

A Study of Social and Psychological Empowerment of Sakshar Mahila Samooh Scheme

Bhure Poonam Ramchandra^{1*}, Dr. Pratima Shukla²

¹ PhD Student, Kalinga University, Raipur

² PhD Guide, Department of Social Work, Kalinga University, Raipur

Abstract - A lot may be learned about women in Indian society by looking at the country's social indices. As a result of the gender power disparity, relationships based on mutual respect are unrealistic. Institutionalized traditions such as rituals and sacraments in Indian culture serve to unknowingly transmit patriarchy from one generation to the next. Some of India's most educated and financially secure women still fast every day in the hopes of extending their husbands' lives. This shows that women in India are still the ones to take the hit for sexism and patriarchy. The studies done on the status of women in India show that they face many disadvantages compared to men. Here, we will discuss some of the most important indicators utilizing the current body of empirical research. The advancement of women can be measured in a variety of ways. There is a lot of weight placed on the sex ratio. The percentage of newborns that are female is known as the female birthrate. The Indian census is more than just a population count; it also reveals interesting information on the lives of women in India. The Indian culture has taken a step back in time because of its fixation on having sons. In the sake of custom, having a child who is not a male lowers a woman's social position and often causes her psychological pain. The discriminatory "Putravati Bhawa" blessing is still often used in the vast majority of Hindu communities. Fetal girls are being killed off by highly educated professionals who are using diagnostic equipment meant to spot issues early on in the process. Populations from rural areas are migrating to urban centers in pursuit of abortion clinics that specialize in terminating the lives of female fetuses. If a girl is born into the family, she will be abandoned and, if she survives, likely poisoned. Efforts to solve social and cultural issues must involve educating the public, rallying support, and taking collective action.

Keywords - Social And Psychological Empowerment, Sakshar Mahila Samooh Scheme, Indian society, Indian culture

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

The social indicators in India reveal a lot about the treatment of women in the country. Because of the significant gap in power between the sexes, gender equality remains a pipe dream. Indian patriarchy is so deeply ingrained that it is passed on unconsciously through societal customs, ceremonies, and sacraments from one generation to the next. Women in India, even those with college degrees and stable careers, often fast for their husbands' health and longevity. What this shows is that women in India are still bearing the brunt of male chauvinism and perpetuating patriarchal norms. Many indicators in studies of women's status in India suggest that they are treated poorly compared to men. Here we will use the available empirical data to describe some of the key indicators.

In patriarchal societies like Maharashtra, the way in which young men and women are socialized into gender roles plays a major role in the formation of unequal gender relations. Girls are expected to adhere to certain social norms and schedules, as well as rules on their education, employment, and marriage, among other restrictions imposed by their families. Because of the inherent bias against women in the socialization process, women need to be educated and empowered to combat discriminatory attitudes and practices in the home and the wider community. Sakshar Mahila Samooh (SMS) was established to improve gender equality and bring attention to concerns such as the deplorable situation of women, the falling sex ratio, the lack of knowledge about women's rights, etc. Health literacy, legal literacy, social awareness, awareness on schemes and programs for women and children, etc. were all areas in which SMS users participated in the process of mass education.

Members of the SMS had also received first trainings meant to raise their general level of consciousness and have them ready to serve as a pool of resources for the local village community. Bringing together literate and educated women from the countryside was a significant step in empowering these women and the community as a whole. It is thought that the individual 'empowerment' of the members through their engagement in the SMS should take place before the communal 'empowerment,' given that the SMS group was a social awakening group functioning in a largely patriarchal social set-up. This section of the book aims to evaluate how much the SMS scheme has helped its female participants in terms of both social and mental empowerment. Women's social standing within institutions like their community, family, etc. can be affected by their level of "social empowerment," which refers to their increased independence and freedom to act on their own or in concert with others to effect change. The term "empowerment" refers to an inward shift in outlook, a sense of greater capability, or a sense of empowerment.

IMPACT ON THE ABILITY TO TAKE DECISION TO VISIT PARENTAL HOME

Sakshar Mahila Samooh relies on its members' ability to travel more easily to its monthly meetings and other events. The plan empowers the women to speak up for themselves and their families in important matters. The results of the research demonstrate that the participants' freedom to visit their parents' house was significantly affected. The percentage of members reporting feeling empowered to make decisions about visiting their parents rose from 31% before they joined the SMS to 40% after they joined the scheme (Table: 1), indicating a 9 percentage point increase. According to the results, 40% of respondents said they were significantly influenced to make this choice, while 31% said they were influenced only somewhat. Fourteen percent of the public at large had either felt no effect or had been unable to assess the effect, and these were the members. There are a number of possible explanations for this, including not being married, never having been in a similar circumstance, still residing with one's parents, etc.

