Help Groups in Bangladesh in 1975 through Grameen Bank. In India, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has taken the initiative for micro finance delivery system to needy persons through the linkage of Self Help Groups with the banks. A Self Help Group is a small economically homogeneous affinity group of the rural poor voluntarily coming together to save a small amount regularly, which is deposited in a common fund to meet members' emergency needs and to provide collateral free loans decided by the group. Self Help Groups are recognized as a useful device to help the poor and an alternative mechanism to meet the urgent credit needs of poor group members through saving habit. Self Help Groups enhance the equality of status of women as participants, decision-makers and beneficiaries in the democratic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life. The basic principles of the Self Help Groups are group approach, mutual trust, organization of small and manageable groups, group cohesiveness, spirit of thrift, demand based lending, collateral free, women friendly loan, peer group pressure in repayment, skill training, capacity building and empowerment.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Micro finance has proved to be a potential tool for alleviating poverty in many parts of the world. India has the largest population of poor people in the world, and over the past decade, micro finance has begun to attract increasing attention from many mainstream players in India contributing to the growth of this industry. In the present research, an attempt has been made to examine the role of micro finance towards SHGs for socio-economic development of its members. In this context, a number of questions related to the impact of micro finance on the beneficiaries, have been raised that need to be addressed empirically. The pertinent questions in this regard are as follows.

1. What is the impact of micro finance on standard of living of the poor people joined in SHGs?
2. What is the impact of micro finance on social and cultural development of the poor people participated in SHGs?
3. Do SHGs empower the members particularly the women in such programs?

On the basis of the above questions, the objectives for the study have been set and accordingly, data have been collected and analyzed.

### 3. Review of Literature

The review of literature is an important step in any research work. Review of earlier studies discloses the works done by individual researchers and institutions and facilitates to start with the unexplored areas of the concerned research work. Various studies related to functioning of Micro Finance Institutions and Self Help Groups, particularly in rural areas have been conducted by different social scientists at micro and macro level in India and abroad. While there has been much literature available in the area of micro finance and SHGs, it is found that the application of SHG-bank linkage is of recent development. The research work conducted by the eminent scholars in this area include Raghavendra (2001), Manimekalai and Rajeswari (2001), Kumaran (2002), Shylenra (2004), Moll (2005), Hietalahti and Linden (2006), Karlan and Jonathan (2009), Karmakar (2009), Goyal and Goel (2012), Eswar and Raghvendra (2014) and others. These studies mainly focused on the role of micro finance and its impact on the functioning of SHGs. Similarly, the well-known scholars namely Goetz and Sengupta (1996), Dahiya, et al. (2001), Kabeer (2001), Singh and Usha Kumari (2007), Ramchandran and Balakrishan (2008), Hoque and Itohara (2009), Jain and Jain (2012), Alikhan and Noreen (2012), Devi (2014) and others carried out the studies relating to women empowerment through SHGs. Most of the studies revealed that micro finance is a potential tool for poverty alleviation in rural areas and SHGs-bank linkage not only empower the women but also help in the rural development. Keeping in view the above stated issues, the present research paper made an attempt to study the impact of micro finance on the members of SHGs of selected districts of Odisha with regard to their socio-economic and cultural aspects.

### 4. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the present research work is to examine the impact of micro finance on the economic and social development of poor people in the rural areas and the role played by micro finance in helping to SHGs in this regard. Apart from this, the other important objectives are:

1. To examine the role of SHGs in improving the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the fellow members.
2. To examine the role of SHGs in empowering the women members.
3. To provide some concrete suggestions for the overall improvement of the functioning of SHGs.

### 5. Scope of the Study

The present study is both descriptive and evaluative in nature and examines the impact of micro finance on the eradication of poverty in rural areas, particularly the members of the SHGs of said locality. The study also measures the impact of micro credit in alleviating the poverty of the SHG members under the study area covering five districts namely Nayagarh, Khordha, Puri, Ganjam and Kandhamal of Odisha. The scope of the study is thus limited to the SHGs who are operating in these districts.

