

Impact of Sakshar Mahila Samooh Scheme on the “Empowerment” of Women

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Abstract - This research aims to shed light on the transformation of Maharashtra into India's economic powerhouse in the decades following India's independence. The state's social problems were only recently recognized, despite the state's flourishing economy. There has always been a disparity between the sexes, but the patriarchal norms ingrained in the culture have only contributed to exacerbate the problem. The contributions of women to the family, the workplace, and society as a whole are little when all the facts are examined. This necessitated studies into the results of various national and state-level initiatives aimed at fostering better gender equality and relations in spheres such as sex inequality, dowry, women's property rights, domestic violence, family structure, fertility patterns, girl child birth order, infant care, healthy eating, and naming ceremonies. Women's "empowerment" will be studied in terms of factors like their ability to move freely and financially, their ability to make decisions (both big and small), the absence of male family influence in significant matters, their access to information about political and legal issues, and their participation in political campaigns and protests. In this analysis, we look at how the Short Message Service (SMS) program has affected the health and social consciousness of rural women, as well as their ability to adapt to new gender norms and advance in their communities. It was the researcher's intention to look into the emancipatory effects of SMS in order to learn more about it (SMS). In order to fully grasp the "empowerment" process, it was crucial to travel to the villages and observe the events that rural women organize under Sakshar Mahila Samooh, such as rallies, awareness camps in the village, organizational activities like monthly meetings, account keeping, role distribution, etc.

Keywords - Sakshar Mahila Samooh Scheme, Women Empowerment, Maharashtra, family, Short Message Service

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INTRODUCTION

The social indices in India reveal much about the position of women in Indian society. There is a significant power gap between the sexes, making egalitarian relationships a pipe dream. In Indian culture, patriarchy is so deeply ingrained that it is passed on unconsciously from one generation to the next through institutionalized practices like rituals and sacraments. Educated, economically independent women in India still follow fasting and go without food all day in the hopes of prolonging their husbands' lives. This demonstrates that women in India continue to bear the brunt of male chauvinism and perpetuate patriarchal norms and practices. Research on women's position in India reveals numerous variables that place women at a disadvantage compared to men. Here, using the available empirical data, we shall explain some of the key markers. Several metrics can be used to characterize women's progress. The sex ratio is an extremely important metric. A female birthrate is defined as the number of female births divided by the total number of live births. The Indian census counts the country's residents and provides

revealing data about the status of women in the country. India has 940 females for every 1000 males, according to the 2011 census. The population ratio of females to males was 933 to 1 in the 2001 census.

Those entrusted with the task of making the "empowerment" plan a reality are crucial to its ultimate success. Education, experience, and "empowerment" in the relevant areas are also major factors in how well those members who have been given the jobs execute. Sakshar Mahila Samoohs (from here on out SMS) were established in every village across the state of Maharashtra to serve as a kind of community-based organization. It was conceived as a means to equip rural communities with educated and literate women. While education is crucial, it is not sufficient to assure women's "empowerment" unless it leads to a significant shift in societal norms and ushers in more equal relationships in society. This community-based organization's level of success in empowering its members, particularly the women in rural areas, should be investigated. This study details the

demographics and socioeconomic background of the SMS membership, as well as the variables that have contributed to the members' "empowerment" through the scheme and the members' "empowerment" in the political and economic spheres. In the first part of the study, the demographics and key elements of the empowerment system are laid out. This data will shed light on whether or not the required eligibility criteria for including SMS members have been met, and on the current status of those employed under the scheme.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

1. Study the socio-economic profile of the members associated with Sakshar Mahila Samooh Scheme.
2. Study the functions and the activities of Sakshar Mahila Samooh.
3. Study the impact of Sakshar Mahila Samooh scheme on the „empowerment“ of women.

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It was understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. The State of Maharashtra, in the year 2007, introduced a scheme called "Sakshar Mahila Samooh" i.e. a group of educated women in every village would lend the necessary resource support to the Gram Panchayat and its subcommittee for effective dispense of the functions assigned to them. The three words of the scheme stand as follows - Sakshar means 'literate', Mahila means 'woman', Samooh means 'group', signifies the literate women's groups in villages of Maharashtra. The role of education in rural or urban society is well established. The scheme Sakshar Mahila Samooh (further was denoted as SMS) is an initiative of the Department of Women & Child Development, Maharashtra to initiate active participation by the rural literate women to bring changes in their community by the community development process.

