

**SELF-HELP GROUPS AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT WITH
REFERENCE TO TUMKUR DISTRICT.**

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Abstract:

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play a crucial role in promoting women's political empowerment, especially within marginalised areas. Initially created to foster economic sustainability through collaborative savings and microcredit, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have transformed into crucial venues for social and political empowerment. The participation of women in these grassroots collectives frequently results in heightened self-assurance, enhanced leadership abilities, and a feeling of empowerment, which enables them to engage more actively in political processes. Studies indicate that women who are part of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) exhibit a higher propensity to participate in political endeavours such as voting, campaigning, and taking up leadership positions within their communities. This engagement not only confronts conventional gender norms but also transforms the political terrain by guaranteeing the inclusion of women's perspectives in decision-making procedures. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) create a nurturing atmosphere where women can cultivate essential cognitive abilities and administrative competencies, establishing a solid foundation for increased involvement and representation in politics.

I. Introduction:

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become a potent tool for advancing women's empowerment, especially in the realm of politics. These grassroots collectives, mostly consisting of women from marginalised groups, aim to promote mutual assistance and economic sustainability through small-scale savings and credit initiatives. Nevertheless, the influence of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) goes beyond just financial advantages; they also function as crucial forums for Social and political empowerment.

Women's involvement in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) frequently results in heightened self-assurance, enhanced leadership abilities, and a feeling of empowerment, all of which collectively contribute to their active participation in political activities. As individuals achieve economic autonomy and the ability to negotiate as a group, they increasingly participate in the management of their local areas, advocating for their entitlements and the interests of their communities. This transformation not only disrupts conventional gender norms but also transforms the political terrain by guaranteeing that women's perspectives are acknowledged and esteemed in venues where decisions are made.

SHGs have played a crucial role in facilitating women's engagement in municipal elections, policy development, and community leadership positions in numerous areas. These clubs create a nurturing atmosphere for women to enhance their critical thinking and organisational abilities, which in turn establishes the groundwork for increased political involvement and representation. SHGs are crucial in promoting gender equality and inclusive governance, making them an essential part of initiatives to empower women in political and social spheres.

Kabeer (2005) contends that the economic empowerment facilitated by self-help groups (SHGs) empowers women to question and oppose patriarchal conventions, thereby enhancing their self-assurance to engage in political endeavours. Financial autonomy frequently precedes political involvement, since women who have control over economic resources are more inclined to advocate their rights and exert influence over governmental decision-making procedures. Sanyal (2009) and Desai and Joshi (2013) emphasise the positive impact of membership in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women's leadership attributes, such as improved communication skills, organisational capabilities, and a heightened feeling of agency. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as the interconnected networks, shared norms, and mutual trust that facilitate effective collaboration among persons. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) establish robust networks of women who provide mutual

assistance in diverse areas of life, including engagement in political activities. Research conducted by Kumar (2014) and Panda (2017) reveals that women who are part of self-help groups (SHGs) are more inclined to participate in political endeavours, such as voting, campaigning, and seeking political office. This increased involvement might be attributed to the assistance and camaraderie they receive from their fellow group members. According to Beaman et al. (2012), there is evidence to suggest that women who are engaged in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are more inclined to take part in local elections and take on leadership positions in village councils. Having women in these positions not only guarantees the consideration of women's concerns but also fosters a more inclusive and representative style of government. Kabeer (2001) and Mayoux (2002) warn that solely focussing on economic empowerment may not be enough to attain political empowerment. The argument posits that unless the underlying structural disparities, such as those pertaining to caste, class, and gender, are adequately addressed, the potential influence of SHGs on political empowerment could be constrained. This study examines the influence of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on the political empowerment of women.

II. Research Methodology:

Out of 10 taluks, only two taluks have been selected for the field study based on the high concentration of women SHGs in the area. From each taluk, 60 sample respondents have been selected based on simple random sampling method.

A survey was conducted using questionnaires to collect data from 120 women SHGs from two selected taluks. The required information and data were collected in various aspects from the sample respondents through personal interview concerned with the aim of schedules. The data is inputted into MSEXCEL and evaluated using frequency and percentages.

