



Work Participation of Women in Self Help Groups and Resultant Impact on Vulnerability: A Case Study from North-East India

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ABSTRACT

Organised group activities particularly among women are growing rapidly in India. The groups facilitate women in economic empowerment by giving them opportunities of self-employment. This has a cascading effect in other aspects of life. The present study while taking a sweeping glance of the plight of women in some of the worst hit countries across the globe including India on selected areas of discrimination and exploitation seeks to find out whether the participation of women in organised group activities like Self Help Groups (SHGs) has altered the evil social notions against women and succeeded in reducing the crime against them. After analysing the graphic data derived from recognised sources, the present study endeavours to focus on the position of women in Tripura a north-eastern state of India on the basis of some selected parameters.

Keywords : Women Empowerment, Basic Rights, Group Activities, Self Employment

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is rapidly increasing day by day all over the world. WHO conducted a multi-country survey among the age group of 15 to 49 in ten developing countries. The report, published in November 2012, reveals that 15% women in Japan and 71% women in Ethiopia reported physical and/or sexual violence. Among the women in the same age group, 0.3% to 11.5% reported that since the age of 15, they had been continuously experiencing sexual violence by the non-partner. From the women of the same age group 17% in rural Tanzania, 24% in rural Peru and 30% in rural Bangladesh reported that their first sexual experience was imposed upon them against their consent. 20% of women reported that they had already faced sexual violence in their childhood. 42% of surveyed females between the age group of 13-23 reported to be victims of physical violence. (World Health Organization)

In India the scenario as revealed by the study conducted by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India, in 2009 shows that, in the year 2009 there were as many as 89,546 incidences of brutality by spouse and family members; 21,397 incidences of rape; 11,009 incidences of sexual pestering and 5,650 incidences of dowry tortures. (UN Women)

Rape is the most frequent crime on women in the country today. Every hour across India there are approximately 18 women who get assaulted. On New Year's Eve an ugly mob attacked women in Mumbai. "In Latur a 14 year old was raped and killed by four young men. In Konark four men were charged with dragging a woman out of a bus and gang raping her." (Crime Against Women in India). The recent incidence of gang rape and brutal torture of a girl in the National capital shook the conscience of the nation. Ultimately she succumbed to her injuries.

Under this backdrop, the present study aims to analyse the incidences of crime against women in a relatively backward North-Eastern state of India. The area of study is Tripura, a small state in North-Eastern India. To envisage a solution to the problem, the pa-

per wants to examine whether the workforce participation of women in Self Help Groups (SHGs) can reduce crimes against them. The present study has considered selected parameters like domestic violence, rape and other abuses against women for analysing the issue of their vulnerability.

MATERIALS & METHODOLOGY

Tripura already has achieved an encouraging success in respect of implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which guarantees minimum 100 days' work to rural population for generation of meaningful assets. The state has also taken various initiatives to ensure women participation in work force. Similar to Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY), the state has a special scheme – Tripura State Support Project on SHGs (TSSPS). It is mainly meant for promoting group activities through formation of SHGs. However, the present study has considered only SGSY supported groups. Tripura is predominantly rural in nature. The study has been carried out in rural areas. It covers 345 randomly selected Self Help Groups. From each group one member has been selected. Thus, the total sample size is 345. Survey has been conducted from April 2010 to March 2011 and April 2011 to August 2012. The secondary data were collected from the Block Offices, Panchayat Offices and from the Department of Rural Development, Government of Tripura. Primary data were collected from the Self Help Group members through well structured questionnaire and through personal interviews. The present study aims to estimate the impact of women participation on women empowerment by taking into consideration some selected parameters. These include-

- Financial Development: - Process that makes improvement in financial capability, superiority and effectiveness of financial intermediary services is called financial development. This procedure involves the communication of many actions and institutions and probably is linked with economic enlargement.
- Social Development: - Social development means blueprint or procedure of transformation exhibited by persons

- resulting from their communication with other folks, social institutions, social traditions etc.
- c) Psychological Development: - Progress regarding individual, emotional, intellectual and social capabilities is called psychological development.
- d) Improvement in Decision Making Process: - A positive change in decision making capacity regarding children's education, children's health etc is called improvement in decision making process.
- e) Political Awareness: - Political awareness means informative awareness regarding the name of the political dignitaries of India, the name of the President of India, election procedure, about extra facilities for the underprivileged section of the society, name of the Chairman of Municipal Council (MC), awareness about MC activities, activities of Panchayats, about 73rd amendment, programmes of rural development, meeting of Gram Sabha etc.
- f) Managerial skill: - Managerial skill means common skills comprising of human skills, technical skills and conceptual skills.