SAMPLE DESIGN

In certain cases of science, analyzing the entire universe is almost impossible; the only alternative was to use sampling. The procedure for deciding the sample of the analysis is sampling of the SMSs was form in every village of each district in Maharashtra. As per Maharashtra Development Report, a total of 5829 SMSs has been formed till January 2007 in Maharashtra. Here, it is important to study the impact of this scheme in the districts where the sex ratio is declining. In one SMS group, there are 25 members that include one leader and twenty four members. The total sample in 9 SMSs was 225 that bring out 9 leaders and 216 members. The selection of the active SMS was done in consultation with the concerned regional government officials from the Department of Women & Child Development and the Department of Health. These departments are primarily responsible

for the formation of SMS groups and distribution of funds for various activities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study of women's „empowerment“ through Sakshar Mahila Samooh scheme was examined through a Descriptive Design using mix method research. The scheme under discussion in the course of this study is unique and therefore it will important to gather women's experiences under the scheme to create a better understanding and its impact on women's „empowerment“. Women's „empowerment“ is a dynamic process and it has multiple domains. The study identifies various domains of „empowerment“ to understand the impact of the scheme on the „empowerment“ of rural women. For in-depth understanding, it will important to reach out to the women at grassroots level, the women who shall involve in the implementation of the scheme and hold the discussions and attend the meetings which they organize in the community. Also, it will require holding discussions with the community that shall the beneficiaries of Sakshar Mahila Samooh scheme. The study will gives a description of the activities and the events that contributed in „empowerment“ process in Maharashtra.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the systematic way to collect and measure data from sources to get complete and precise data for research activities. In all areas of study the facts collection component is not unusual with body and social sciences, the humanities and corporations. It allows scientists and analysts to collect key factors as the information they collect. In contrast with the approaches in terms of subject matter, the value of maintaining the right and truthful sequence remains the same. Current data collection is essential for preserving the credibility of research and for ensuring excellent outcomes and their findings. Both the first and secondary supply for study targets is a valuable tool.

PRIMARY DATA

Uncooked statistics will primary records that were collect at source. Primary statistics was obtained from the first-hand point of view by means of surveys, remarks, interviews, questionnaires and tests. Primary data will special findings, collect through direct study.

SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data was the data collect by an individual rather than the user. A researcher who is not associated with the analysis / recherche study collects secondary information for a different purpose, and in the past at quite different times such

data will readily accessible and cost effective in comparison to primary data.

Sources of secondary data collection will as follows:

- Government department's journals,
- Organizational records,
- Magazines,
- Journals, books,
- Newspapers and
- The information which is collected originally for other research purpose.

STATISTICAL METHODS AND TOOLS

Quantitative data shall analyze by using descriptive statistics technique. Data will tabulate, present in the form of tables and figures. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) will use for quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data shall collect through FGDs, Observations and Interview guide. The data will transcribe manually to do the analysis through identifying major themes.

DATA ANALYSIS

A key feature of the SMS service is publicizing the importance of women's involvement in politics. Data on members' political "empowerment" was also collected to provide light on this dimension of "empowerment," and this topic is discussed in the following section, since members' participation should have affected them politically. The last part of the scheme focuses on the economic "empowerment" of SMS members. This includes the development of Self-Help Groups in the community, as well as trainings of SMS members and knowledge building on other financial schemes that may have affected their economic situation as SMS members.

diverse perspectives on what it means to be "empowered," and these differences in turn influence how they feel about being involved in any given endeavor.

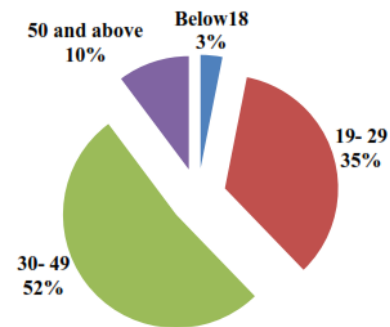


Figure 1: Age of SMS Members

More than half of the SMS participants in this study were adults between the ages of 30 and 49. (Figure 1). According to this data, middle-aged women make up the bulk of those who participate in SMS activities. The group of people aged 19 to 29 had the second highest turnout. Women in this age range are known as reproductive age because of the many obligations they take on, including marriage, adjusting to a new family, having children, and raising them. The researcher noticed during FGDs that people aged 50 and up were far less likely to participate in SMS activities, which may explain why just 10% of the sample comprised this age group. Teenage girls made up a tiny percentage of participants (3 percent), according to the data. The requirements for the system state that the SMS must have both balika samooch and kishori shakti yojana participants, but they do not specify what proportion of participants must be teenagers. The low percentage of teenage girls indicates that the SMS strategy has failed to successfully recruit a sizable proportion of its target demographic. Teens may be less likely to participate in a certain activity for a variety of reasons, including their own academic pursuits, a lack of familiarity with the program, or even restrictions imposed by their own families.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile

