

# **Barriers for Women Empowerment in India**

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## **Abstract**

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the status of women empowerment in India using various indicators like women's household decision making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, political participation, acceptance of unequal gender role, exposure to media, access to education, experience of domestic violence etc based on data from different sources. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by government. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. Household decision making power and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with their age, education and employment status. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. More than half of the women believe wife beating to be justified for one reason or the other. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their earnings. Control over cash earnings increases with age, education and with place of residence. Women's exposure to media is also less relative to men. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence than that of urban women. A large gender gap exists in political participation too. The study concludes by an observation that access to education and employment are only the enabling factors to empowerment, achievement towards the goal, however, depends largely on the attitude of the people towards gender equality.

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## 1. Introduction

*“Women are the builder and moulder of nation’s destiny. Though delicate and soft as lily, she has a heart, far stronger and bolder than of man... she is supreme inspiration of man’s onward march”*

In the history of human development, woman has been as important as man. In fact, the status, employment and work performed by women in society are the indicator of a nation’s overall progress. Without the participation of women in national activities, the social, economical or political progress of a country will be stagnated. The hands that rock the cradle, May though, as the myth goes have not yet ruled the world. The fact is that most of the women’s domestic role is combined with economic activities and utilization of their skill and labour to earn the extra income for the family, which makes the difference between a reasonably decent survival and humiliating poverty. Women constitute half of the humanity, even contributing two-thirds of world’s work hours. She earns only one-third of the total income and owns less than one-tenth of the world’s resources. This shows that the economic status of women is in pathetic condition and this is more so in a country like India. Among total Indian population of 1027.10 million, women constitute 495.73 million. Therefore, “women constitute nearly 50 per cent of population, perform two-thirds of the work and produce 50 per cent of food commodities consumed by the country. They earn one third of remuneration and own 10 per cent of the property or wealth of the country” Women are regarded as the “better half” of the society and at par with the men. But unreality, our society is still male dominated and women are not treated as equal partners both inside and outside the four walls of the house. In fact they are treated as weak and dependent on men. As such Indian women enjoy an unfavourable status in society. Rural women in India constitute 77.00 per cent of the female population They share abundant responsibility and perform a wide spectrum of duties in running the family, maintaining the house hold activities like rearing, feeding, attending to farm labour, tending domestic animals and the like, even then they suffer from being both economically and socially invisible. Within the framework of democratic policy, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women’s advancement in different spheres. Since independence numbers of innovative schemes have been launched for the enhancement of women in our country. The social welfare department reported that, the status of women in 1974 highlighted the total lack of

implementation of the concept of gender equality established in Indian constitution and indicated that Indian women remained deprived economically and socially.

Women empowerment is a new phrase in the vocabulary of gender literature. The phrase is used in two broad senses i.e. general and specific. In a general sense, it refers to empowering women to be self-dependent by providing them access to all the freedoms and opportunities, which they were denied in the past only because of their being women. In a specific sense, women empowerment refers to enhancing their position in the power structure of the society.

The word women empowerment essentially means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day- to- day lives in the social, political and economic terms - a power which enables them to move from the periphery to the centre stage.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures, a position; indiscriminate in favour of women. Within the framework of democratic polity, our laws, developmental policies, plans and programmes are aimed at women advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions to secure rights of women. The women movement and a widespread network of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) having strong grass-root presence and deep insight into women concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. Women today are trying to understand their position in the society. Women have become increasingly aware of sexual inequalities in every sphere of life and are seeking ways to fight them.

The Indian women have cast off their age old shackles of serfdom and male domination. She has come to her own and started scaling the ladders of social advance with proud and dignity. Women of India are now uplifted and emancipated and granted equal status with men in all walks of life-political, social, domestic and educational. They have a franchise, they are free to join any service or follow any profession. Free India has, besides her woman prime minister, women ambassadors, women cabinet ministers, women legislators, women governors, women scientists, engineers-doctors-space researchers-giant IT specialists, women Generals, women public officers, judiciary officers and in many more responsible positions. No distinction is now made in matters of education between boys and girls. Their voice is now as forceful and important as that of men. They are becoming equal partners in making or dismissing of a government.

