

Economic Empowerment of Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Rajasthan through Self- help Group: A Case of SAKHI

Anju Singh Choudhary

Faculty, CESBM MDS University, Ajmer
E-mail: anjusinghchoudhary@gmail.com

Abstract—Women are the nucleus of bringing growth in an entire family, community or any nation. If women are empowered they can bring an overall upliftment in the entire society. Besides providing them with job opportunities on of the best way to make them socially and economically independent is by effectively generating self-employment opportunities among them in their own areas. Self help Group play an important role as they reach the rural and remote areas and create awareness among the local people through local citizens. Hindustan Zinc has been engaged in empowerment of rural women through formation of self help-groups since 2006. The present paper makes a eloquent explanation of the self help group initiative of Hindustan Zinc- Sakhi. The objective of the study is to communicate its impact on rural women entrepreneurs of Rajasthan. Using case study and historical survey approaches, the authors formulate conclusions about the organizations linking it with the broader objective of rural women empowerment.

Keyword: Economic Empowerment, Rural Women Entrepreneurs, Sakhi, Self help Group

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-Help Group (SHG) is a small voluntary association of poor people, preferably from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of solving their common problems through self-help and mutual help. The SHG promotes small savings among its members which are kept with a bank. This common fund is in the name of the SHG. Usually, the number of members in one SHG does not exceed twenty. Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Social Workers, health workers, village level workers, etc Informal Associations of local people Development oriented government departments, Banks, Bank personnel, Mahila Mandals, Yuvak Mandals, Facilitators, other individuals (in their personal capacities) Farmers' Clubs under the Vikas Volunteer Vahini (VVV) Programme of NABARD and Other development institutions.

An SHG's originated in the year 1975 at Bangladesh by Mohammed Yunus. In the eighties, it was a serious attempt by the Government of India to promote an apex bank to take care of the financial needs of the poor, informal sector and rural areas. And then, NABARD took steps during that period and initiated a search for alternative methods to fulfill the financial

needs of the rural poor and informal sector. NABARD initiated in 1986-87, but the real effort was taken after 1991-92 from the linkage of SHGs with the banks. In other words, the Self Help Group (SHG) in India has come a long way, since its inception in 1992. The spread of SHGs in India has been phenomenal. It has made dramatic progress from 500 groups in 1992 (Titus 2002) to some 16, 18,456 groups that have taken loans from banks. About 24.25 million poor households have gained access to formal banking system through SHG-bank linkage programme and 90% of these groups are only women groups (NABARD2005). The NABARD (2006) homepage declares that more than 400 women join the SHG movement every hour and an NGO joins the Micro-Finance Programme every day. There are also agencies which provide bulk funds to the system through NGOs.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF SHGS IN INDIA (2005-06 TO 2009-10)

YEAR	Number of SHGs	Growth Rate
2005-06	2238565	109.47
2006-07	2924973	30.66
2007-08	5009794	71.28
2008-09	6121147	22.2
2009-10	6959250	13.6

Source: NABARD Reports 2005-06 to 2009-10

In Rajasthan, there are approximately 1.5 lakh self help groups of women. Department of women and child development has promoted about 50% of these groups. Other government departments under developmental schemes like SGSY, Watershed Development etc, have organized other 20-25% groups. NGOs have promoted remaining 25-30% groups. About 40% SHGs have been able to take loan from Banks, about 70% of SHGs are located on 30% of the districts, large number of poor are still beyond the reach of SHGs and formal financial institutions.

TABLE 2: PROGRESS OF WOMEN SHG's AS ON 2009-10

Particulars	Total SHGs (lakh)	Women SHGs (lakh)	% of Women SHGs to Total SHGs	Total Amount (crore)	Women SHGs Amount (crore)	% of Women SHGs Amount to Total SHGs Amount
Saving linked SHGs	69.5	53.10	76.3	6198.7	4498.6	72.57
Loan Disbursed	15.8	12.9	81.50	14453.3	12429.3	85.99
Loan Outstanding	48.51	38.91	80.33	28038.38	23030.36	82.14

