

Scheduled Caste Women Empowerment Through Self-Help Groups



Social Science

KEYWORDS:

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ABSTRACT

Scheduled Castes are deprived castes in the society and as such, they were given reservation in education and employment. SC women are deprived from both caste and gender as they are exploited by their family members and society. The reservation in education and employment is of no use for poor and illiterate rural women of scheduled caste. Hence, Self-Help Groups are formed by these women. The Self-Help Groups have helped to reduce caste barriers and also increasing socio-economic status of the scheduled caste women in villages. The present study is based on field based survey of 400 scheduled caste women in Kalaburagi district of Karnataka.

Introduction:

Scheduled Castes (SCs), major castes under these castes are formerly untouchables. Consequent to their deprivation in many of the castes grouped under scheduled castes, they are backward in terms of education, employment, culture, economically and politically. The women of scheduled castes are still more backward as they are deprived due to their caste, gender and poverty.

Women empowerment is multi-dimensional as increasing legal awareness and formulation of legislations for protection of women is legal empowerment of women, increasing economic status by encouraging income generating activities and mobilizing savings through formation of Self-Help Groups for rural women is economic empowerment and reservation in Panchayat participation is political participation. In this way, women empowerment through formation of Self-Help Groups was initiated by the Government.

Reservation in education and employment is of no use for the scheduled caste women, who are illiterates or low educated and even middle aged. In this regard, incomes generating activities or self-employment are preferred for these women. To start income generating activities, it is essential that there is need for capital investment and for this purpose; women empowerment by formation of Self-Help Groups was started. A Self-Help group is a small voluntary association of poor people preferably from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of saving their common problems through self-Help. The number of members in one SHG does not exceed 20 (Surender and Manoj Kumar, 2010). The size is limited to 20 because any group larger than this would need to be registered under the India legal system. Voluntarily coming together to save small amounts regularly. They mutually agree to contribute to a common fund and to meet their emergency needs on mutual help basis. The group member use collective wisdom and peer pressure to ensure proper end use of credit and timely repayment thereof. Infect peer pressure had been recognized as an effective substitute for collaterals. An economically poor individual gains strength as part of a group besides financing through SHGs reduce transaction costs for both lenders and borrows while lenders have to handle only a single SHGs account intends of a large number of small sized individual accounts, borrowers as a part of a SHG cut down expenses on travel (to and from the branch and other places) for completing paper work and on the loss of workdays in canvassing for loans (Angel Anila, 2012).

It is essential to know whether the scheduled caste women have gained benefits from Self-Help Groups and the present study is made in backward area of Hyderabad-Karnataka region that is in Kalaburagi district. The objectives and methodology of the study are as under.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study is made:

- ❖ To know the social background of scheduled caste women members of Self-Help Groups in Kalaburagi district; and
- ❖ To study whether the socio-economic status of scheduled caste women at rural areas are declined due to women empowerment activities, especially through Self-Help Groups.

Methodology and Limitations:

The theoretical background for the present study is derived from secondary literature published in journals and books. Based on the theoretical background, it was decided to interview the scheduled caste women members of Self-Help Groups formed in different villages of Kalaburagi district. Totally, 400 scheduled caste women were interviewed to collect the primary data and the collected primary data is analyzed and discussed as under.

Analysis and Discussion:

The age plays significant role in determining the knowledge of scheduled caste women. It also determines the urge to work and participating in income generating activities of the Self-Help Groups. In this regard, the age-wise distribution of the respondents is shown as under.

Table No. 1. Age-wise Distribution of the Respondents

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
18 to 25 Years	98	24.5
26 to 35 Years	152	38.0
36 to 45 Years	69	17.2
45 & Above	81	20.2
Total	400	100

The age of the respondents shows that, 152 (38.0%) are between the age groups of 26 to 35 years followed by, 98 (24.5%) are between the age group of 18 to 25 years, 81 (20.2%) are of more than 45 years and the remaining 69 (17.2%) are between 36 to 45 years. It shows that middle aged scheduled caste women are more enthusiastic in participation of Self-Help Group activities.