Hindu law has been changed and modified. Far-reaching changes have been introduced in the Hindu Marriage Act. Women have been given right to divorce in certain cases. Besides this, the Hindu Succession Act has given to the daughter; the right to the property of her parents. Our Constitution has given equal rights to women. No distinction has been made on the basis of caste, religion or sex. Their rights have thus been safeguarded. Thirdly, three percent reservation for women is apt to be enacted in the future.

Notwithstanding the remarkable changes in the position of women in free India, there is still a great divergence between the constitutional position and stark reality of deprivation and degradation. Whatever whiff of emancipation has blown in Indian society, has been inhaled and enjoyed by the urban women, their population belonging to the rural areas are still totally untouched by the wind of changes. They still have been living in miserable conditions, steeped in poverty, ignorance, superstition and slavery. There still exists a wide gulf between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislations, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality on the status of women in India, on the other. The human rights scenario in the country continues to be dismal and depressing. Women are being brutalized, commodified, materialized and subjected to inhuman exploitation and discrimination.

Although, gender discrimination has been banned by the Constitution and women have been guaranteed political equality with men, yet there is a difference between the constitutional rights and the rights enjoyed in reality by women. Even after half a century of independence, barring a few exceptions, women have mostly remained outside the domain of power and political authority. Although they constitute about half of the citizen and over the years their participation by way of voting has increased, yet their participation and representation in law making and law implementing bodies are not very satisfactory. No doubt the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts have provided access to women in the decision making process at the grass-root level but their representation in the Parliament and state legislatures is woefully poor. Insecurity does not allow the women leaders to identify leadership at the grass-root level. In politics when a man proposes, they themselves depose. In reality women representatives are ornamental in nature and political consciousness is found lacking among them. They are affected by the caste and class divisions, feudal attitudes, patriarchal nature of the family and village-social, environmental, ethnic, religious separatism and the like. They are members on record only. Allegedly, they are not consulted while taking decision. Thus,

women representatives are not free from male dominance in the village administration and no significant change in the power equal is observed in the villages.

In these days of scam-ridden politics, the increasing role of money and mafia in elections keeps most of the women away from politics. Increasing violence and vulgarity against them intimates women and consequently they prefer to stay out of politics.

Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the one's without power gain greater control over their lives. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment as a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns. With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market and the state. Importantly it involves at the psychological level women's ability to assert them and this is constructed by the 'gender roles' assigned to her especially in a cultural which resists change like India.

Women Empowerment in India is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social malice practiced in India in many forms since thousands of years. The malice is not going to go away in a few years or for that matter by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts. Formulating laws and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the times these laws and policies just remain on paper. The ground situation on the other hand just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. Addressing the malice of gender discrimination and women empowerment in India is long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth and development.

Following are the barriers of women empowerment in India:

1. Cast System
2. Child Labour Practice
3. Demographic Factors
4. Dowry as cordon
5. Female age at marriage
6. Gender bias in curriculum



7. Gender gaps in higher education
8. Higher dropout rate among girls.
9. Parental preference for boys going to school.
10. Poor School Environment for girls
11. Poverty

### **1.1 Objectives the of Study**

- To find out the exact need of women empowerment in India
- To assess the Awareness of women empowerment in India
- To analyze the barriers of women empowerment in India
- To examine the nature of women's self help groups in Haryana
- To examine the challenges impeding self help groups in empowering women in Haryana
- To identify strategies of empowering women through self help groups

### **1.2 Research Questions**

To understand the nature and extent of women's empowerment in the Kumasi Metropolis, the research intends answering the following questions:

- What are the barriers faced by women in their empowerment in India?
- What are the strategies of empowering women in India?
- What is the nature of women's self help groups in Haryana?
- Are there any challenges confronting self help groups in empowering women?
- What are the strategies of empowering women through self help groups?
- How does women's participation in self help groups empower them?

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in

India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. However there are significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level.

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure.

Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Empowerment**

The concept of empowerment is of increasing interest to researchers, practitioners and particularly disadvantaged citizens of all nations. In some respects, empowerment is a new buzzword. As Edelman (2003) has noted in relation to language and the politics of human services, sometimes new language is used to describe the same old practices. Others believe that the empowerment language can actually lead to raised awareness (Rappaport, 2001). Regardless, a growing number of people are searching 9 to understand the meaning of empowerment and ways it can be used to change their settings and lives.