Source: Status of micro Finance 2009-10, NABARD

2. WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Women entrepreneurs may be defined as a woman or groups of women who initiate, organize and run a business enterprise. Women entrepreneurship makes them economically strong and gives the freedom to take decisions since women entrepreneurs initiate, organize and operate the business enterprise. The Government of India has defined women enterprise as an industrial unit where one or a group of women owned at least 51 per cent share in the capital and at least 51 per cent employment generated by the enterprise should be for women only. Women entrepreneurs, who were confined to traditional areas like food, fruits, vegetables, pickles, papads, tailoring etc., have shifted to non-traditional areas like engineering, jewellery, handicraft, electronics, manufacturing etc. (Choudhary.N, 2009) SHG- banking linkage model is an important model of micro-finance which helps their members to start their own business. SHGs in rural area have empowered illiterate and poor women by linking them to the mainstream banking system. Most women remain deprived of employment opportunities as wage workers because of their family responsibilities, social and cultural barriers. In this context, self-employment or setting up enterprise of their own may become an opportunity for women, to get an income and to acquire financial security in this regard Self Help Groups can play major role and development of entrepreneurship can help reduce the problem of unemployment and several social problems in the society that go with it. Therefore, Entrepreneurship development among women can be considered as a possible approach to economic empowerment of women.

Realizing its role as a corporate towards the society the Vedanta Group has always set some targets making it a part of its Corporate Social Responsibility. The seven discrete focus areas in their community programmes are: health, education,

sustainable livelihoods, women's empowerment, community asset creation, bio-investment and integrated village development. These areas have been chosen due to the relevance they have to the development agendas of their major host countries, and regional areas of operation. They focus especially for the rural women. The table below shows the efforts by the Vedanta Group for the rural women. Hindustan Zinc as a part of Vedanta Group has further worked on these goals with the formation of Sakhi.

Table 3: Women Empowerment Efforts by Vedanta Group

	Total
Number of Self Help Groups (SHGs)	1,275
Women members of SHGs	17,587
SHGs engaged in income generation activities	328
No. of women-established micro-enterprises	489
Average monthly income of women entrepreneurs in US\$	110

3. SAKHI- TOWARDS GOAL OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women in rural Rajasthan are for a change. Their social and economic conditions are changing and they are emerging as self reliant, self independent, micro entrepreneur, and decision makers in their house. The women of rural Rajasthan are experiencing women empowerment. Their house hold income is increasing multi-fold and there is a significant change in their quality of life. The credit goes to forming of Self Help Groups that has participation of about 10-12 rural women, primarily of the same village and surrounding. Hindustan Zinc has been engaged in empowerment of rural women through formation of self-help-groups since 2006. Each group has about 12-15 rural women and these women are being developed as rural women entrepreneurs, who are now managing their own micro-enterprises. Hindustan Zinc has developed such 475 self-help-groups in Rajasthan reaching out to 6,000 rural and tribal women. All these groups are popularly known as "Sakhi'-Self-help-groups" and these rural entrepreneurs are addressed as 'Sakhi'. "Sakhi" campaign of Hindustan Zinc has brought focus towards the need for social and economic empowerment of these rural women.

Hindustan Zinc Campaign has two broad objectives.

- 1) To bring all the Hindustan Zinc Self- Help Groups, rural and tribal women under single umbrella of sakhi and to reckon them as a collective force to the outside world.
- 2) To provide them training and exposure that includes searching for new markets for products selling, bringing sakhi products online and provide micro financing.

Rajasthan is emerging as one of the leading State in India in development of Self Help Groups (SHGs). Hindustan Zinc alone facilitates 215 Self Help Groups in the district of Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara and Rajsamand. More than 3,500 women are associated with these 215 Self Help Groups in the State. The important part is that all the Self Help Groups are linked with the banks and operate their bank accounts. The cumulative savings of these groups is about Rs. 45 Lacs and about 80% of these Self Help Groups have received a loan of about Rs. 50 lacs from the banks. With the empowerment has come the awareness and importance of sanitation, education, health and nutrition amongst these women. They are now regularly sending their children to school. Hindustan Zinc has been engaged in empowerment of rural women through formation of self-help-groups since 2005-06. Each group has about 12-15 rural and tribal women and these women are being developed as rural women entrepreneurs who are managing their own micro - enterprises. The self-help-group training starts with teaching them thrift savings, linking them with banks and then segregating them as per their interests for extensive vocational training in farm and non-farm based sector. Today, Hindustan Zinc has more than 450 Sakhi-self-help-groups across five districts of Rajasthan: Udaipur, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara and Ajmer.

4. TRAINING WOMEN AT SAKHI

The self-help-group training starts with teaching women thrift savings, linking them with banks and then segregating them as per their interests for extensive vocational training in farm and non-farm based sector. Interaction with these women has always been a challenge as these women are primarily from remote villages and are not quite open for dialogue or conversation. Family pressure and their household work further adds up to this pressure. This makes the task of community connect team of Hindustan Zinc more difficult. Convincing these women and then their families takes days of regular interaction and motivation. Finally, when these women see their siblings come out of their homes and improve their social and economic condition, they agree. Bringing rural women together was not easy as they had clashes of interest or rural beliefs and also difference of temperament.