Table 1: Demographic details of the respondents

Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
18-30	10	8.33
31-40	52	43.33
41-50	38	31.67
51-60	14	11.67
Above 60	6	5.00
Caste/Category		
SC/ST	23	19.17
OBC	62	51.67
General	35	29.17
Economic Status		
APL	35	29.17
BPL	67	55.83
Other	18	15.00
Education		
Illiterate	35	29.17
Primary	42	35.00
High School	20	16.67
PUC	12	10.00
Graduate	8	6.67
P.G.and Above	3	2.50
Marital Status		
Unmarried	32	26.67
Married	65	54.17
Divorce	8	6.67

Widow	15	2.50
Type of family		
Joint	41	34.17
Nuclear	79	65.83
Total	120	100

This table displays the demographic information of the participants. The age bracket with the greatest number of participants is 31 to 40, closely followed by the 41-50 age bracket. The age group of 60 and above has the smallest number of responses, accounting for only 5.00%. Among the total responders, almost 50% are from the OBC category, followed by 29.17% from the general merit category, and only 19.17% from the SC/ST categories. Based on the table, the class with the largest number of respondents consists of those who have completed their primary education, accounting for 42 respondents or 35.00% of the total. In contrast, 35 respondents or 29.17% are illiterate. Additionally, 10.0% of the respondents have completed their PUC, and only 3 respondents or 2.50% have completed their post-graduation. Out of the 120 respondents, over 50% of them are BPL card holders, whereas 35 respondents (29.17%) were APL card holders. Over 50% of the respondents are married and belong to nuclear families.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents about political empowerment after joining SHG

Sl No	Statements	Yes	%	No	%	Total
1	Political Awareness Improved After Joining SHG	88	73.33	32	26.67	120
2	Involving Political Party Programmes After Joining SHG	32	26.67	88	73.33	120
3	Participation in Gramasabha Meeting After Joining SHG	72	60.00	48	40.00	120
4	Politically Active After Joining the SHG	92	76.67	28	23.33	120
5	SHG Converted to Political Party	15	12.50	105	87.50	120
6	Agree about SHGs are the Grass Root Channels of Political Empowerment of Women	85	70.83	35	29.17	120

Our findings indicate that SHG members exhibit a higher propensity to be acquainted with and engage with other women, including those residing outside their immediate vicinity. Additionally, they are more inclined to use their voting rights and cast their ballots based on personal preferences. Furthermore, SHG members are more prone to actively participate in village gatherings. Members of self-help groups (SHGs) are not only more likely to possess knowledge about specific public benefits, especially those intended for households, but they also have a higher likelihood of using a greater number of federal benefit programs. The survey reveals that around 75% of the female sample respondents had enhanced their political awareness after becoming members of the SHG. Over 25% of the respondents have become party members, while over 75% have not. Recently, a significant number of women have been actively participating in local politics. Members of self-help groups also exhibit a disposition towards active involvement in the governance of their local community. Within the study area, 60.00% of the respondents have actively engaged in Gramasabha meetings following their involvement in SHG. Conversely, only 40% of the respondents have shown a lack of interest in participating in grammesabha meetings. It is imperative to involve women members in the meetings and enhance the effectiveness of the panchayats in order to promote the development of rural areas. The survey reveals that a significant majority, namely over three-fourths of the respondents, have become politically engaged after joining the SHG. Conversely, just 23.33% of the members in the study region remain inactive in terms of political involvement after joining the SHG.

The establishment of a Self-Help Group (SHG) is intended to enhance the economic well-being of its members, and their engagement in political activities will additionally strengthen their social empowerment. The primary goal of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is to empower individuals from

economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Their participation in politics should be regarded as a chance for them to gain proximity to or become active participants in positions of authority. From the study area, it is evident that among the 120 sample respondents, only 12.5% expressed the view that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have transformed into a political party. Most researchers concur that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) serve as the primary means for politically empowering women at the grassroots level. Within the designated research zone. Among the 120 participants surveyed, 70.3% expressed strong agreement, while just 29.17% had not accepted due to a lack of understanding.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, our findings underscore the pivotal role that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play in fostering both social and political empowerment among women. SHG members demonstrate a heightened capacity for community engagement, particularly in their interactions with other women and in their active participation in local governance. Their increased political awareness, as evidenced by the significant number of women participating in voting and village meetings, illustrates the profound impact of SHGs on empowering women to exercise their rights and influence community decisions.

Overall, the majority of the respondents recognize the empowering potential of SHGs, particularly in terms of political engagement. Therefore, it is recommended that efforts be made to further integrate women into local governance structures and to support their continued political participation, ensuring that the benefits of SHG membership extend beyond economic gains to include meaningful social and political empowerment.

Reference:

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