Friedman (1992) defined empowerment in terms of “inclusion” and “exclusion” and central importance of “power” in a political sense, not merely limited to a particular development activity. The involvement of women’s groups in development projects at the grassroots levels through direct involvement in the decision-making and implementation processes, not only empowers them, but also gives them the chance of contributing their own efforts to the mainstream of the development of their communities. Empowerment is conceptualized as a process through which members of self-help groups gain power at intrapersonal, interpersonal and political/community levels (Parsons, 2005; Gutierrez et al, 1998).

According to Wallenstein (2001), empowerment is a social-action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life, and social justice. While Whitmore (2000) feels the concept of empowerment needs to be more clearly defined, she states that there are some common underlying assumptions:

- a) Individuals are assumed to understand their own needs better than anyone else and therefore should have the power both to define and act upon them
- b) All people possess strengths upon which they can build
- c) Empowerment is a lifelong endeavour
- d) Personal knowledge and experience are valid and useful in coping effectively.

Kessey (2005) defines empowerment as a process of change by which individuals or groups, with little or no power, gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their lives. The

empowerment of women, also called gender empowerment, has become a significant topic of discussion in regards to development and economics. Entire nations, businesses, communities, and groups can benefit from the implementation of programmes and policies that adopt the notion of women empowerment (Severine and Shahani, 2009). Empowerment is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human rights and development. The Human Development and Capabilities Approach, The Millennium Development Goals, and other credible approaches/goals point to empowerment and participation as a 10 necessary step if a country is to overcome the obstacles associated with poverty and development (United Nations, 2008).

Most literature also associates empowerment with personal control. Rappaport (2002) points out that empowerment should mean, enhancing the possibilities for people to control their own lives (p. 119). Cochran (2003) believes that people understand their own needs far better than anyone else and as a result should have the power both to define and act upon them. Kwapong (2008) added her view on empowerment as entailing the ability and freedom to make choices in the social, political, and economic arenas.

Increasingly, empowerment is being understood as a process of change (Cornell Empowerment Group, 2007). McClelland (2008) has suggested that in order for people to take power, they need to gain information about themselves and their environment and be willing to identify and work with others for change. In a similar vein, Whitmore (2000) defines empowerment as: an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live.

## **2.2 Dimensions of Empowerment**

Empowerment is not essentially political alone; it is a process of having personal, economic, social and political dimensions with personal empowerment being the core of the empowerment process. In fact, political empowerment will not succeed in the absence of economic empowerment (Ghadoliya, 2006)

The economic component requires that women be able to engage in a productive activity that will allow them some degree of autonomy, no matter how small and hard to obtain at the beginning (UNESCO, 2000). Economic empowerment also concerns the quality of women's economic involvement, beyond their mere presence as workers. Their presence in the

workforce in quantitative terms is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step toward raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries as a whole (World Economic Forum, 2005).

Political Empowerment is when there is equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies (World Economic Forum 2005). According to Malhotra and Schuler (2002), political empowerment involves one's knowledge of political system and means of access to it. It also encompasses women representation in regional and national bodies of government.

Socio-cultural empowerment brings about women literacy and access to a broad range of educational options, participation in extra familial groups and social networks

### **2.3 Key Elements of Empowerment**

Empowerment has become a popular term in women development programmes. Key elements of empowerment were identified to include decision making power, ability to make choices, assertiveness, education, skill acquisition and increase in self image. Empowerment has both an individual and group benefits (Chamberlin, 1997):

- **Having decision-making power:**

No one can become independent unless he or she is given the opportunity to make important decisions about his or her life

- **Assertiveness:**

Assertiveness refers to one's ability to clearly state what she wishes and to stand up for oneself. It is an important element of women empowerment as it helps an individual to get what she wants (Chamberlin, 1997)

- **Health and well-being:**

Improved well-being is a concept related to the substantial differences between women and men in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and issues of fundamental safety and integrity of a person

- **Growth and change that is never ending and self-initiated:**

Growth and change as elements of empowerment emphasize that empowerment is not a destination, but a journey; that no one reaches a final stage in which further growth and change is unnecessary

- **Increasing women's positive self-image:**

As a person becomes more empowered, she begins to feel more confident and capable. This, in turn, leads to increased ability to manage one's life, resulting in more improved self-image. The negative perception of women that has been internalized also begins to change and may redefine it to convey positive qualities (Chamberlin, 1997).