Education of the scheduled caste women helps their empowerment. If the SC women are highly educated, then they don't need empowerment and if the SC women are illiterates, they are more prone to exploitation and discrimination and as such, they need to be empowered. In this regard, the collected primary data on education of the respondents is as under.

Table No. 2. Education Level of Respondents

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	87	21.7
Primary/ Secondary	216	54.0
Under-Graduate	63	15.7
Graduate	34	8.5
Any Other	--	--
Total	400	100

The education of the respondents revealed that, 87 (21.7%) have not went to schools and are illiterates, 216 (54.0%) have completed primary or secondary education, 63 (15.7%) are under-graduates and 34 (8.5%) are graduates. It shows that education of majority of the respondents is lower or illiterates. Hence, empowerment is essentially needed for these women to strengthen them in society and also to provide them equal status in the society.

The scheduled caste women now engaged in different income generating activities with the help of NGOs and forming Self-Help Groups. In this regard, the occupations of the respondents are shown as under.

Table No. 3. Occupation of the Respondents

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agriculture	92	23.0
Business/ Self-employment	173	43.2
Seasonal/ Unorganized Sector	129	32.2
Any Other	06	1.5
Total	400	100

It is highlighted on the occupations of the respondents that, 92 (23.0%) are working in agriculture, 173 (43.2%) are engaged in business or self-employment, 129 (32.2%) are working in seasonal employment or in unorganized sector and 06 (1.5%) are also working in other types of occupations. It shows that, majority of the respondents are working in occupations, where there is more exploitation from the employers, except in their own business or self-employment. Income is also flexible and lower in these occupations.

Many of the studies have been already proved that increase in economic status lead to increase in social status. In this regard, information collected on annual income of the families of the respondents is as under.

Table No. 4. Annual Income of Family

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than Rs. 24000	31	7.7
Rs. 24001 to Rs. 48000	64	16.0
Rs. 48001 to Rs. 1 lakh	173	43.2
Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 2 lakhs	127	31.7
More than Rs. 2 lakhs	05	1.2
Total	400	100

Annual income of the families of the respondents shows that, 31 (7.7%) have family income of less than Rs.24000, 64 (16.0%) have family income between Rs. 24001 to Rs. 48000, 173 (43.2%) of the respondents have annual family income of Rs. 48001 to Rs. 1 lakh, 127 (31.7%) have annual family income of family between Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 2 lakhs and only 05 (1.2%) have family income of more than Rs. 2 lakhs per annum. It shows that majority of the respondents are living families with lower income class families.

The scheduled castes were untouchables before independence and now also in few of the rural areas, it is not completely banned. Further, social discrimination and exploitation of scheduled castes is prevailed in society due to orthodox social

culture. Due to caste associated stigma, the scheduled castes are facing many problems in society, even now. Hence, information was collected from the respondents on the problems faced by their families in society due to their caste and gender and tabulated as under.

Table No. 5. Family Faced Problems due to Caste

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Verbal Abuse by Forward Castes in Public	114	28.5
Atrocities & Harassment by Forward Castes	48	12.0
Caste based Social Discrimination & Alienation	173	43.2
Lower Status in Society due to Caste	251	62.7
Restrictions to enter Public Places	82	20.5
Any Other	14	3.5
None	93	23.2
Total	400	100

Surprisingly, it is noted that, many of the respondents and their family members are facing more than one type of problems in society due to their caste and gender. Particularly, of all the respondents, 114 (28.5%) have stated that their family members have faced verbal abuse by forward castes in public, 48 (12.0%) have expressed that their family members faced atrocities and harassment by forward castes, 173 (43.2%) have remarked that their family members faced caste based social discrimination and alienation, 251 (62.7%) have opined that their family members faced lower status in society due to caste, only 82 (20.5%) have faced restrictions to enter public places, 14 (3.5%) have mentioned that they are also facing other problems and only 93 (23.2%) have stated that they have not faced any problems in society. It is surprising to note that though Indian Constitution emphasized caste and gender equality, still the scheduled caste women and their family members are facing many of the problems due to their caste and gender. The scheduled castes are also aware about their rights regarding the social equality. As such, they have also taken measures to solve their problems. In this regard, the measures and actions taken by the respondents or their family members against the above stated problems are shown as under.