## 6. Hypotheses for the Study

Keeping in view the objectives set for the study, the following null hypotheses are framed to be tested during the due course of analysis.

1. **H<sub>0</sub>**: There is no significant increase in income after becoming the members of the SHGs.
2. **H<sub>0</sub>**: There is no significant change in social and cultural conditions of SHG Members.
3. **H<sub>0</sub>**: There is no significant improvement in empowerment of women after becoming the members of SHGs.

## 7. Research Design

The research design adopted for the present research work is outlined below.

The present study has used a structured questionnaire for the purpose of collecting primary data from the SHG member respondents. The secondary data were collected from books, journals, periodicals etc. For collection of primary data, purposive random sampling method was followed. Further, the data were collected during 2016-2017 in six months interval from the same respondents to know any improvements with regard to their socio-economic and cultural aspects. The reliability of the data set was tested by using Cronbach's Alpha whose test value was found to be 0.670 and considered reliable. Finally, the researchers have collected information from 612 SHG member respondents of 306 SHGs. The collected data was analyzed and interpreted by using the statistical tools such as percentage, scaling technique (measurement of attributes), Pearson's chi-square test etc.

## 8. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis can highlight the demographic profile of the respondents who have participated in the survey work. By analyzing this information by age, sex, or educational qualification etc., MFIs/SHGs can develop various schemes and programs to cater the needs of the target group. In this survey, 153 SHGs have participated from five selected districts namely Nayagarh, Khordha, Puri, Ganjam, and Kandhamala of Odisha and the relevant information from 612 members were collected. The key variables such as gender, age, educational qualification, family size etc. pertaining to demographic data is presented for analysis in the following section.

### i. Gender

Table-1: Gender-wise classification of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	78	12.75
Female	534	87.25
Total	612	100.00

Source: Questionnaire

The gender profile of the respondents is presented in the table-1. Out of the 612 respondents participated in the survey, 78 respondents were male and 534 respondents were female. The percentage of female respondents was 87.25% and the remaining 12.75% were male

respondents. This shows the participation of women in SHGs is more than that of their counterpart.

## ii. Age

Table-2: Age-wise classification of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25 years	24	3.9
25 to 40 years	488	79.7
41 to 55 years	84	13.7
Above 55 years	16	2.6
Total	612	100.0

Source: Questionnaire

The age group of the members of the SHGs plays an important role in doing various economic activities. The table-2 shows that 488 members i.e. 79.7% belong to the age group of 25-40 years followed by 84 members belonging to the age group of 41-55 years. A negligible percentage was noticed in the age group of below 25 and above 55 years. It can be concluded that young persons are interested to join the SHGs.

## iii. Educational qualification

Table-3: Educational qualification-wise classification of the respondents

Educational qualification	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	66	10.78
Primary education	87	14.22
High school	161	26.31
Intermediate & above	298	48.69
Total	612	100

Source: Questionnaire

It is clearly shown in the table-3 that out of the 612 respondents 66 respondents are illiterate i.e.10.78% and they constitute the lowest percentage in the sample catalogue. The respondents who have completed their primary education are 87 and it constitutes 14.22% of the total respondents. The above table also reveals that the highest percentages of the respondents are from intermediate & above qualification which constitute 48.69%. On the other hand, 161 respondents have high school level of education and its percentage is 26.3. It can be concluded that members having intermediate and above qualification are more interested in joining SHGs to do some kind of economic activities for their livelihood.

iv. **Social class**

Table-4: Social class-wise classification of the respondents

Social class	Number	Percentage
ST	135	22.06
SC	124	20.26
OBC	147	24.02
GEN	206	33.66
Total	612	100

Source: Questionnaire

It is noticed from the table-4 that out of the 612 respondents, 206 respondents are from general caste that accounts for 33.66% of the total respondents. The number of respondents belonging to Schedule Tribe is 135 and accounts for 22.06% of the total respondents. Similarly, the number of respondents belonging to Schedule Caste is 124 and that constitutes 20.26% of the total respondents. When it comes to OBC, its number is 147 i.e. 24.02%. From the analysis, it can be inferred that the representation of different castes in the total sample is more or less evenly distributed with minor variation.

v. **Family members size**

Table-5: Family member size-wise classification of the respondents

Family member	Frequency	Percent
1-2 members	24	3.9
3-5 members	370	60.5
More than 5 members	218	35.6
Total	612	100

Source: Questionnaire Survey.