AGE				EDUCATION			
S.N.	Age	Freq	%	S.N	Age	Freq	%
1.	Below18	7	3.0	1.	Primary & Middle	22	10.0
2.	19- 29	78	35.0	2.	Matriculation & Senior	169	75.0
3.	30- 49	117	52.0	3.	Graduation and Other	34	15.0
4.	50 and above	23	10.0				
	Total	225	100.0		Total	225	100.0
MARITAL STATUS				OCCUPATION			
S.N	Marital Status	Freq	%	S.N	Occupation	Freq	%
1.	Unmarried	33	15.00	1.	Government Service	36	16.00
2.	Married	165	73.00	2.	Private Service	31	14.00
3.	Widow	23	10.00	3.	Self-employed	97	43.00
4.	Separated	4	2.00	4.	Seasonal Worker	51	23.00
	Total	225	100.00	5.	Unemployed	10	04.00
					Total	225	100.0

AGE

One's age is a major consideration in deciding whether or not to take part. Women of different ages have

MARITAL STATUS

A person's level of involvement and "empowerment" may also vary depending on their marital status. Marital status has a clear effect on a woman's ability to negotiate and make decisions, therefore it's crucial to look at the phenomenon known as "women's empowerment" in India from the perspective of single women, married women, and women in other relationships. The vast majority (73%) of the participants in the current analysis were married (Figure 2.). One possible interpretation of this is that samooch members have taken on community duties in addition to their usual family duties. Cultural norms regarding women's participation in decision-making and leadership roles

beyond the home and their impact on community growth may vary.

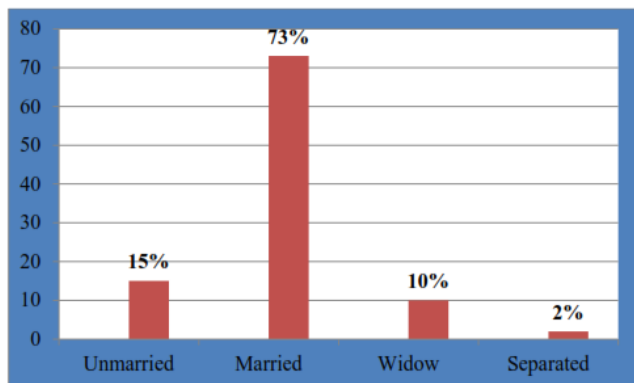


Figure 2: Marital Status of SMS members

Being able to commit time to the SMS activities is crucial, and unmarried women's motivation to contribute to the welfare of the community may be rather high. Fifteen percent of women in this survey were not married. Only 2% of the membership was divorced or legally separated. With the help of the members and their active engagement, this plan hopes to raise awareness in the local community, particularly on issues affecting women and children.

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

To improve rural areas, the program is specifically targeting educated women; 75 percent of the participants were female, and most of them (if not all) had completed at least secondary school.

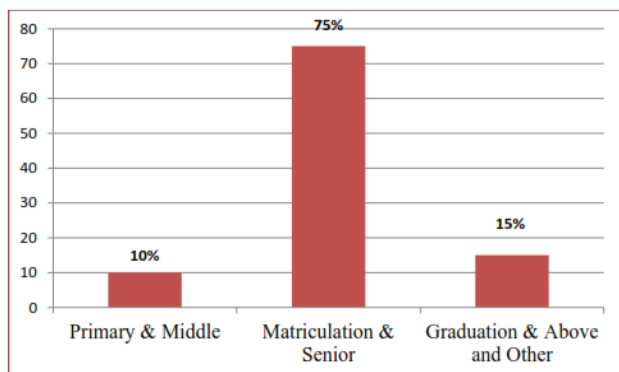


Figure 3: Educational Qualifications

This was followed by 15 percent members with the qualification up-to the level of graduation and above. Only 10 percent of the members had studied up to the level of primary and middle school (Figure 3). It shows that the selection of the women members under this scheme was deliberate to an extent in order to fulfill the criteria of the scheme as the same scale was also found while holding focused discussions during data collection.

OCCUPATION

According to the results of the poll, all participants in the SMS have jobs. (See Fig. 4) From the numbers, it appears that the vast majority of participants are either self-employed (at 43% of the total) or perform seasonal jobs (23 percent). Labor in agricultural fields and related industries (dairy farms, etc.), temporary jobs (such as knitting in the winter), and work that is in high demand during a specific time of year are all examples of seasonal work.