- But once they came together, they started working like a strong team where they extended a helping hand to one another and ensured their SHG came out with the best of products," he said.
- Each SHG has about 10-15 women who are trained and linked to the market for selling their products. Finance from banks for raw material is also facilitated.
- Most of the rural women were illiterate and Hindustan Zinc arranged for adult-education classes in villages.
- Vedanta has also developed and organised more than 2000 similar SHGs in Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Odisha and even in Zambia in Africa.
- A number of NGOs across India and banks like HDFC Bank, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur and other local banks have come forward to provide financial assistance to the members of the SHGs..
- These rural women once trained in vocational traits, start getting orders from the different markets, towns as well as big cities.
- A coordinator has been kept by the company for managing a cluster of Sakhi self-help-groups who helps in getting orders for these Sakhi self-help-groups and coordinates the production.
- Not every woman wants to get trained in garments, accessories, home-furnishing or other products; some are inclined to continue with their ancestral trait like agriculture and livestock development. For these women, special projects and training sessions are developed and organised like cash crop cultivation, water harvesting, green-house development, seeds selection, etc.
- For women connected with livestock, training is given on breeding and artificial insemination, managing livestock, immunisation etc.
- The Company has been educating them on savings, inter-lending and capacity building, including, providing need based training to the members.
- Linking them with banks, and guiding them for opening micro enterprises.
- The role of Hindustan Zinc is important in terms of making these women participate in the Panchayat affairs, decision making in issues within their houses, at village level, and also uplifting their quality of life.
- Efforts to train women through workshops . Like 50 rural and tribal Women got together to participate in the First Workshop The workshop was held at Vidhya Bhawan Auditorium in Udaipur in September 2014. The workshop saw discussion and interactive sessions on changing scenario in the garments and home-furnishing market, development of handicraft industry, quality check in production, colour combination as per changing seasons, production as per current fashion trends and pricing of the products.

With emphasis on self independence and improving their quality of life, about 60% members have opted and established their own micro-enterprise , viz. vegetable cultivation, mini dairy, tailoring shop, grocery shops, spice grinding units, imitation jewellery shop to name a few. This has brought a significant change in their economic conditions. On an average there has been an increase in their monthly income to the tune of Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5,000. The biggest concern is that most of these women are not literate; so, they have to depend on others to operate their bank accounts and handle finances. Although the groups meet every month to discuss socially relevant issues such as childcare, family planning and sanitation, many members fail to benefit because they are not educated. In a country where women empowerment in rural

area plays an important role in the economic development of the nation, the participation of Corporates in forming of SHGs is important.

5. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the present paper is to depict the role played by Hindustan Zinc to empower the rural women of Rajasthan. It quotes the importance of social and economic independence of the rural women in the development and growth of any nation.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Self-help groups are an empowering agent for the downtrodden. It acts as a catalyst of change for the underprivileged people of any nation. Corporates on the other hand have all the resources in their hand, like financial, production, human resource and knowledge base. They can easily approach any remote areas as no one can. The social responsibility of these organisations is much greater than any. Hindustan zinc has made a strong effort in meeting the needs of the society through its Sakhi Pariyojana.

The present paper is a descriptive research paper based on secondary data. Data have been found out from different websites, books, research paper and journals, respective governments and non government agencies such as UNESCO, ICOMOS, IUCN, GHF, etc.

7. LITERATURE REVIEW

Indhumathi and Palanivelu (2013) 'Women Empowerment through Self – Help Group' reveals that the formation of SHGs has led to a member of positive feature. The most important achieved aspect is that the earlier belief that the poor are unbankable and less credit worthy has been wrong. The success of any strategy of woman empowerment depends upon the following factors: level of education, hard work, social customs, family planning, environment and collective strategies beyond the microcredit to increase the endowments of the woman enhance their exchange outcomes vis-a-vis the socio culture and political spaces are required for the women empowerment.

Parker (2013) in his article "Empowering Women Through Microfinance in India" depicted that across the globe, but especially in Asia, and particularly in areas where rural population density is relatively high, microfinance can be an extremely effective poverty reduction tool. Microfinance enterprises can also potentially be very profitable undertakings as excess urban capital is redirected to credit starved rural areas. Modern microcredit is a relatively new phenomenon and as such some growing pains should be expected.

Dr. Bhatt and Rajdev (2012) in their study "An Analysis of Factors Empowering Women Through Microfinance" stated that the research study aimed at checking the impact of microfinance on women empowerment. From the study it can be concluded that microfinance institution helps in poverty alleviation and through that standard of living of women also improves. The SHG's have provided social opportunities to make them aware about these rights, entitlements and development programmes as well as starting income generation activities for substantial earnings and self-employment.