## **2.4 The Concept of Women Empowerment**

Empowerment is defined by Sharland (2007), as the process through which an individual who feels unable to change something in her life is supported in finding ways of doing so. Such an individual would then be able to move from a position of "stuckness" to a state of being able to create a new way forward from the particular difficulty they are experiencing.

According to Whatley (2008), empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities which entails the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. He added that empowerment is probably the totality of the following capabilities:

1. Having decision-making power of their own
2. Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision.
3. Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or).
4. Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making.
5. Having positive thinking and the ability to make changes.
6. Ability to learn skills for improving one's personal or group power.
7. Ability to change other's perception by democratic means.
8. Involving in a growth process and change that is never ending and selfinitiated.

## 9. Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma

Empowerment is providing support in the forms of finance and technical assistance to the marginalized. In economic development, the empowerment approach focuses on mobilizing the self-help efforts of the poor, rather than providing them with social welfare

The BusinessDictionary.com (2014) described empowerment as a management practice of sharing, rewards and power with employees so that they can take initiatives and make decisions to solve problems and improve service and performance. Therefore, empowerment is based on giving people skills, resources, authority, opportunity and motivation that will contribute to their competence and satisfaction. Once empowered, the individual is ultimately driven by her belief in her capability to influence events. Women empowerment is the cultivation and fortification of women with the capacity to acquire self-actualization critically with good education and knowledge. With knowledge, the empowered women can critically discern the means of acquiring a healthy sense of identity and power. The issue of women empowerment is so important to have made President Barack Obama, come up with the presidential memorandum on the coordination of policies and programmes to promote gender equality, and empower women and girls globally, ensuring that women and girls, including those marginalized are able to participate fully in public life, are free from violence and have equal access to Women Empowerment: Barriers and Benefits 4 education, economic opportunity, and healthcare, increase broader economic prosperity, as well as political stability and security (The White House, Office of the Press Security, 2013). To further affirm the place of women in the prosperity and stability of nations, the American Secretary of State John Kerry, emphatically stated that no country can get ahead if it leaves half of its people behind. He added that women's issues as we know, are more than just women's issues. They are families' issues, they are economic issues, they are unity issues and they are justice issues (United States Department of State: Office of Global Women's Issues, 2013). When a woman is empowered, self confidence is built into her, which gives her a sense of personal strength. Empowerment makes one able to express her feeling with authority and being able to decide something and then do it right. That is why women should be placed in the very heart of sustainable development. Young women if empowered with tools to address the specific challenges they face, are a strong force for progress, and reform in all sectors. A good example can be found in Professor Wangari Maathais, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. This notable environmental and human activist organized workshops on civic education to encourage the Kenyan women to look for the cultural, political, and economic

policies and practices that were the root causes of environmental problems, and to take action to address those root causes (Warner, 2012). She was able to do these and many other things that imparted positively on other women and the society, because she was educated and thus empowered.

## **2.5 Empowerment Benefits**

The most important benefit of empowerment lies in its capacity to accelerate the pace of social change and economic growth. Through empowerment tools such as education and training, developmental attitudes and choices are strengthened. It has also been discovered that ICT education has brought deep changes to women's patterns of thinking and communication. The benefit of this lies in the immense role IT plays in supporting women entrepreneurs (Munkvold & Tundai, 2005). Internet services are now used to search for product related information within and outside the shores of Nigeria. Several other positive effects from using IT include increased sales, access to new customers and market. IT has also led to improve efficiency of operations. For example, women running garment related business used the internet to search for new designs for women's choices, thus enabling them to improve their products and enter foreign markets in countries in Africa and other continents. This has led to economic growth. As a matter of fact, when economy grows, poverty decreases and when poverty decreases, it leads to increases in the development of the families and communities.

Empowerment makes women to be functional, more enlightened and conscious of their situations. Empowered women have imparted positively on their families. For example, families have enjoyed improved livelihood, healthcare, nutrition and the general wellbeing of the communities. There is promotion of healthier sexual behaviour and relationship because informed mothers who are in a better position to teach their children to resist peer pressure and vices.

