Manuscript ID:
IJEBAMPSR-2026-030216

Volume: 3

Issue: 2

Month: April

Year: 2026

E-ISSN: 3065-9140

Submitted: 06 Mar 2026
Revised: 11 -Mar-2026
Accepted: 11-Apr -2026
Published: 30-Apr -2026

Address for correspondence:
Bane Bhimashankar Balasaheb
Asst. Prof., S.M. Joshi College, Hadapsar Pune, Economics Department
Email:
shankarbane66422@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21272177

DOI Link:
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21272177

Women Empowerment and the Impact of Self-Help Groups: A Field Study

Bane Bhimashankar Balasaheb
Asst. Prof., S.M. Joshi College, Hadapsar Pune, Economics Department

Abstract:

Women empowerment is a crucial aspect of social and economic development, aiming to enhance the ability of women to become self-reliant and actively participate in decision-making processes. In recent years, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as an effective tool for promoting women empowerment, especially in rural areas. The present study focuses on analyzing the impact of SHGs on women empowerment. For this purpose, primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews with SHG members and leaders. The study reveals that participation in SHGs has significantly improved women's self-confidence, financial independence, and decision-making ability. However, certain challenges such as lack of awareness, financial constraints, and issues related to loan repayment were also observed. Overall, the findings indicate that SHGs play a vital role in empowering women and contribute to their socio-economic development.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Financial Independence, Rural Development, Empowerment*

Introduction:

It is often said that women are the key to social life. In the functioning of society, both men and women hold equally important positions. They are like the two wheels of a chariot of social life; if one wheel stops, the chariot cannot move forward. Despite this essential role, women have historically been given a lower status in society. This raises an important question: why has such inequality existed, even when women contribute equally to the progress and development of society? Addressing this issue and improving the condition of women is essential for achieving balanced and sustainable social development.

In Ancient Times, especially during the Early Vedic Period, women were given a high and Respected status in society. They were considered equal to men in all aspects of life. Women had complete freedom to make their own decisions from acquiring education to choosing their life partners. Education was equally accessible to women, and many learned women such as Lopamudra, Ghosha, Gargi, Maitreyi, and Sulabha were known for their knowledge and wisdom. These women were respected as "Vidushi" (Learned Scholars). During this period, women were also regarded as the heads of households and were given the status of "Grihaswamini" (Mistress of the House). However, as time progressed into the Later Vedic Period, the status of women began to decline gradually. Their position in society weakened, and their independence was restricted. Women were confined mainly to domestic roles, often limited to household responsibilities such as cooking and childcare. Their rights and freedoms were significantly reduced. During the Medieval Period, due to repeated foreign invasions and socio-political instability, the condition of women deteriorated further. Women were often treated as objects rather than individuals with rights. Their safety became a major concern, and their access to education was almost completely denied. As a result, a large number of women remained uneducated and socially dependent. In the Modern Period, although the status of women initially remained low, significant changes began to take place. During the reign of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, women were treated with respect and dignity, which marked the beginning of positive transformation. Later, several social reformers and thinkers played a crucial role in improving the status of women.

How to Cite this Article:
Bane, B. B. (2026). Women Empowerment and the Impact of Self-Help Groups: A Field Study. International Journal of Economics, Business, Accounting, Agriculture and Management Towards Paradigm Shift in Research (IJEBAMPSR), 3(2), 88–93. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21272177

Reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Chhatrapati Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar made significant efforts to bring women into the mainstream of society. They worked towards women's education, equality, and social justice. Today, the impact of these efforts is clearly visible. Women are now being given equal opportunities in various fields such as education, employment, politics, and business. They are actively participating in social and economic development. This transformation reflects a positive change in the status of women and highlights the direction towards gender equality and empowerment.