Table 1: Impact on the Ability to Visit Parental Home and Age (before and after joining the SMS)

Sl. No.	Age Group	Before/ After	Unit	'Empowerment'				Total
				To great extent	To some extent	No Change	Don't Know	
1	19- 29	Before	N	27	27	9	15	78
			%	35.20	34.20	12.00	18.60	100.0
		After	N	35	24	8	11	78
			%	44.90	30.80	10.30	14.10	100.0

2	30- 49	Before	N	35	45	21	16	117
			%	30.27	38.40	17.90	13.43	100.0
		After	N	55	39	17	6	117
			%	47.00	33.30	14.50	5.10	100.0
3	50 and above	Before	N	7	7	9	0	23
			%	30.30	28.50	40.00	1.20	100.0
		After	N	1	6	7	9	23
			%	4.34	26.08	30.43	39.13	100.0
Overall		Before	N	70	78	41	36	225
			%	31.00	35.00	18.00	16.00	100
		After	N	91	70	32	32	225
			%	40.00	31.00	14.00	14.00	100.0

People aged 30–49 reported this shift more than those aged 50 and up. The group of people aged 19 to 29 years old saw the third biggest increase. This indicates that women between the ages of 30 and 49 become more grounded and willing to take on challenges in order to make positive changes in their life. Transitions such as children starting school, dealing with adolescents, and making significant life choices on behalf of children all occur around this time. With its health awareness initiatives, social awareness programs involving gender-based discrimination, etc., and other sensitization efforts, the SMS had also tackled many of these problems. If rural women were given access to such information, they might broaden their views and make a real difference in the world today. The data also shows that the effect was shown to be nearly the same in the other age categories, with the exception of the group of those younger than 18 years old, whose impact could not be measured. Those between the ages of 19 and 29 had the greatest impact (44.9%), followed closely by those aged 50 and up (43%). Thirty percent of members aged 50 and up reported that it did not influence their choice to see their parents.

Table 2: Impact on Ability to Visit Parental Home and Education

S. N	Education	Unit	'Empowerment'				Total
			To a great extent	To some extent	No Change	Don't Know	
1	Primary	N	0	2	0	4	6
		%	0.00	33.30	0.00	66.70	100.00
2	Middle	N	5	6	4	1	16
		%	31.30	37.50	25.00	6.30	100.00
3	10th	N	37	39	11	11	98
		%	37.80	39.80	11.20	11.20	100.00
4	12th	N	35	15	13	8	71
		%	49.30	21.10	18.30	11.30	100.00
5	Grad	N	10	7	1	7	25
		%	40.00	28.00	4.00	28.00	100.00
6	P G& other	N	4	1	3	1	9
		%	44.44	12.50	37.50	12.50	100.00
Overall	Overall	N	91	70	32	32	225
		%	40.40	31.10	14.20	14.20	100.00

Table 2 shows that among members who completed high school, the impact on their decision-making ability to visit their parents' home was almost evenly distributed between 'to a great extent' (reported by 37.8 percent) and 'to some extent' (reported by 39.8 percent), while 11% of members reported no change. More variation was seen among those with only a high school diploma: 49.3 percent said it changed their lives "to a considerable extent," 21.1 percent said it changed their lives "to some extent," and 18.7 percent said there was no effect. Half of the members who went on to higher education said that the program influenced their decision to spend time with their families. However, just 33% of the members had been affected, and even then only "to some extent," based on their level of education. Members agreed that it was much easier for them to convey their wish to meet their parents before they got married, but that it became much more complicated after they did so. However, because of this pressure, many women have to learn to live with their in-laws' persistent harassment without speaking up. These women had found a voice through the medium of the SMS and realized the significance of informing and bargaining within their families to achieve their deepest objectives. 10 percent of those in the general category, 7 percent of those in the other backward class, and just 4 percent of those in the scheduled caste reported the change to have occurred to a "large extent" (Table 6.3). The response "to a considerable extent" was recorded for only 25% of SMS members from the scheduled caste community, indicating the lowest percentage of influence. The lowest percentage was seen in the most privileged group. The majority of people in the general caste did not notice the shift, which affected only 39.6 percent of the population. This demonstrates that the ladies have not yet been able to overcome patriarchal thinking, as evidenced by their decision to forego a trip back to their country of origin. In rural locations, parents had far more control over their children's freedom to visit their houses by erecting impenetrable walls during the socialization process. Although the SMS scheme did