## **2.6 Measurement of Women Empowerment**

Empowerment is difficult to measure, and there is no agreed-upon method. Most definitions stress on an indicator of empowerment which is; a personal change in consciousness involving a movement towards control, self-confidence and the right to make decisions and determine choice (CIDA, 1997).



Empowerment is a process, though the result of the process may also be termed empowerment. But more specifically, the outcome of empowerment should manifest itself as are distribution of power between individuals, genders, groups, classes, castes, races, ethnic groups or nations. Empowerment means the transformation of structures of subordination, through radical changes in law, property rights, control over women labour and bodies, and the institutions that reinforce and perpetuate male domination (Batliwala, 2003)

Women empowerment can be measured through the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The Gender Empowerment Measure shows women participation in a given nation, both politically and economically. GEM is calculated by tracking the share of seats in parliament held by women; of female legislators, senior officials and managers; and of female professionals and technical workers; and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence (Severine and Shahani, 2009). It then ranks countries given this information. Other measures that take into account the importance of female participation and equality include: the Gender Parity Index and the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) (Severine and Shahani, 2009).

Understanding that empowerment is a complex issue with varying interpretations in different societal, national and a cultural context is necessary. However tentative indicators to ascertain empowerment are as follows:

- The level of the individual woman and her household: participation in crucial decision-making processes; extent of sharing of domestic work by men; extent to which a woman takes control of her reproductive functions and decides on family size; extent to which a woman is able to decide where the income she has earned will be channelled to, feeling and expression of pride and value in her work; self-confidence and self-esteem; and ability to prevent violence (UNESCO, 1998).
- At the community and/or organizational: existence of women's organizations; allocation of funds to women and women's projects; increased number of women leaders and at village, district, provincial and national levels involvement of women in the design, development and application of technology; participation in community programmes, productive enterprises, politics and arts; involvement of women in non-traditional tasks; and increased training programmes for women; and exercising her legal rights when necessary.

- At the national level: awareness of her social and political rights; integration of women in the general national development plan; existence of women's networks and publications; extent to which women are officially visible and recognized; and the degree to which the media take heed of women's issues.

From the above explanations, the concept empowerment can be seen as a multidimensional process whereby ones intrinsic abilities are induced to access power, make choices and decisions on their personal accord. Thus empowerment embodies all arena of individual life; be it social, cultural, economic or political. It can therefore be summarized as an inner feeling within which there is an increased self-esteem or an outward capability.

## **2.7 The Concept of Self Help Groups (SHG)**

The concept of SHGs are small informal associations created for the purpose of enabling members to reap economic benefit out of mutual help, solidarity, and joint responsibility. The benefits include mobilization of savings and credit facilities and pursuit of group enterprise activities (Anand, 2002).

The group-based approach not only enables the poor to accumulate capital by way of small savings, but also helps them gain access to formal credit facilities (Shylendra 2004). By way of joint liability, these groups enable the poor to overcome the problem of collateral security, thus freeing them from the clutches of moneylenders (Stiglitz 2000). Moreover, some of the basic characteristics of SHGs like small membership size and homogeneity of composition bring about cohesiveness and effective participation of members in the functioning of the group (Fernandez 1998).

A self help group consists of 10-20 members drawn from a relatively homogeneous economic class (poor), self-selected on the basis of existing affinities and mutual trust; members meet regularly at a fixed time and place and pool their savings into a common fund from which they take need based loans. The group develops its own rules and regulations and sanctions for violations; the meeting procedures and processes, leadership change norms, intensive training and handholding, are designed to enable SHGs to function in a participatory and democratic manner. The objectives of the SHGs go beyond thrift and credit – and include the overall development of members in the social, political, cultural and economic arena; thus the SHGs are credit plus“ institutions (Fernandez, 1998).