Both public and private sectors have nearly as many women workers (16%). (14 percent). Teachers, aides, peons, guards, office assistants, unskilled laborers, and security guards are all examples of typical jobs in the public and private sectors. These women ran their own businesses and worked as street sellers, seamstresses, and estheticians, or were participants in their families' enterprises. Teenagers make up the bulk of the 4 percent of the population that is unemployed. According to the findings of the survey, rural women's primary source of income and ability to support their families came from the informal economy.

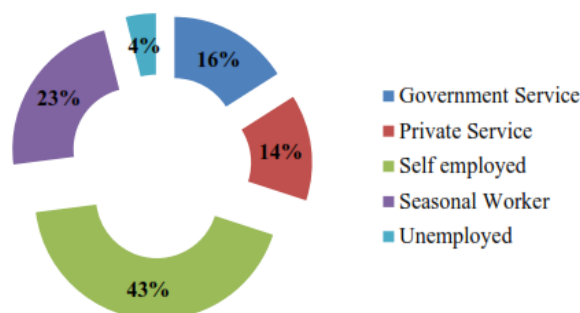


Figure 4: Occupation of the SMS Members

CASTE

The caste composition of the SMS members shows that the majority (49 percent) were from the general category followed by other backward class forming 28 percent and scheduled castes forming 23 percent of the population (Table 2).

Table 2: Caste of SMS members

S. N.	Caste	Frequency	Percentage
1	General Caste	111	49.00
2	Other Backward Class	62	28.00
3	Scheduled Caste	52	23.00
Total		225	100.00

Statistics reveal that the literacy rate among the general population is still rather high. So that rural women can guarantee widespread dissemination of schemes and programs in the village community, the scheme was established with a goal of having a representative percentage of literate and educated women from all communities. In India and particularly in the state of Maharashtra, one's caste

is a determining factor in eligibility for government benefits.

MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The distribution of the SMS members by monthly household income groups shows that they were from wide-ranging income groups, the highest of 34 percent of the SMS members were in the income group of Rs. 5001-8000 per month (Table 3).

Table 3: Monthly Household Incomes

Sl. No.	Monthly Household Income (Rs.)	Frequency	Percentage
1	2000&Below	47	21.0
2	2001-5000	48	21.00
3	5001-8000	77	34.00
4	8001-11000	41	18.00
5	11001 and above	12	5.00
Total		225	100.00

Twenty-one percent of the first two categories had monthly incomes of less than Rs. 2,000 and between Rs. 2,000 and Rs. 5,000, respectively. Eighteen percent had a household income of between Rs. 8,000 and 11, 000. Only 5% of the population had monthly incomes of Rs. 11000 or more. Nearly half of the members, or around 42% of the total population, were found to have annual household incomes of Rs. 5000 or less.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Almost 75% of Maharashtra's population still resides in rural areas. The family structure in the villages had experienced significant alterations. Traditional nuclear families are breaking up for several reasons such as changing lifestyles, urbanization, and the need to divide up land to accommodate growing numbers of people.

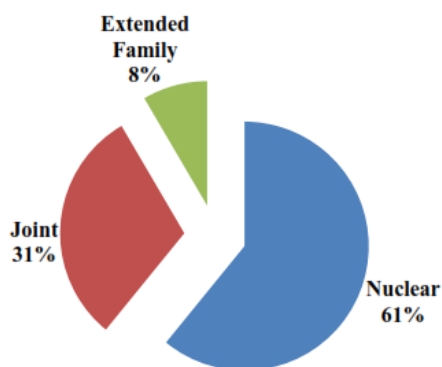


Figure 5: Family Structure

In the course of this investigation, this phenomenon was also noticed. A majority of SMS respondents

(61%), according to the survey, came from traditional nuclear households. While 31% of SMS members came from nuclear households, just 8% of the population lives with their extended relatives. The remaining 8 percent consisted of distant relatives (Figure: 5). Women's higher levels of participation in nuclear family settings demonstrate that, in contrast to their counterparts in joint and extended families, these women are freer to make decisions on their own and experience fewer constraints in everyday life.

OWNERSHIP OF DWELLING UNIT AND PROPERTY OWNERSHIP OF THE SMS MEMBERS

Adequate shelter is both one of humanity's fundamental need and a proxy for societal well-being. According to the 2011 Census, home ownership in rural Maharashtra is quite high, at over 88%. It's a sign that rural poverty is relatively mild because even the poorest people often have some property. There's a chance that agriculture-driven economic expansion and improved infrastructure are to blame. In the rural areas of Maharashtra, even seasonal farm workers own a tiny plot of property. Table 4 from the report confirms that nearly all SMS members (94%) own a residence, with the remaining 6% living in rented homes. Those who are currently living in rented homes are the ones who previously called another place home.