The family member size-wise distribution of SHG members is shown in table-5. It is revealed from the table that 60.5% of the respondents are having 3-5 members in their family which is distantly followed by 35.6% of the respondents having more than 5 members in their family. On the other hand, only 3.9% respondents have the family size of 1-2 members. Hence, it can be concluded that members with large family size is noticed in the Self Help Groups, the reason may be attributed to generate extra income to feed the family members.

**Inferential Analysis**

The following section deals with the detail analysis of the critical variables which affect the SHG members in their sphere of activities.

i. **Reasons for joining SHG**

Table-6: Reason(s) for joining SHGs

Educational qualification	Reason(s) for joining SHGs			
	To generate extra income for the family	To develop social status	For availing low rate of interest from MFIs	For survival and poverty eradication
Illiterate	62	48	52	74
Primary education	21	45	35	56
High school	68	53	67	63
Intermediate & above	75	65	134	94
Total	226	211	288	287

The Table-6 presents the information on the reason(s) for which the respondents have joined as member of SHGs. Here, educational qualification is taken as criterion the and on that basis the respondents were asked for reason(s) for joining SHGs. It can be seen from the table-6 that a total of 74 illiterate respondents have cited survival and poverty eradication as the main reason for joining the SHG. Similarly, 56 respondents having primary education have given the same reason for joining the SHGs. On the other hand, 68 respondents having high school education said that they joined SHGs to generate extra income for the family. Likewise, 134 respondents having intermediate and above qualification joined SHGs to avail low rate of interest from MFIs for doing the business. On the whole, maximum respondents cited two important reasons namely, availing low rate of interest from MFIs and survival and poverty eradication for joining the SHGs.

## ii. Business activities of SHG members as entrepreneurs

Table-7: Business activities of SHG members

Livelihood of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Spice preparation and Packaging	80	13.07
Food Processing and Packaging	32	5.23
Animal husbandry (Diary farm-Goat, Cow, Buffalo)	90	14.71
Turmeric Business	68	11.11
Pampad, Badi and Pickles	96	15.69
Incense sticks preparation and Packaging	56	9.15
Mushroom Farming	82	13.40
Vegetable Business	14	2.29
Packaging of Forest Produces	36	5.88
Others	58	9.48
Total	612	100

It is found from the Table-7 that highest number of SHG members (15.69%) are doing business in the preparation of Pampada, Badi and Pickles followed by animal husbandry, mushroom farming and spices constituting of 14.71%, 13.40% and 13.07% respectively. Whereas the lowest numbers of SHG members are dependent on vegetable business for their livelihood, the reason may be due to perishable in nature and lack of storage facility of such items.

### iii. Impact on income of members after joining SHGs

The respondents have joined the SHGs in order to generate more income and lead a better life. To know the position, data have been collected on income of the members in respect to before joining and after joining the SHGs. The frequency table is prepared and presented below.

Table-8: Impact on income of members after joining SHGs

Income			
Category	Observed frequency		Total frequency
	Yes	No	
After membership	287	180	467
Before membership	47	98	145
Total	334	278	612
Category	Expected frequency		Total frequency
	Yes	No	
After membership	254.87	212.13	467
Before membership	79.13	65.87	145
Total	334	278	612

Table-8(a): Chi-square test

Test	Calculated value	D.F.	Tabulated value	Decision
Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	37.65	1	3.84	Rejected

1.  $H_0$ : There is no significant increase in income after becoming the members of the SHGs.