In the Modern Period, over time, women have gradually achieved a status equal to men. They have started making their mark in almost every field such as education, business, politics, and social work. As women became more skilled, aware, and active, they progressed significantly, which ultimately led to the emergence of the concept of women empowerment. Women empowerment can be understood as the process by which a woman gains the ability, confidence, and independence to make decisions and take actions on her own. It means enabling women to rely on their own strength and capabilities to shape their lives. In today's world, women have reached higher levels of achievement and have earned respect and recognition in society. However, women empowerment is not merely about giving rights to women; it is a broader concept that focuses on making women capable of controlling their own lives and decisions. In the present scenario, the need for women empowerment is strongly felt, especially in terms of economic independence. When women become financially independent particularly through platforms like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) They not only contribute to poverty reduction but also enhance the overall income of their families. This inclusion helps them become an integral part of the economic mainstream. Economic independence builds self-confidence among women, which empowers them to raise their voices against domestic violence, exploitation, and injustice. As a result, the gender gap in society gradually reduces, and women gain social respect and dignity. Moreover, Empowerment increases women's participation in household decision-making, which has a direct and positive impact on the development of future generations. Research shows that empowered women tend to spend a significant portion of their income on their children's education, health, and nutrition, thereby contributing to the creation of a healthy and progressive society.

In the context of Women Empowerment, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play a vital role. A women's Self-Help Group is a small, voluntary group of women who come together to save money regularly. These savings are not primarily aimed at profit-making, but rather to provide financial support to members during times of need. The fundamental objective of such groups is mutual help and cooperation, especially in times of crisis. Through SHGs, women develop the habit of saving and gain access to small loans, which helps them manage their financial difficulties. More importantly, SHGs provide opportunities for skill development and create awareness about various government schemes. This exposure encourages women to take up entrepreneurial activities and start small businesses. As a result, women become economically independent and self-reliant. They gain confidence, improve their decision-making abilities, and actively participate in both family and social matters. Thus, SHGs act as an important tool for empowering women. Therefore, women empowerment is not just about the progress of women alone; it is a strong foundation for the sustainable development of the entire nation and for bringing about meaningful social transformation.

Literature Review:

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the present research topic, it is essential to review the existing literature related to women empowerment and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). For this purpose, the following significant research studies have been reviewed:

1. Prof. Deepak Dajiba Patil – "महिला सक्षमीकरण: वास्तव आणि अपेक्षा" (Women Empowerment: Reality and Expectations)

Prof. Deepak Patil has effectively explained the concept of women empowerment in his research work. According to him, women empowerment is a multidimensional process that involves the physical, mental, and intellectual development of women, enabling them to achieve equal rights with men in social, political, and cultural spheres. He has also discussed the growing importance of empowerment in the modern era and the progress made in this direction. While his study provides a comprehensive overview of the social, political, and educational status of women, it gives comparatively less emphasis to their economic condition.

The present study attempts to address this gap by focusing specifically on the economic empowerment of women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), particularly examining their role in promoting financial independence and self-reliance.

2. Dr. Sheetal Sharma – "भारत में महिला सशक्तिकरण एवं योजनाएं : एक अध्ययन" (Women

Empowerment and Government Schemes in India: A Study)

Dr. Sheetal Sharma, in her research, has presented a detailed analysis of women empowerment in India. She highlights that women empowerment is not dependent on a single factor but is influenced by multiple dimensions such as geographical location (rural/urban), level of education, social status (caste and class), and age. Her study also provides an overview of various government schemes designed for the upliftment of women. However, it offers limited discussion on the practical outcomes of economic empowerment and the specific role played by Self-Help Groups. In contrast, the present research builds upon these insights and focuses on how such schemes, when implemented through SHGs, contribute to women's economic progress and help them become self-sufficient and independent.

The above studies primarily highlight the social, political, and policy dimensions of women empowerment. However, there is a noticeable gap in analyzing the role of Self-Help Groups in fostering economic empowerment at the grassroots level. Therefore, the present research attempts to fill this gap by focusing on SHGs as a central mechanism for promoting women's financial independence and by providing a realistic, field-based analysis of their impact on women empowerment.