## **2.8 Relationship between Empowerment and Participation in Self Help Groups**

Past research has shown that participation and empowerment are closely related (Schulz et al., 1995; Rappaport, 2001; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 2003). However, this relationship may be complex and complicated. Itzhaky and Schwartz (2004) found that not all the elements of empowerment are affected by all the elements of participation. Itzhaky and York (2000) further suggest that the relationship between participation and empowerment can be erratic, although the former can well be an antecedent of the latter. When participation affects empowerment, the path can be direct, indirect or combined (Zimmerman, 2000; Prestby et al., 2005; Chavis and Wandersman, 2001; Speer and Hughes, 1995).

Participation in SHGs certainly help members to empower themselves (Chesler, 2006; Nylund, 2000; Mok, 2001). SHGs activities empower members to cope with problems and stresses, and they also empower members in their relations with the organizations that serve them, and with the community where they live. Empirically, it was found that participation in SHGs activities is instrumental in reducing family burden, loneliness, and guilt-feeling, and at a macro-level, Self Help Group members' advocacy activities can affect government policies (Citron, et al., 1999; Medvene and Krauss, 2000). The strong correlation between self help group participation and self-confidence, self-efficacy, civil responsibility, and political efficacy has also been supported in research studies (Florin and Wandersman, 2007; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 2003).

## **2.9 Barriers to Women's Empowerment and Participation**

The subordination that women experience daily, regardless of the class they might belong to, takes various forms: discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence- within the family, at the place of work and in society. The details may be different but the theme is the same (Bhasin, 2004).

“Three hundred years of witch-hunting, running parallel with the colonization of the world, were necessary to snatch from the women as from Third World people their power, their economy and their knowledge, and to socialize them into becoming what they are today: housewives and the “underdeveloped”. The housewife and with her the „underdeveloped“ is the artificial product, resulting from unimaginable violent development, upon which the whole society, law, state, science, art and politics, the family, private property and all the modern institutions have been built” (von Werlhof, 2008).

## **2.7 Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Base**

Women empowerment and development in theories are based on evolution of feminist theories of development as well as mainstream development debate (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). They include the feminist conceptualization of women empowerment and identify gaps in women development. The point of difference exists at the level of understanding of women cultural oppressions and gender based discriminations. Feminist claim of women empowerment does not only emphasize the award of development rights and opportunities but also they link the recognition of oppression to gain consciousness and struggling against the unwanted cultural and legal binding at household and community level. However, the definition of empowerment is not clearly defined in that way which is acceptable for all but is does not mean that it is not defined at all. There are definitions with rang of high and low acceptance and agreements. The concept empowerment refers to the ability to decision making which is much agreed understanding of women empowerment. Generally, this starts of definition has also a broader understanding which can be further divided into contextual meanings and definitions i.e. individual and collective decision making, private and public domains decision making, economic social decision making and so on. It is associated with disempowerment in a way that, it refers to the people who are denied to make choices and they get this ability by any means, any struggle, any sacrifice or else will be more closer to the condition declared as empowerment. So there exists a built in relativity in the term empowerment. Gaining the ability to make choices that refers to a process of change over time with objectives to remove oppressions, makes empowerment a process that doesn't happen and achieve suddenly. People with great power exercise cannot be called empowered though they are powerful. This is because the definition of empowerment given here refers to achieve empowerment from a disempowered status but the powerful people who were never disempowered cannot be counted under this definition. There is a logical association between poverty and empowerment. One obvious linkage is the lack of sufficient income which hinders the participation of poor in decision making and it also limits the alternatives to make choices. A variety of empowerment definitions found in literature with its linkages to various social, economic, political and cultural dynamics. It is also linked to inequality and discrimination based on social and economic classes, gender, race and ethnicity, nationality and religious affiliations. Amartya Sen has linked it with freedom of expressing power and choices that adds to capability of an individual. The official definition of women empowerment in India is extracted from number of definitions exists in academic literature

and publications of organizations and institutes working on poverty reduction, gender and development and human rights. This definition includes Women's sense of self-worth, their right to have and to determine choices, their right to have access to opportunities and resources, their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, Their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Giriappa (1997) analysed the women empowerment with the corresponding levels of discrimination and effectiveness of decision-making by women in different rural enterprises and concluded that the female headed households were effective in taking decision in respect of work mobility, schooling, health care, asset creation, employment generation and social participation in low social status households. The informal empowerment was wide spread through women earning members, their decisions were subjected to various degrees of discrimination by males.