Dr. DhirajJain and MsBhagayashree Jain (2012) in their study "Does Microfinance Empower Rural Women?- A Empirical Study in Udaipur District, Rajasthan" revealed that Microfinance program like the SHGs in India have been promoted for their positive economic impact and the belief that they empower women. The study result strongly demonstrates that there is a significant increase in the women empowerment of the SHGs members. However, social backwardness, indebtedness and presence of other microcredit programs in the same or nearby villages have a significant positive influence on women's participation in this program.

Rajendran and Dr.R.P.Raja (2011) in their study "Does Micro Finance Empower Rural Women?- A study in Vellore District, Tamil Nadu" summarizes that there is an appreciable empowerment in the political space than economic empowerment and there was negligible social empowerment as a result of participating in microfinance through the SHG programme.

Singh & Singh (2010) in their study 'Loan default by SHGs in Rajasthan' unraveled many interesting dimensions of Self Help Groups and reinforced the significance of focusing on the core principles of SHG formation and promotion as identified by some of the earlier enquiries into SHG quality and performance. The study findings revealed that the ad hoc formation of groups, lack of emphasis on group development, widespread laxity in writing and absence of basic books of record, lack of attention to member savings, low incidence of inter-loaning, appropriation of benefits by the leaders/ office bearers, credit to group without estimating credit needs of members, lack of effective grading by banks are the defining characteristics of the groups.

Deininger & Liu (2009) in his study 'Longer-Term Economic Impacts of Self-Help Groups in India' suggests that SGH's a program that not only fosters group formation but also supports more mature groups through federation and credit access can have significant economic benefits in the long term. To assess the overall desirability and impact of such programs, a key question relates to the extent to which benefits will be maintained once outside support is terminated. The answer will at least partly depend on whether either the SHGs established by the program continue to operate –

possibly adjusting the services offered to the level of member development – and, related to this, whether beneficiary households will be able to use the one-time injection of credit and capacity to push them on a permanently higher trajectory of economic activity and asset accumulation.

Ranjula Bali Swainan and Fan Yang Wallentin (2009) in their study “Does microfinance empower women evidence from Self-Help Groups in India” strongly concluded in their study that SHG members were empowered by participating in microfinance program in the sense that they could have a greater propensity to resist existing gender norms and culture that restrict their ability to develop and make choices.

Prof. Singh (2008) in his study “Micro Finance and Empowerment of Scheduled Caste Women: An Impact Study of SHGs in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal” stated that there has been a paradigm shift in development and governance. Democratic decentralization, partnership with NGO’s, empowering community based organizations, participatory development, 223sustainable growth and equity etc. have proved to be instrumental in people participation in development and governance as well as their empowerment.

8. SUCCESS STORIES OF “SAKHI” WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS- SOME CASES

- **Lalita Choudhary**, a 30 year old house wife belongs to a lower middle class family staying in Gudli, Udaipur. Few years back, she and her family had to struggle a lot as her husband’s job was not sufficient to feed the family of five. To fulfill the needs and to meet day to day expenses, Lalita started working as an Akaal Rahat Worker where she used to get a 3 kg of wheat after the whole day labour. But she was unhappy as after putting so much hard work, her children’s education and other requirements still remained unattended. Then she was approached by Hindustan Zinc through its women empowerment program in 2006 to join Self Help Group. She decided to give it a try and joined it that changed her life and this time it was a sustainable change. Under the program, she was first imparted training on stitching and tailoring at sewing centre in her Kalika Mata Self Help Group. There, Lalita and other 20 women were trained for around 6 months on skill development. After training, Lalita started working from home where she used to stitch clothes free of cost in order to enhance her skills. After seeing her work inspiration, one NGO approached her and offered the job of a Master Trainer in a 10 day tailoring program far from village. In 2008, Lalita applied and got the job as a Master Trainer in Sewing Center program of Hindustan Zinc in Debari. Things have changed for Lalita; she is now more confident, independent, socio-economically sound and most importantly has gained respect in her community and village. She has completed 12 batches and has trained about 300 rural women. Lalita is now

supporting her family financially while earning more than Rs 5000/- per month and with this money she is not only giving her children quality education.