Research Methodology

The primary objective of the present research study is to critically examine "Women Empowerment and the Impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs)." In order to ensure that the findings of the study are accurate, reliable, and meaningful, a systematic research methodology has been adopted as described below:

1. Methods of Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, data has been collected from two major sources:

a) Primary Data:

Primary data has been collected to obtain first-hand information regarding various initiatives undertaken for women empowerment, particularly the functioning and impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). A structured and standardized questionnaire was designed for this purpose. Personal interviews were conducted with SHG leaders (such as presidents) and active members to gather detailed and authentic information about their experiences, participation, and outcomes.

b) Secondary Data:

To support and strengthen the study, secondary data has been collected from various sources such as reference books, published research papers, government reports, and relevant websites. This helped in gaining a deeper understanding of the topic and provided a theoretical framework for the study.

2. Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for primary data collection was systematically divided into six sections to ensure a comprehensive analysis of all aspects related to SHGs and women empowerment:

I. Basic Information and Structure:

This section includes general details such as the name of the SHG, year of establishment, and number of members.

II. Financial Structure and Savings:

It focuses on monthly savings, internal lending practices, and interest rates within the group.

III. Entrepreneurship and Income Generation:

This section examines the types of businesses initiated by members and the income generated through such activities.

IV. Government Support and Bank Linkage:

It covers information about government schemes (such as NRLM and NABARD initiatives), access to bank loans, and financial assistance.

V. Impact and Empowerment:

This section evaluates the changes in confidence, decision-making ability, and overall empowerment of women after joining SHGs.

VI. Challenges and Suggestions:

It identifies the major problems faced by SHGs and includes suggestions provided by members to improve their effectiveness.

3. Sampling Strategy

For this study, a sample of Self-Help Groups from a selected area was chosen. The respondents included group leaders and active members who were directly involved in SHG activities. The selection was made using a convenient sampling method, ensuring easy access and meaningful interaction with participants. This approach helped in capturing a realistic picture of the impact of SHGs on women empowerment at the grassroots level.

Objectives of the Study

I. To examine the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in promoting women empowerment.
II. To analyze the impact of SHGs on the economic condition and financial independence of women.
III. To study the changes in women's decision-making power and social status after joining SHGs.
IV. To identify the challenges faced by SHGs and suggest measures to improve their effectiveness.

Conceptual Background and Significance of the Study:

In the present research paper, the concept of women empowerment has been explained in a comprehensive manner. In simple terms, women empowerment refers to the ability of a woman to stand on her own feet and become self-reliant through her own efforts. According to the World Bank, empowerment is defined as “the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.” This definition has been considered as a guiding framework in the present study. In order to promote women empowerment, the government has introduced various schemes and initiatives to provide financial support and opportunities to women. Some of the important schemes include:

- Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
- Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)
- Stand Up India Scheme
- Mahila E-Haat
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana

Through these schemes, the government aims to provide financial assistance, employment opportunities, skill development, and awareness among women. Various awareness campaigns are also conducted to encourage women’s participation in economic and social activities. As a result, a gradual improvement in women empowerment can be observed. While studying the economic aspect of women empowerment, special emphasis has been given to Self-Help Groups (SHGs). A women’s Self-Help Group is generally formed by a minimum of 10 women who come together with common goals and objectives. They regularly save money and create a common fund, which is used to support any member in times of financial need. SHGs can vary in size and financial capacity. The monthly savings of members may range from as low as ₹100 to ₹10,000 or more, depending on the group’s structure and economic condition. These groups function in an organized manner and are officially registered. After registration, a separate bank account is opened in the name of the SHG. All financial transactions of the group are conducted through this bank account and are usually managed with the joint approval of key members such as the President and the Secretary. This structured functioning ensures transparency, accountability, and effective financial management within the group. Thus, Self-Help Groups serve as an important institutional mechanism for promoting financial inclusion, mutual support, and ultimately women empowerment.

Data Analysis:

The data analysis of the present study is based on the primary information collected through a structured questionnaire and personal interviews with members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The collected data has been systematically analyzed according to the different sections of the questionnaire to understand the role of SHGs in promoting women empowerment. This analysis helps in identifying the socio-economic conditions of women, their level of participation, and the overall impact of SHGs on their empowerment.