Table No. 6. Measures/ Actions Taken against Caste based Atrocities

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Registered Complaint with Police	58	14.5
Discussed & Compromised in Panchayats	121	30.2
Frequent Clashes with Forward Castes	43	10.7
Reported to Scheduled Caste Associations	106	26.5
Any Other	25	6.2
Nothing	111	27.7
Not Applicable	93	23.2
Total	400	100

It is observed from the above table that, many of the respondents and their family members have taken more than one type of actions or measures to control atrocities on them. Particularly, 58 (14.5%) have stated that they have registered complaints with Police, 121 (30.2%) have mentioned that they have discussed their problems in panchayats and compromised, 43 (10.7%) have expressed that there are frequent clashes with forward castes, 106 (26.5%) have remarked that they have reported problems faced by the scheduled castes to scheduled caste associations, 25 (6.2%) have opined that they have taken other measures, 111 (27.7%) have not done anything and it is not applicable to

93 (23.2%) of the respondents as they have not faced any type of atrocities and harassment from forward castes. It is surprising to note that many of the respondents have stated that there are frequent clashes with forward castes and such development is not healthy in social environment. The panchayats and police have to take initiation to solve the problems of forward castes and scheduled castes, so that there should be cordial environment in society.

The scheduled caste women are facing many problems due to caste based discrimination and gender based inequality. Hence, information was collected from the respondents on how to control these problems in society and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 7. Measures to Control Caste based Discrimination and Gender Based Inequality

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Higher Education of SC Women	289	72.2
Employment of SC Women in Organized Sector	235	58.7
Increased Awareness in Society	146	36.5
Legal Controls	133	33.2
Separate Reservations for SC Women	116	29.0
Any Other	28	7.0
Total	400	100

There is more than one type of measures as suggested by the respondents to control caste based discrimination and gender based inequality. Among all the respondents, 289 (72.2%) have expressed that there is need to increase higher education among scheduled caste women, 235 (58.7%) have opined that there is need for scheduled caste women in organized sector, 146 (36.5%) have felt that there is need for increased awareness in society, 133 (33.2%) have remarked that there is need for legal controls against discrimination and inequality, 116 (29.0%) have mentioned that there is need for separate reservation for scheduled caste women and 28 (7.0%) have also given other measures to remove caste and gender based inequalities and discrimination.

it is noted that many of the Self-Help Groups are formed on the basis of individual community or group of communities under scheduled castes or all castes together. In this regard, information on the nature of Self-Help Groups formed is collected and tabulated as under.

Table No. 8. Nature of Self-Help Groups

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Single/ Few Associated Communities	33	8.2
All Communities grouped under Scheduled Caste	127	31.7
Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Only	54	13.5
All Castes including Forward Castes	186	46.5
Total	400	100

The nature of Self-Help Groups for which the respondents are members revealed that, 33 (8.2%) are members to the Self-Help Groups which are formed by single or only few associated communities under scheduled castes, 127 (31.7%) are members to Self-Help Groups which are formed by all castes grouped under the scheduled castes, 54 (13.5%) of the respondents are members to Self-Help Groups formed by all communities under scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and 186 (46.5%) of the respondents

are members to Self-Help Groups which formed by women from all castes including forward castes. It is noted that, scheduled castes were discriminated earlier due to their castes, but due to formation of Self-Help Groups, majority of the scheduled caste women are participating in Self-Help Groups with women of all castes equally. Hence, it can be concluded that Self-Help Groups are filling the caste based gaps in villages.

The Self-Help Groups were formed to initiate self-employment or income generating activities among rural women and thereby improvement in economic status of rural women. Hence, it is essential to know whether the Self-Help Groups have improved the economic status of the scheduled caste women. For this purpose, primary data was collected from the respondents on the economic status of scheduled caste women before joining to Self-Help Groups and presented in the following table.