In order to test the above hypothesis, the chi-square test has been applied. The test result is presented in the table-8(a). It is observed from the table that the chi-square test value is 37.65 and it is higher than the tabulated value at 5% level of significance. Since the calculated value is higher than the tabulated value, the above hypothesis stands rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that there is a significant change in income of the members after joining the SHGs.

**iv. Impact on social and cultural conditions of SHG Members**

In order to measure the effect on social and cultural conditions of the members of SHGs, the information on important variables were collected from them on pre and post membership period and they are tabulated and presented in table-9 for analysis.

Table-9: Impact on social and cultural conditions of SHGs Members

Observed frequency			
	Yes	No	Total
After membership	169	134	303
Before membership	192	119	311
Total	361	253	614
Expected frequency			
	Yes	No	
After membership	178.15	124.85	303
Before membership	182.85	128.15	311
Total	361	253	614

Table-9(a): Chi-square test

Test	Calculated value	D.F.	Tabulated value	Decision
Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	2.25	1	3.84	Accepted

2.  $H_0$ : There is no significant change in social and cultural conditions of SHG members

In order to test the above hypothesis, the chi-square test has been applied and the test result is presented in the table-9(a). It is observed from the table that the chi-square test value is 2.25 and it is lower than the tabulated value at 5% level of significance. Since, the calculated value is lower than the tabulated value, the above hypothesis stands accepted. Hence, it is concluded that there is no significant change in the social and cultural conditions of members after joining SHGs.

**v. Impact of Empowerment on women members of SHGs**

In order to measure the impact of empowerment of the women members of SHGs, the information relating such variables were collected from them on pre and post membership period and they are tabulated and presented in table-10 for analysis.

Table-10: Impact of empowerment on women members of SHGs

Observed Frequency			
	Yes	No	Total
After membership	176	81	257

Before membership	80	107	187
Total	256	188	444
Expected Frequency			
	Yes	No	
After membership	148.18	108.82	257
Before membership	107.82	79.18	187
Total	256	188	444

Table-10(a): Chi-square Test

Test	Calculated Value	Df	Tabulated Value	Decision
Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	29.29	1	3.84	Rejected

3.  $H_0$ : There is no significant impact of empowerment on women after becoming the members of SHGs.

In order to test the above hypothesis, the chi-square test has been applied. The test result is presented in the table-10(a). It is observed from the table that the chi-square test value is 29.29 and it is higher than the tabulated value at 5% level of significance. Since, the calculated value is higher than the tabulated value, the above hypothesis stands rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that there is significant impact of empowerment on women after becoming the members of SHGs.

vi. **Level of satisfaction of SHG members**

Table-11: Satisfaction level of member respondents of SHGs

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Highly satisfied	73	11.93
Satisfied	432	70.59
Neutral	37	6.04
Dissatisfied	52	8.50
Highly dissatisfied	18	2.94
Total	612	100

Source: Data compiled from survey.

The table-11 reveals the level of satisfaction of member respondents with regard to performance of SHGs in which they are associated. It is seen from the table that 70.59% respondents are satisfied with their respective SHGs performance. It is followed by 11.93% highly satisfied members. On the other hand, 11.44% member respondents are either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied on their SHGs performance. Apart from this, 6.04% member respondents

remain neutral on SHGs performance. On the whole, It can be concluded that a maximum of 82.52% members are satisfied with the performance of their respective SHGs.

## 9. Major Findings of the study

The major findings of the study are presented under two sub-headings namely, descriptive and inferential. They are presented below.

### Findings of Descriptive Analysis

- It is observed that 87.25% of the respondents are female and the rest 12.75% belong to the male category.
- It is noticed that a majority of the respondents i.e. 79.7% belong to the age group of 25-40 years which is distantly followed by 13.7% respondents with the age group of 41-55 years.
- It is found that intermediate and above qualified respondents are 48.69%. It is followed by high school level qualification with 26.31% respondents. On the other hand, 10.78% respondents are illiterates.
- It is observed that one third of the respondents belong to the general category (33.66%) which is followed by 24.02% OBC respondents and 22.06% ST respondents.
- It is noticed from analysis that 60.5% of the respondents are having 3-5 members in their family while 35.6% of the respondents are having more than 5 members in their family.