Basic Information and Structure

For the purpose of data analysis, primary information was collected through a structured questionnaire, as mentioned in the research methodology. The researcher conducted personal interviews with members and leaders (such as Presidents) of various Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to gather accurate and first-hand data. Under the first section of the questionnaire, namely Basic Information and Structure, details such as the name of the SHG, year of establishment, number of members, and educational background of members were analyzed. While studying different SHGs, it was observed that most of the groups were established after the year 2010, with some even formed after 2015. Although the concept of SHGs in India began in the 1980s, their expansion and development gained significant momentum after 2010. This indicates a growing awareness and acceptance of SHGs as an important tool for women empowerment. In terms of group composition, it was found that most SHGs had around 10 members, which is considered an ideal size for effective functioning. Regarding the educational status of members, approximately 70% to 80% of women in most groups were educated, while in some groups around 40% of members were found to be uneducated. This variation in educational levels suggests that SHGs provide opportunities not only for educated women but also for those with limited or no formal education, thereby promoting inclusive participation.

Financial Structure and Savings

In this section, the financial structure and savings pattern of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have been analyzed. Based on the field survey conducted in rural areas, it was observed that the level of savings among SHGs is generally low. Approximately 70% of the groups reported a monthly saving of ₹100 per member, while about 30% of the groups had a monthly saving of ₹200. No SHGs with higher savings amounts such as ₹500 or ₹1000 per month were found during the survey. This is mainly due to the rural setting of the study area, where the level of economic development is relatively low, resulting in limited saving capacity among members. It was also observed that the saving amount in SHGs is usually fixed. Any change in the saving amount requires a collective decision taken during group meetings with the consent of all members. SHGs also provide internal loans to their members to meet urgent financial needs. The interest rate on such loans is relatively low, generally ranging from 1% to 2% per month. The primary objective behind this low interest rate is that SHGs operate on a non-profit basis, focusing on mutual support rather than profit-making. Furthermore, each SHG maintains a separate bank account through which all financial transactions are conducted. These transactions are carried out with the joint approval of authorized members, typically the President and the Secretary, ensuring transparency and accountability in financial operations.

Entrepreneurship and Income Generation

In this section, the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in promoting entrepreneurship and income generation has been analyzed. SHGs are not only used to meet personal financial needs but also serve as a platform for initiating collective business activities. It was observed that members often rely on SHGs to fulfill their immediate financial requirements. In cases where women face a shortage of capital for their personal or small-scale business activities, they utilize SHG funds to bridge this gap. Thus, SHGs act as an accessible and reliable source of finance. During the field survey, it was found that some SHGs had successfully initiated collective enterprises, while others primarily used the funds to meet individual needs. Since the study area is predominantly rural, most members depend on agriculture. Therefore, SHGs are frequently used as a financial source to meet agricultural expenses such as seeds, fertilizers, and other farming-related costs. Furthermore, the SHGs that engaged in collective business activities reported moderate levels of profit. This indicates that SHGs have the potential to enhance income generation and promote entrepreneurship among women, although the extent of success may vary depending on local conditions and available opportunities.

Government Support and Bank Linkage

In this section, the role of government support and bank linkage in the functioning of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has been analyzed. It was observed that during the formation of SHGs, they are formally registered with government authorities. This registration enables SHGs to avail benefits from various government schemes designed for women empowerment and rural development. The government periodically provides financial assistance and credit facilities to SHGs, which help in strengthening their economic activities. The loans or financial support received from government schemes are generally distributed equally among the members of the group, ensuring fairness and collective benefit. This financial assistance plays a crucial role in meeting both personal and business-related needs of the members. In addition to government support, banks also play an important role in the functioning of SHGs. Each SHG opens a separate bank account, and bank officials provide guidance regarding financial management, saving practices, and loan procedures. This support helps SHG members to manage their finances more effectively and encourages formal banking practices. Thus, government initiatives and bank linkages together contribute significantly to the growth, sustainability, and empowerment potential of Self-Help Groups.