Table No. 9. Economic Status Before Joining Self-Help Groups

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Poor/ Unsatisfactory	214	53.2
Self-Sufficient	77	19.2
Self-Sufficient but Economically Dependent	109	27.2
Any Other	--	--
Total	400	100

It is noted from the above table that the economic status of the respondents before joining to Self-Help Groups revealed that, the economic status of 214 (53.2%) of the respondents was poor or unsatisfactory, that of 77 (19.2%) of the respondents was self-sufficient and economic status of 109 (27.2%) of the respondents was self-sufficient but they were economically dependent on others. It shows that the economic status of a great majority of the respondents was poor, unsatisfactory or economically dependent on others.

After joining to Self-Help Groups, the scheduled caste women have started their own income generating activities such as Agarbatti making, candle making, knitting, tailoring, weaving, handicrafts, etc. In this respect, the income generating activities of the respondents are as under.

Table No. 10. Nature of Income Generating Activities After Joining Self-Help Groups

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Animal Husbandry, Fishing, Poultry, etc.	98	24.5
Home Food Products, Hotels, Bakery, etc.	81	20.2
Agarbatti, Candle production, etc.	28	7.0
Knitting, Stitching, Weaving, etc.	106	26.5
Rural Artistic Works, Handicrafts, etc.	44	11.0
Any Other	05	1.2
None	38	9.5
Total	400	100

The nature of income generating activities after joining Self-Help Groups as stated by the respondents revealed that, 98 (24.5%) are working in animal husbandry, fishing, poultry, etc, 81 (20.2%) are engaged in production of home food products, hotels, bakery items, etc, 28 (7.0%) are working in Agarbatti or candle making, etc, 106 (26.5%) are engaged in knitting, stitching, weaving, etc., 44 (11.0%) are engaged in rural artistic works, handicrafts, etc, 05 (1.2%) are working in other types of works and only 38 (9.5%) are unemployed and doing nothing. It is noted that, Self-Help Groups are promoting the self-employment or income generating activities by rural women.

By engaging themselves in income generating activities, the respondents are conducting the business and making the profits. The monthly profits made by the respondents from their income generating activities are as under.

Table No. 11. Monthly Income from Income Generating Activities

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than Rs. 1000	35	8.7
Rs. 1001 to Rs. 2000	172	43.0
Rs. 2000 to Rs. 3000	102	25.5
Rs. 3001 to Rs. 5000	53	13.2
More than Rs. 5000	--	--
Not Applicable	38	9.5
Total	400	100

It is observed from the above table that, monthly income of the respondents from the income generating activities shows that, 35 (8.7%) are earning less than Rs. 1000 per month, 172 (43.0%) have profit or monthly income between Rs. 1001 to Rs. 2000, 102 (25.5%) of the respondents are earning monthly profits between Rs. 3001 to Rs. 5000 and it is not applicable to 38 (9.5%) of the respondents as they are not engaged in income generating activities. It is noted that the profit from income generating activities is low.

Of course, the income of the respondents is increased due to their participation in income generating activities and as such, they have gained economic status. As such, it was asked to the respondents that whether their status and respect has changed in family and society and the collected primary data is shown as under.

Table No. 12. Change in Social Status and Respect After Joining Self-Help Groups

Particulars	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Social Status & Respect Increased in Family	215	53.7
Social Status & Respect Increased in Society	134	33.5
Caste & Gender Equality Achieved in Society	89	22.2
No Difference in Social Status and Respect	185	46.2
Total	400	100

Regarding the change in social status and respect after joining to Self-Help Groups, it is highlighted that, many of the respondents have given change in more than one type of status. Particularly, 215 (53.7%) have remarked that there is increase in social status and respect in their families, 134 (33.5%) have mentioned that there is increase in social status and respect in society, 89 (22.2%) have stated that the caste and gender equality is achieved in society and 185 (46.2%) have not found any of the differences in their social status and respect.

Conclusion:

It is highlighted from the above study that the Self-Help Groups formed by the scheduled caste women helped to bridge gap between different castes in the villages. Further, scheduled caste women have also gained economic benefits such as profit from income generating activities, loans from banks and Self-Help Groups, etc. Consequently, there is considerable decline in caste based atrocities on scheduled castes in the villages. Still, it is suggested to the NGOs, Banks and Panchayats to promote the formation of Self-Help Groups with memberships from all castes in villages.

REFERENCE

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