Out of the 345 surveyed groups, a total of 181 groups (52%) consist of females only whereas there 69 male groups (20%) and 95 (28%) are mixed groups. In West Tripura district out of the total surveyed groups of 112, 58% are female groups, 7% are male groups and 35% are groups with mixed composition.

Sl. No.	Crime Head	Year										Percentage variation in 2009 over 2008
		2005	%	2006	%	2007	%	2008	%	2009	%	
1	Rape	18,359	12	19,348	12	20,737	11	21,467	11	21,397	10.5	-0.3
2	Kidnapping & Abduction	15,750	10	17,414	10	20,416	11	22,939	12	25,741	12.6	12.2
3	Dowry Death	6787	4	7618	5	8093	4	8172	4	8383	4.1	2.6
4	Torture	58,319	37	63,128	38	75,930	41	81,344	41	89,546	43.9	10.1
5	Molestation	34,175	22	36,617	22	38,734	21	40,413	21	38,711	19.0	-4.2
6	Sexual Harassment	9,984	6	9,966	6	10,950	6	12,214	6	11,009	5.4	-9.9
7	Importation of Girls	149	1	67	0	61	0	67	0	48	0.0	-28.4
8	Sati Prevention Act	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.0	-100
9	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act	5,908	4	4,541	3	3,568	2	2,659	1	2,474	1.2	-7
10	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act	2,917	2	1,562	1	1,200	1	1,025	1	845	0.4	-17.6
11	Dowry Prohibition Act	3,204	2	4,504	3	5,623	3	5,555	3	5,650	2.8	1.7
	Total	1,55,553	100	1,64,765	100	1,85,312	100	1,95,856	100	203,804	100.0	4.1

Source-Annual Report-2010-2011, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Table I depicts the incidence of crime against women in India. According to the Annual Report 2010-11 of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India, the crime against women such as rape, kidnapping and abduction, torture, molestation, sexual harassment, trading of girls, immoral trafficking, indecent representation of women and dowry related crimes have been increasing sharply. The report indicates that between 2005 and 2009 the crime against women has steadily increased over the years. In 2005, a total of 1, 55,553 incidences of crime against women occurred. In 2006 it increased by 9,212 cases (i.e. by 19.2 %) over the previous year. Thus, in total 1, 64,765 cases had been recorded in 2006. In 2007, the occurrence of crimes increased over the previous year by 20,547 cases (i.e. by 42.58 %). A total of 1, 85,312 cases occurred in 2007. In 2008, the increase was by 10,544 cases (i.e. by 21.85 %). In 2009, incidences of crimes again increased by 7,948 cases (i.e. by 16.47 %). A total of 2, 03,804 incidences had taken place in 2009. Table I shows that as compared to other crimes, the proportion of occurrence of rape, kidnapping and abduction, torture and molestation are quite high.

Table II shows the Incidence of Crime against Women in Tripura during 2009 and 2010. Tripura is a one of the small states in India. The population of Tripura is about 36, 71,032 and out of that 17, 99,165 are females. As per the report of Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of

In South Tripura District out of the 98 surveyed groups, 42% are female groups, 35% are male groups and 23% are mixed groups. In North Tripura district out of the 90 surveyed groups 56% groups consist of exclusively female members. 24% are male and 20% are mixed groups. In case of Dhalai district 56% of the groups are female groups, 11% are male and rest 33% are mixed groups.

Among the total surveyed respondents 69% are female and the remaining 31% are male. District wise analysis of sex composition reveals that in West Tripura 76% of the members female and 24% male members. In South Tripura sex composition of the respondents comprised of 60% female and 40% male. Whereas in North Tripura, 69% are female and 31% are male. In Dhalai district 73% of the respondents are female and 27% are male respondents.

RESULTS and DISCUSSIONS

The study reveals a disheartening picture where women are denied not only the right to live with dignity, but are also deprived of basic human rights like freedom of speech, freedom to get education etc.