not directly affect women's and girls' ability to make their own decisions in this crucial area, it did have an effect through its advocacy in other spheres, such as education and the proactive prevention of gender-based violence.

Table 3: Impact on the Decision to Visit Parental Home and Caste (before and after joining SMS)

S N	Caste	Before/ After	Unit	EMP				Total
				To a great extent	To some extent	No Change	Don't Know	
1	General	Before	N	32	46	8	24	111
			%	29.00	41.7	7.3	22	100.00
		After	N	44	37	12	18	111
			%	39.70	33.30	10.80	16.20	100.00
2	Other Backward Class	Before	N	29	17	13	2	62
			%	47.00	27.70	21.10	4.00	100.00
		After	N	34	12	10	6	62
			%	54.80	19.40	16.10	9.70	100.00
3	Scheduled Caste	Before	N	11	22	10	9	52
			%	21.40	42.00	19.10	17.50	100.00
		After	N	13	21	10	8	52
			%	25.00	40.40	19.20	15.40	100.00
Overall	Overall	Before	N	73	85	31	36	225
			%	32.26	37.91	13.83	16.00	100.00
		After	N	91	70	32	32	225
			%	40.50	31.10	14.20	14.20	100.00

The monthly sessions were the single most influential factor in shifting attitudes and fostering a greater sense of "empowerment" among participants and the broader community. The monthly gatherings provided a forum for rural women to discuss, debate, and raise awareness of societal concerns at large. The primary means of enlightening the women to the issues facing the community and inspiring them to take action were group meetings. The scheme required participants to attend a monthly meeting, where they discussed and planned activities, and where they also carried out a variety of activities designed to educate them on social concerns and encourage them to spread this information to other women and villagers.

Table 4: Impact on the Decision to Visit Parental Home and Monthly Meetings Attended

S. N	'Empowerment'	Meetings Attended							
		(1-3)		(4-6)		(6+)		Overall	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	To a great extent	32	47.10	30	27.80	29	59.20	91	40.40
2	To some extent	22	32.40	39	36.10	9	18.40	70	31.10

Members might voice their opinions on pressing neighborhood issues like domestic abuse, child marriage, and more. Only 49 of the 225 members interviewed had attended more than six sessions in the last six months (Table 4.). The data in the table

above shows that just 29 people, or nearly 60% of the overall population, reported a change in their decision to visit their parents' house to a "large extent." 47.1% of members attended between one and three meetings in the previous six months, followed by 27.8% of members who attended between four and six meetings during the same time period. As a whole, the data reveals that members, who actively participated, by showing up to the monthly meetings, had a greater say in the matters of parental home visitation policy.

IMPACT ON DECISION FOR RECREATION

An idea of recreation in the country is far off. The participation in community celebrations is a popular leisure activity. It's a great way to unwind and feel refreshed after a long day. A form of leisure time is a rarity for rural women. Twenty-five percent of SMS users said they felt their participation had a "significant degree" on their ability to make leisure-time decisions, according to the survey. However, the research showed that over half of the members only reported an impact 'to some extent,' and another 17% had no impact on their decisions concerning recreation for self-care. Village kids and teenagers were the primary participants in these events. Youth clubs were founded in rural regions as a means of recreation, but they have had little success. Traditionally, the activities under the umbrella of youth clubs have been an essential source to channel the energy of the youth, who are more vulnerable to being impacted by the antisocial and hostile components like alcohol and drug use, which may be made feasible by the development of SMS. SMS members' decision-making abilities for leisure activities and their distribution by age, revealing a "empowerment" after joining the scheme. Change 'to a great amount' among members climbed from 18.95 percent to 25.30 percent between before and after participation in the plan. The percentage gain was greatest for those in the 19-29 age bracket, next for those in the 30-49 age range, and finally for those 50 and beyond. A person's age plays a role in the autonomy with which they choose their own leisure activities. According to the statistics, over 40% of the members who mentioned a shift with the phrase "to a considerable extent" were in the age range of 19-29. Members aged 30-49 showed a much smaller percentage, while those younger than 19 showed no effect at all. Youth recreation was unaffected by the scheme for those under the age of 19, despite the fact that play is widely acknowledged as crucial to young people's healthy development. The system had a moderate effect on the older women since they actively participated and had a place to vent their frustrations.