According to data on SMS members' assets, the vast majority (78%) do not have any property title in their name at all. Table 4 shows that only 22% of SMS members own any real estate in their own names, demonstrating a lack of "empowerment" in this area. Those who qualify for the government refund while registering property in the name of a woman are automatically members of the group. According to the research, all of the members who claimed to not own any property had it registered in their names in order to save money. The researcher discovered during data gathering that only one family member had inherited property.

Table 4: Ownership of Dwelling Unit and Property Ownership

S. N	Ownership of Dwelling Unit	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Own	211	94.00
2.	Rented	14	6.00
Total		225	100.00
Property in Member's Name		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	49	22.00
2.	No	176	78.00
Total		225	100.00

TYPE OF HOUSE AND SIZE OF DWELLING OF SMS MEMBERS

The type of dwelling is an indicator of the social status and the environmental condition of the household. The State of Maharashtra has the highest proportion of pucca houses in the rural

areas, as recorded by NSSO 65th round (July 2008-June 2009).

Table 5: Dwelling Units and its Description

S. N	Type of Dwelling Unit	Frequency	Percentage
1	<i>Pucca</i>	129	57
2	<i>Semi-pucca</i>	91	40
3	<i>Kaccha</i>	5	2
Total		225	100
	Number of Rooms	Frequency	Percentage
1	One room	44	20
2	Two room	107	48
3	More than two rooms	74	33
Total		225	100

Ninety-three percent of the rural populace, the poll found, lives in pucca dwellings. The dwellings of SMS members are described below (table 5). Only 129 (57%) of the 225 respondents in this survey live in pucca houses, whereas 44% live in semi-pucca houses, where only a few rooms are cemented and the rest of the building is built on bricks. Only 2% of the population does not reside in kuccha homes (Figure: 6).

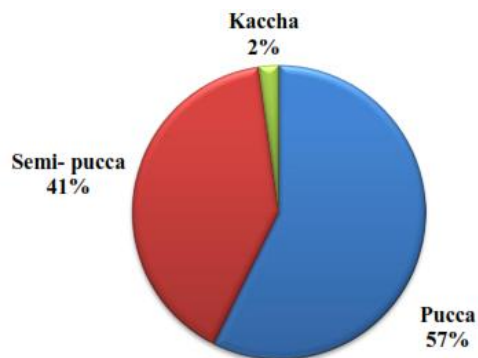


Figure 6: Type of Dwelling Unit

CONCLUSION

The phrase "empowerment" encompasses a wide range of meanings when applied to different social, cultural, and political settings. Not every language can easily adopt it. Emancipation encompasses a wide range of concepts, including but not limited to: the ability to make one's own decisions, to stand up for one's rights, to awaken independence, to be free, and to have abilities. By building on people's strengths and those of their communities, empowerment is defined from the bottom up, while social inclusion is transformed from the top down. To achieve empowerment, systemic transformation through long-term methods is essential. Inclusion in society is the only means through which social institutions can be reformed in order to bring about economic expansion that is really inclusive. A program named "Sakshar Mahila Samooh" (SMS) was implemented in 2007 to create groups of literate and educated women in each village to aid in the community's general development,

with a focus on helping women, children, and other at-risk individuals. Each hamlet in the state has a Sakshar Mahila Samooh, which is a legally recognized organization (registered as a Society) that serves the interests of women. These groups, known as "Sakshar Mahila Samooh" (SMS), are eligible to receive grants and loans for microcredit and other forms of community support. The groupings of educated women in the rural areas of Maharashtra go by the acronym "SMS," which is made up of the three words "SAKSHAR MAHILA SAMOOH" (SMS). The State of Maharashtra's Department of Women and Child Development conceived up the idea for the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to encourage literate rural women to become involved in the community's development process. One common strategy for effecting positive social change is the establishment of women's collectives or other forms of community-based organization at the grass-roots level. State-sponsored NGOs (SNGOs) in Maharashtra are State-led organizations that focus on uplifting the state's rural population. In order to combat issues like domestic violence, caste discrimination, malnutrition, and oversight functions like community development, the scheme envisions the crucial role of educated rural based women in implementing, generating awareness, and bringing about positive change in rural areas by collaborating with State Government Departments to implement a wide range of activities.

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