Though women constitute almost half of the Indian population yet they are subjected to unspeakable violence and brutal atrocities almost as a daily ritual by the unsigned menfolk.

India, Tripura reported the highest rate of crime against women in 2009. Table II reveals that in Tripura in 2010 the crime of committing rape had increased by 1.34% over that of 2009.

Table II: Incidence of Crime against Women in Tripura during 2009 - 2010

Sl. No	Crime Head	2009	Percentage	2010	Percentage	Percentage variation
1	Rape	190	18.90	238	20.25	1.34
2	Women Harassment	815	81.09	937	81.09	0
	Total	1005	100	1175	100	1.34

Source- Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Tripura

It can be mentioned here that the social and economic empowerment of women can reasonably motivate them to combat the crimes. In rural areas the groups facilitate women in financial empowerment by giving them self employment opportunities. In this connection, it is important to understand the functioning of Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Table III contains information about composition of groups created since 2009-10 till 28.08.2011 in India. It shows that large numbers of women SHGs were set up during this period.

Table III: Self Help Groups formed Across India

Year	No. of SHGs Formed	No. of Women SHGs Formed	Percentage of women SHGs formed
	Total Since 1.4.99	Total Since 1.4.99	Total Since 1.4.99
2009-2010	3708410.35	2651450	71.49
2010-2011	3988926.34	2955287.79	74.08
2011-2012 till 28/08/2011	3943127	2865212	72.66

Source- <http://rural.nic.in/sgsy/sgsyframetop.asp?id=02>, retrieved on 28th August 2011

71.5% of the women SHGs formed in 2009 and 2010. For the duration of 2010-2011, this ratio stood at 74.08%. Out of whole figure of Self Help Groups formed, 70% belong to women.

In Tripura SHGs are running very successfully. There are lots of group members who crossed poverty line after joining the Self Help Group activity.

Table IV: Self Help Groups (SHGs) formed in Tripura

Year	No. of SHGs Formed	No. of Women SHGs Formed	Percentage of women SHGs Formed
	Total Since 1.4.99	Total Since 1.4.99	Total Since 1.4.99
2008 to 2009	27010	17168	63.56
2009 to 2010	31485	19125	60.74
2010 to 2011	34436	21434	62.24

Source- <http://rural.nic.in/sgsy/sgsyframetop.asp?id=02>, retrieved on 28th August 2011

The data in table IV reveals that till 2008-09, out of the total SHGs formed, 63.6% was created exclusively for women. Till 2009-2010 the percentage of women SHGs stood at 60.7% which is pretty low as compared to the corresponding figure of previous year. In 2010-2011 the ratio of women SHGs again registered on rise and the cumulative figure stood at 62.2%. For the entire period of 2008 to 2011, out of total figure of Self Help Groups only 60% were represented by women.

Table V: District Wise -Self Help Groups (SHGs) formed in Tripura during 2010 -2011(upto, June-2011)

District	No. of SHGs Formed	Percentage of total SHGs Formed in Tripura	No. of Women SHGs Formed	Percentage of Women SHGs Formed in Tripura	No. of BPL Families that have crossed the poverty line
	Total Since 1.4.99	Total Since 1.4.99	Total Since 1.4.99	Total Since 1.4.99	
Dhalai	4980	14.46	3898	18.18	374
North Tripura	6221	18.06	3418	15.94	0
South Tripura	10246	29.75	5672	26.46	0
West Tripura	12989	37.71	8446	39.40	155213
Total	34436	100	21434	100	155587

Source-Rural Development Department, Government of Tripura

Table V shows that, in West Tripura district in 2010-2011, cumulatively, since 1st April 1999 about 39.4% of the total SHGs formed was women SHGs. It is pretty high as compared to the figure in the other three districts. The share of women SHGs stood at 15.9% in North Tripura district which is fairly low. One of the vital reasons may be that the West District is the capital district and the transportation conveniences and marketing services are better as compared to those in other three districts. As per the above data, if we consider Dhalai and South Tripura Districts, the proportion of women SHGs formed in those districts is 18.18% and 26.46% which are far

less than what is prevailing in West Tripura District. South district is nearer to the capital district. Moreover, the district has comparatively better infrastructure. The above table also shows that, in West Tripura 155213 and in Dhalai districts 374 number of BPL families crossed the poverty line with the help of SHGs but no such significant improvement could be noticed in North and South Tripura district.