IMPACT ON THE DECISION TO VISIT FRIENDS OR RELATIVES

Having the freedom to choose whether or not to visit friends and family is a sign of personal autonomy, especially among rural women. In this area, the 'empowerment' process was greatly influenced by the

SMS scheme. When a death occurs or a cultural celebration is taking place, only women make the trip out to the gravesite. However, the regular gatherings and activities had undoubtedly inspired women to become mobile and to make their own option to visit friends and relatives, all thanks to the functionality of the SMS. The rural women's use of SMS as a means of communication and socialization was widespread. To ensure a healthy development of the mind, social interaction is equally crucial. When women get together with their friends and family, they can talk about the issues that are most pressing to them and receive support from those they care about. Forging friendships also depends on one's chronological age. According to the data, the percentage of people in the age range of 19 to 29 who reported changing their minds "to a great extent" was the highest. However, those in the 30-49 age brackets showed the greatest total change. Women over the age of 50 also reported being affected by joining the samooh, with 52% saying their lives had changed "to a significant amount" and 75% saying their lives had changed "to some extent."

IMPACT ON MEMEBR'S DECISISON IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION, MARRAIAGE ETC

Women's decisions regarding their children's education, sending their older children to work, and marriage plans were all influenced by the SMS. Many members said during interviews that they are asked for advice on major life choices like marriage from friends and family. Some volunteers said their partners and families were encouraging of them because of the good they were doing in the world. Many people in the neighborhood had come to them looking for advice on government programs, such as the old age pension, and they were happy to help. Ninety percent of members had a good influence on their capacity to make decisions relating to their children's education, marriage, etc. as a result of the SMS. Only 4% and 7% of the total number of participants thought they were unable to decide any impact in these areas, respectively. Members felt more prepared to make educated decisions as members of society. The locals in their communities recognized them as committed members of the Sakshar Mahila Samooh. They consulted them for advice on sensitive personal matters such as birth control, vaccinations, medical care, hygiene, and more. Many recent brides also turned to the group for advice on navigating the challenges of starting a new family. The Ahmednagar SMS members also mentioned that the villagers seek to them for information and counsel them on matters that the Panchayat members don't seem to be able to resolve. When looking at the effect on parental decision-making about their children's schooling, marriage prospects, and so on, the data suggests that members between the ages of 30 and 49 have felt it the most, followed by those between the ages of 19 and 29, and finally those who are 50 and up. 87% of members in the age bracket of 50+ believed they had been impacted 'to a significant extent,'

while 13% felt the impact was low. Seventy-one percent of members in the 30-49 age bracket indicated the influence 'to a considerable extent' on their ability to make decisions pertaining to their children, followed by 23 percent who reported the impact 'to some amount'.

IMPACT ON THE DECISIONS TO INFLUENCE FAMILY PLANNING

As a result of a lack of education and access to services, rural women are particularly at risk when it comes to unwanted pregnancies. Community-based services for family planning and contraception were prioritized by the National Health Mission and delivered by ASHA workers. In addition to the economic benefits, the members of the Sakshar Mahila Samooh also ran a health initiative. Members of the samooh were educated in the art of sharing information and reached out to local brides-to-be. ASHA workers, health surveys in the villages, outreach through regular community activities, etc. were just a few of the ways that members learned about the newlywed ladies in the families. As a first step, women in the community need to be persuaded and take the initiative to initiate conversations about family planning among themselves. Sixty-eight percent of members reported being influenced "to a great amount" by the scheme on their ability to influence decisions pertaining to family planning concerns, with another 20% reporting being impacted "to some extent." Of the remaining 12%, those people either say there was "no influence" or say they can't quantify the effect. The ability to make family planning choices demonstrates women's agency in the realm of bodily autonomy. Only 2% of participants indicated "no influence" on their ability to make decisions about their own or others' family planning. This may be attributable to the member's persistent engagement in health-related programming, particularly those aimed at women's wellbeing. In fact, the scheme's primary goal was to improve rural women's social standing, with contraceptive use serving as a key measure of success. SMS participants were knowledgeable about several forms of birth control, including sterilization, IUCDs, and condoms, as shown through discussions with SMS participants. Members reported receiving training on how to talk to others about the need of using condoms to prevent STDs.