Impact and Empowerment

In this section, the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women empowerment has been analyzed. It was observed that SHGs serve as an effective means for women to achieve economic independence and self-reliance. During the field survey, respondents were asked about the changes they experienced after joining SHGs. Almost all the women reported positive outcomes. They stated that since joining SHGs, they have been able to access financial support whenever required, which has reduced their dependency on others. At the same time, they have developed a regular habit of saving. Moreover, participation in SHGs has significantly increased their self-confidence. Women expressed that they now feel more capable of handling financial matters and making decisions. Their involvement in household decision-making has also increased, indicating a shift towards greater empowerment within the family. In addition, many respondents highlighted that their social status has improved after joining SHGs. They are now more actively involved in community activities and are recognized with greater respect in society. Thus, the findings clearly indicate that SHGs have a positive impact on women’s economic, social, and psychological empowerment.

Challenges and Suggestions

In this section, the major challenges faced by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and the suggestions provided by members have been analyzed. During the field survey, it was observed that one of the most common problems faced by SHGs is the irregularity in monthly savings by members. Since most of these SHGs are located in rural areas, members do not always have a stable or regular source of income. As a result, they are sometimes unable to contribute their savings on time, which affects the overall functioning of the group. Another significant challenge is related to the repayment of internal loans. When a member takes a loan from the group and fails to repay it within the agreed time, it creates financial difficulties for other members. In some cases, due to financial constraints, the borrowing member is unable to repay the loan, making recovery a challenging task

for the group. At the end of the survey, two important questions were asked to the respondents:
(1) What measures would you suggest to make SHGs more effective?
(2) What are your future plans for the SHG?
The responses varied among members, but some common suggestions and plans were identified:

Suggestions to Improve SHGs:

I. Ensuring regular savings by all members through strict group discipline
II. Providing skill development and entrepreneurship training
III. Improving access to markets for SHG products
IV. Increasing financial literacy and awareness among members
V. Strengthening monitoring and record-keeping practices
VI. Simplifying loan procedures and improving repayment mechanisms

Future Plans of SHGs:

I. Expanding collective business activities
II. Increasing the amount of savings and investment
III. Availing more benefits from government schemes
IV. Strengthening group unity and participation
V. Becoming financially self-sufficient and sustainable

Thus, although SHGs face certain operational challenges, with proper planning, discipline, and support, they have strong potential to become more effective instruments for women empowerment.

Conclusion:

The present study concludes that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play a significant role in promoting women empowerment, especially in rural areas. Through regular savings, access to small loans, and participation in group activities, women have become more economically independent and self-reliant.

The study also highlights that SHGs have positively influenced women's confidence, decision-making ability, and social status. However, challenges such as irregular savings and loan repayment issues still exist. Overall, SHGs serve as an effective tool for economic and social empowerment of women and contribute to the broader goal of sustainable development.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed to the successful completion of this research paper titled "Women Empowerment and the Impact of Self-Help Groups: A Field Study." I am deeply thankful to my colleagues, mentors, and the Department of Economics, S.M. Joshi College, Hadapsar, Pune, for their valuable guidance, encouragement, and academic support throughout this research work. Their suggestions and insights greatly enhanced the quality of the study.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References:

1. Research Paper, Prof. Deepak Dajiba Patil, "महिला सक्षमीकरण: वास्तव आणि अपेक्षा" (Women Empowerment: Reality and Expectations), ISBN: 978-93-5240-041-6
2. Research Paper, Dr. Sheetal Sharma, "भारत में महिला सशक्तिकरण एवं योजनाएं : एक अध्ययन" (Women Empowerment and Government Schemes in India: A Study), 2017 IJSRST, Volume 3, Issue 7, Print ISSN: 2395-6011, Online ISSN: 2395-602X
3. Research Paper, Hema Mehata, Study on empowerment of women through self-help groups in less development part of jogeshwri-east (Mumbai Suburb), March 2017, Volume 5, Issue 4, ISSN: 2278-8794
4. Research Questionnaire. (2026). Asst. Prof. Bane Bhimashankar Balasaheb, Women Empowerment and the Impact of Self-Help Groups: A Field Study Unpublished primary survey instrument.
5. Primary Data. (2026). Field survey conducted through individual interviews with Self-Help Groups, March 2026.
6. Shende, T., & Chakane, S. (2025). Sanshodhan Paddhatīche Mulatatve (Fundamentals of Research Methodology).