The groups are engaged in a wide variety of economic activities like tailoring, fruit processing, fishery, piggery, poultry, goatery, duckery, milch-cow, cane & bamboo work, weaving, incense sticks making, plantation, agriculture, pottery, grocery, soft toy making, mushroom cultivation, tea production, foam products, gift item making, decorating and catering, jute products, vermi-compost production, photo binding, file-folder making, writing pad making, bakery, ornaments making, candle sticks manufacturing, readymade garments making, floriculture, fishery inputs, involvement with mid-day meal scheme in different schools, aluminium products making, wood products making, food items making, rice and rice products making, bag making, woollen garments manufacturing, cosmetic items, preparation of molasses, renting out power tiller to the farmers, mat making, stationery goods trading, bee keeping, renting out small luggage van, mosquito net making, blanket manufacturing etc.

As a result of empowerment there has been some significant reduction in domestic violence. The following table VI will indicate this.

Table VI: Male and Female Perceptions regarding Reduction in Domestic Violence on Women after Joining Group Activities

Categories	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	76	71.69	214	89.53	290	84.05
No	30	28.30	25	10.46	55	15.94
Total	106	100	239	100	345	100

Source: Field Survey, 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012

Among the surveyed members, 290 respondents (84.05%) with 214 female (89.53%) and 76 male (71.69%) expressed that after joining SHGs, domestic violence has reduced. Total 55 respondents (15.94%) with 25 female (10.46%) and 30 male (28.30%) respectively said that there was no change in domestic violence. Most of the respondents felt that domestic violence has reduced after joining SHGs. It also bears proof that involvement of women in SHG activities has really empowered women folk.

To understand extent of women empowerment, it is very significant to recognize the gender-wise perception of the group members regarding impact of SHG-participation of women on different aspects of Women Empowerment.

Table VII: Gender-wise Perception of the Group Members Regarding Impact of SHG-Participation of Women on Different Aspects of Women Empowerment

Categories	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Financial & Social Development	46	43.40	99	41.42	145	42.03
Only Social Development	14	13.21	41	17.15	55	15.94
Only Financial Development	29	27.36	59	24.69	88	25.51
Financial Development & Improvement in Decision Making Process	3	2.83	10	4.18	13	3.77
Financial Development & Technical Skill formation	4	3.77	8	3.35	12	3.48

Social & Political Awareness	4	3.77	7	2.93	11	3.19
Managerial skill formation	1	0.94	3	1.26	4	1.16
Psychological Development	5	4.72	12	5.02	17	4.93
Total	106	100	239	100	345	100

Source: Field Survey, 2010 - 2011 and 2011 - 2012

The field survey also reveals that among the female respondents 41.42% claim that they achieved both financial and social development after joining SHGs. 24.69% of the female respondents told that they got only financial development. Out of the surveyed respondents 17.15% of the female were of the opinion that they achieved social development. 5.02% of the SHG workers mentioned about psychological development. From the total surveyed respondents 4.18% of the group members told that they got financial development & improvement in decision making process. They also expressed that they experienced positive change in their decision making capacity regarding their children's education, children's health etc. From this table it is clear that participation of women in SHGs has a positive influence on their decision making capacity. 3.35% women expressed that they got improvement regarding financial & technical skill formation and another 2.93% reported of increase in social & political awareness.

The surveyed women members showed positive impacts in matters of understanding of Municipal activities, functioning of Panchayats, Rural Development activities etc. Only 1.26% of the members mentioned SHG activities improved their managerial skill formation.

Thus, it can be inferred that women participation in the Self Help Groups activities has brought in significant improvement in respect of social upliftment of women. Besides economic empowerment, the work force participation has changed the general perception on the status of women in the society. However the spread of socio economic upliftment has not been uniform throughout the entire area of study. There are districts like North Tripura and South Tripura where inspite of relatively more number of SHGs, not a single household could cross the poverty line. The outcome of the study indicates that there is an urgent need of more state intervention in the issue. The area wise analysis can reveal the reasons for such unequal progress in socio-economic development. Considering the fact that Self Help Groups have significant positive impact on women empowerment, specific policy formulation is required to widen the possibility of economic development through SHGs. State monitoring along with state assistance in this regard can bring in more effective impact on women empowerment and also on regional economy.

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