CONCLUSION

The State Government came up with the idea for the SMSs in order to tackle the two most pressing problems facing the State. First, there was a problem with women's low social standing, and second, there wasn't enough involvement from genuine civil society groups. The state's intention to recognize these SMSs as local non-governmental organizations is, thus, a positive step in the right direction. Unless a distinct system of support is put in place to oversee quality and output, simply expanding the number of organizations on paper will not solve the problem. As 70% of Maharashtra's population lives in rural areas, it

is important to note that the state is economically prosperous and can afford a separate apparatus to promote these SMSs for their intervention in these areas. In rural areas, there is a dearth of reputable non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which contributes to the ineffective rollout of government programs and the perpetuation of long-standing social ills like infanticide, honor killing, caste-based and gender-based discrimination, violence against women, and low health indicators. There is a real chance that the situation in rural Maharashtra can be improved by the widespread use of short message service (SMS) in the region's villages. High rates of illiteracy among women are a reflection of cultural roadblocks to their personal and professional advancement. The lack of progress in human development indicators shows that more work has to be done. While agricultural output has increased, many people still go without basic necessities. This is especially true when it comes to children's health and nutrition, which is a particularly pressing issue. A woman's low social standing is reflected in the six to eight hours of unpaid work she performs every day in rural States. Towards gender parity has been difficult in Maharashtra. With help from federal and state governments as well as the nonprofit sector, the Maharashtra government's Women and Child Development Department has launched a number of programs aimed at advancing the status of women and children in the state.

REFERENCES

1. Jejeebhoy, Shireen J. (1995). *Women's Education, Autonomy, and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Developing Countries*. India, New Delhi. Vedams eBooks (P).Ltd.
2. Jha, J. & Menon, N. (2016). Why It Is Important to Retain an Independent Mahila Samakhya Programme. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(12). Retrieved from <https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/12/commentary/why-it-important-retain-independent-mahila-samakhya-programme.html>. Accessed on JANUARY 10, 2018
3. Jupp, D., Ali, S.I., & Barahona, C. (2010). *Measuring empowerment? Ask them Quantifying qualitative outcomes from people's own experiences - Insights from result-based management from the experience of movement in Bangladesh*. Bangladesh. SIDA. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/countries/bangladesh/46146440.pdf>. Accessed on JUNE 10, 2014
4. Kabeer, N. (1999). *Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment*. *Development and Change*, 30, 435-464. doi:10.1111/1467-7660.00125 Retrieved from www.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/research_design/empowerment.pdf. Accessed on JUNE 10, 2013

5. Kabeer, N.(1998). Money Can't Buy Me Love?' Re-evaluating Gender, Credit and Empowerment in Rural Bangladesh. In Discussion Paper 363. U.K. Brighton. Institute of Development Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/money-can-t-buy-me-love-re-evaluatinggender-credit-and-empowerment-in-rural-bangladesh>. Accessed on JUNE 10, 2013
6. Kabeer, N.(2001). Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. In Sisask, Anne. (Ed.) *Discussing Women's Empowerment: Theory and Practice*. pp-17-57. Sweden. Stockholm: SIDA studies (3). Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.
7. Kandpal, E., and K. Baylis. 2011. "Standing Together: Peer Networks, Female Empowerment, and Child Welfare." Working Paper.
8. Kandpal, E., and K. Baylis. 2013. "Expanding Horizons: Can Women's Support Groups Diversify Peer Networks in Rural India?" *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*.95(2) 360-367.
9. Keller, B. & Mbwewe. D.C.(1991). Policy and Planning for the Empowerment of Zambia's Women Farmers. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 12(1):75-88.
10. Kilby.P.(2017). NGOs and Political Change: A History of the Australian Council for International Development. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*.28 (3) 1364-1366.
11. Kishor. S.(2006). Population and gender. Entry in G. Ritzer (ed.) *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Sociology* Blackwell Publishing

Corresponding Author

Bhure Poonam Ramchandra*

PhD Student, Kalinga University, Raipur