### Findings of Inferential Analysis

- ❖ The study reveals that maximum members have joined the SHGs to get cheaper loan from MFIs and do small business for their livelihood and reduce poverty.
- ❖ After joining the SHGs most of the respondents have started small business units for their livelihood
- ❖ The study observes that there is a significant change in the income of the members after joining the SHGs.
- ❖ The study also reveals that there is no significant change in the social and cultural conditions of members after joining SHGs.
- ❖ The study brings out the fact that there is a significant change on empowerment of women after becoming the members of SHGs.
- ❖ The study also observes that 82.52% respondents are either satisfied or highly satisfied with their respective SHGs performance.

## 10. Suggestions

Finally, some important suggestions are given to SHGs for betterment of their functioning leading to the poverty alleviation and rural development. They are briefly presented below.

The successful implementation of programs for SHGs is not the responsibility of MFIs and the government alone. It also requires the co-operation and involvement of the beneficiaries in such programs. On the basis of the findings of the study, few suggestions are given for the benefit of the members of SHGs.

- It is suggested that the beneficiaries should organize themselves into groups because group linkage model can be very effective as it creates an environment of mutual trust among the group members.

- It is suggested that group linkage will enable the members to get cheaper finance from MFIs. This will help the members to carry out their economic activities on a cost effective basis.
- The beneficiaries should make only productive use of the micro credit instead of indulging in unnecessary expenditures which would adversely affect their socio-economic condition.
- Guidance and counseling should be given to the members with regard to their choice of business activities which they would like to undertake. Funds provided to them should also be flexible to meet their requirements.
- Monitoring and follow-up on the functioning of micro enterprises run by the SHG members is crucial till the business is stabilized. The same is, of course, very important in case of non-farm activities such as basket making, incense stick making, preparation of dry food items etc. For this MFIs/ NGOs can take a lead role.
- Women empowerment through economic activities is a prerequisite for economic independence and that will ultimately contribute to the family income. Hence, various schemes available for them should be offered on the basis of their choice and interest.
- It is reported that MFIs organize awareness campaigns at village level but people hardly take interest on such campaigns. The beneficiaries should actively participate in such programs to enhance their knowledge regarding the availability and use of micro finance services.

### **11. Limitations of the Study**

Descriptive research study, particularly using the survey method of collecting data is subject to certain limitations. So this piece of work is not an exception. The present research work has been carried out on the basis of the data collected from 612 SHG members from five districts. The limited number of samples, of course, will not give 100 percent accurate result. Further, the views expressed by the respondents may be biased one. Hence, the conclusion drawn on such information is one of the limitations of the study. The selection of five districts where the present study has been concentrated is another limitation from the area coverage (scope) point of view. The statistical tools and techniques used in the study too have their own limitations. In spite of all these limitations, an honest and sincere attempt has been made to make the study a systematic and reliable one.

### **12. Conclusion**

Women participation in Self Help Groups have obviously created tremendous impact upon the life pattern and style of poor women and have empowered them at various levels not only as individual but also as members of the family in the community and the society as whole. Now Self Help Groups are getting credit as and when needed for their basic requirements. They have injected a positive change in their socio-economic behavior and enhanced their status and value at the grass root level. The rural women have risen to the level of self-reliance. The result highlighted that there is a significant impact of empowerment on women after becoming the members of SHGs. The study also pointed out that there is a significant change in the income of the members after joining the SHGs. Thus, Self Help Groups have become a powerful tool in bringing women together in the remote rural areas and thus, helped to liberate the once mute sufferers in silence to march forward towards collective community progress on a substantial basis.

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