- **Meena Kumari** an SHG Beneficiary of Hindustan Zinc whose hand-stitched craft embodies the spirit of Rajputs in various artifacts and dresses. By joining the local Self Help Group supported by Hindustan Zinc, this woman of Debari village has acquired stitching and embroidery skills and has become an entrepreneur.
- **Shahnaz Hussain** lost her husband 15 years ago, her life came to a standstill. The thought of funding the education of her two children and bearing the family's expenses almost sent the homemaker from a Rajasthan village into depression. Speaking to other women in her Bichhdi village in Udaipur district, she came in touch with the Jai Hind self-help-group (SHG), which trained her in stitching and tailoring. Today, she is one of the many businesswomen of rural Rajasthan supported by Hindustan Zinc. The Jai Hind SHG not only helped her get educated but also empowered her socially and economically. Shahnaz is one of the 6,000 rural women who have been able to support their families by joining Hindustan Zinc's SHGs launched in 2006.
- **Dalla Soni** from Rajsamand, near Udaipur joined the Joganiya Mata SHG that was engaged in micro-enterprises. Along with 15 other women she learnt meenakari and tailoring, and have tied up with the exploration department of Hindustan Zinc for making cotton bags - an order worth Rs.75,000.
- **Radha Somani** of Agucha village, took a loan of Rs. 10,000 and started a Manihari Shop. Today she earns about Rs. 4,000/- per month. She is paying pack her installment and also her sons college fees.
- **Shanti Mali** is about 56 years of age, widow with one son. She was working as daily wage and fell ill. She took a loan of Rs. 15,000/- and started cultivating vegetables in 2 bighas of land. Today her daily earnings are over Rs. 500/-. She has become a small entrepreneur now.

The above stories of the rural women of Rajasthan are clearly stating the importance of Sakhi as a change agent. They have imbibed in these underprivileged women the enthusiasm to be independent economically and to help their family improve the standard of living.

9. CONCLUSION

Women in rural Rajasthan are for a change. Their social and economic conditions are changing and they are emerging as self reliant, self independent, micro entrepreneur, and decision makers in their house. The women of rural Rajasthan are experiencing women empowerment. Their house hold income is increasing multi-fold and there is a significant change in their quality of life. The credit goes to forming of Self Help Groups that has participation of about 10-12 rural women,

primarily of the same village and surrounding. Rural women have always proved their mettle and strength in every sphere of life. May it be house-hold work, agriculture, handicrafts, tailoring, traditional crafts or liberal arts, rural women of India have always been in front and have even dominated the global fashion industry with their traditional art and skills. The efforts of the Hindustan Zinc are commendable and is for the sustainable development of the society. Moreover, they are continuing their efforts by taking more programs on health, cleanliness and education. These programs are setting up an illustration for the other corporate of the country to put forward their foot in the transformation of the Indian rural society, especially the women.

REFERENCES

- [1] Indhumathi C. and Dr. Palanivelu P.(2013), 'Women Empowerment through Self – Help Group' Volume : 2 Issue : 6, June 2013, ISSN No 2277 – 8160, Global Research Finance.
- [2] James Parker(2013) "Empowering Women Through Microfinance in India" Pacific Money Economics and Business <http://thediplomat.com/pacificmoney/2013/03/13/>.
- [3] Dr. Kaushal A. Bhatt and Mr. Amit A. Rajdev "An Analysis of Factors Empowering Women Through Microfinance" ParipeX - Indian Journal Of Research, Volume I, Issue 11, November 2012 , pp-50-52
- [4] Jain Dhiraj and Jain Bhagayashree Jain (2012), 'Does Microfinance Empower Rural Women?- A Empirical Study in Udaipur District, Rajasthan', Research world , Journal of Arts, Science and Commerce, Volume III, Issue 2(1), April 2012, pp:76-89.
- [5] Rajendran K and Dr. Raja R.P. (2011), 'Does Micro Finance Empower Rural Women?-A study in Vellore District, TamilNadu' Indian Journal of Finance, November 2011, pp:47- 55.
- [6] Singh Jaipal and Singh Anil Kumar(2010), 'Loan default by SHGs in Rajasthan', center for macro finance,
- [7] Deininger Klaus and Liu Yanyan(2009), 'Longer-Term Economic Impacts of Self-Help Groups in India' The World Bank Development Research Group ,Sustainable Rural and Urban Development Team March 2009.
- [8] Swaina Bali Ranjula and Wallenin Fan Yang (2009) "Does microfinance empower women evidence from Self-Help Groups in India" International Review of Applied Economics, Volume 23, No.5, pp:541-556. 9) Singh S.K. (2008), 'Micro Finance and Empowerment of Scheduled Caste Women: An Impact Study of SHGs in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal' World Bank .org
- [9] <http://vedantasakhi.blogspot.in/>
- [10] <http://udaipurtimes.com/hindustan-zinc-announces-sakhi-awards-2014/>