Jyothi (1998) reported in her study on employment pattern and empowerment of rural women in Kolar district that the distribution of women according to the level of empowerment showed that most of the women had medium level of empowerment (58), while few women (8) belonged to high level of empowerment, remaining 54 women had low level of empowerment.

Saradha (2001) reported that the product empowerment of women in self-help groups was found to range from high and low with 35.80 and 35.00 per cent, respectively. It indicated that even though the women are psychologically empowered but their real empowerment level was low. The possible reasons for this may be the patriarchal society where the women are regarded as weaker section and the managerial competencies, decision-making power, reduction in drudgery, assessing information and resources and critical awareness of rural women were found to be low because of the lack of general media exposure, low level of education and lack of recognition.

Thus it can be said with a reasonable amount of confidence that reviews on the extent of empowerment generally reveal that majority of the women belonged to low and medium level of empowerment. It indicated that even though they are statistically empowered the real empowerment level was very low.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design employed for the study will be the case study approach. According to Nachmias, (1992) a case study entails an observation of a single group or phenomenon at a single point in time, usually subsequent to some phenomenon that allegedly produced change. A case study research design according to Bromley (1990) is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aim to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. In line with the above, the Haryana district will be subject to critical examination in the area of women's empowerment through participation in self-help groups. Haggett (1977) stated that a case study is an empirical enquiry that allows for an investigation of the dynamics of a particular system.

#### **3.2 Study Variables**

Kreuger and Neuman (2006) explained that a variable is a concept that varies. They stated that a variable may take on two or more values which are its attributes. According to Babbie (2007) variables are the logical groupings of attributes. This was re-echoed by Miller and Brewer (2003) as they conceived the idea that variables help in moving a research from a conceptual to an empirical level, employing the variables as key elements of the research problem. The variables employed for the study will include:

- Nature of SHGs in Haryana district
- Strategies of empowering women through SHGs
- Level of women's empowerment and the participation in SHGs
- Challenges impeding SHGs in empowering women in Haryana district

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

Both secondary and primary data sources will be employed for the research. Secondary data on the list of self help groups in the Haryana district will be collected from the Department of Women and Children's Affairs. Primary data will be collected on the strategies for empowering women, the extent to which SHGs empower women and the challenges confronting these groups from the field.

### **3.4 Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection techniques employed for the research will include the use of structured questionnaires and interview guides.

The questionnaires will be used for the collection of data from members in the selected SHGs. The questionnaire embodies both open and closed-ended questions for randomly selected members of the various groups. Interviews will be conducted for institutions involved in the survey using interview guide.

### **3.5 Sampling Techniques**

The multi stage sampling technique will be adopted. The sampling techniques include the purposive sampling method in the determination of SHGs and institutions to be interviewed. The purposive sampling is used when the various sampling units satisfy certain criteria of interest. In this study, the chosen group will be solely women's group, located in the Haryana district and are functioning.

### **3.6 Selection of Study Population and Area**

According to Frankel and Wallen (2000) a population refers to the group to which the results of the research are intended to apply. They stated that a population is usually the individuals who possess certain characteristics or a set of features a study seeks to examine and analyze. Kumekpor (2002) emphasized this by defining a population as the total number of all units of the issue or phenomenon to be investigated into which is "all possible observations of the same kind". The research population will consist of registered self help groups. Basically, the study will be carried out in specific communities in the Haryana district where the groups for the study are located.

### **3.7 Data Analysis and Processing**

Babbie (2007) defined a unit of analysis as the „what“ or „whom“ being studied. He emphasized that unit of analysis in a study are usually referred to as unit of observation. Unit of analysis has also been viewed as the most basic part of a phenomenon being investigated. With respect to this study, the units of analysis are the self help groups and the individual members.

In understanding the key concepts of the study (that is, Empowerment, Self Help Groups and Participation) the data collected will be analyzed. The empirical data collected will be processed by editing in order to eliminate data errors. The data will be further coded and tabulated for the purposes of the analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) will be used to generate the measures of central tendency and dispersion. To determine the level of women's empowerment, the UNESCO indicator for an individual's empowerment will be adopted using a three parameter likert scale. Tables, charts and proportions will also be employed in the quantitative analysis while the qualitative technique involves descriptive analysis.



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