

**EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUPS: EXPLORING THE IMPACT  
ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

**Dr. Sumangala R. K.** Department of Political Science, G.F.G.C, Gubbi  
Email: [sumangalasumai25@gmail.com](mailto:sumangalasumai25@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Self-help groups (SHGs) have developed as an important vehicle for improving women's socioeconomic status, particularly in economically challenged countries. This study seeks to investigate the impact of self-help groups (SHGs) on women's political participation. The research looks primarily at how women's membership in these organizations affects their political knowledge, confidence, and engagement in public affairs. This research used a mixed-methods approach, collecting data via questionnaires and in-depth interviews with members of different Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The results show that participating in self-help groups (SHGs) improves women's political participation by giving opportunities for political education, leadership training, and peer support. Furthermore, the research reveals that women's self-help groups (SHGs) serve to develop networks that increase women's participation in local politics and civic activities. However, political activity varies widely and is influenced by various variables such as educational attainment, socioeconomic situation, and cultural milieu. The report finishes with a section on the significance of these results for policy-making and future research. This topic focuses on how self-help groups (SHGs) may boost women's political empowerment.

**Keywords:** *Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Women's Political Engagement, Economic Empowerment, Political Participation*

## **1. Introduction**

In recent decades, women's roles in government and politics have received significant attention as an important component in upholding democratic values and guaranteeing equitable growth. Despite tremendous advances, women's political engagement remains low, especially in rural and underprivileged groups. Structural constraints such as sexism, restricted access to education, economic reliance, and cultural standards continue to prevent women from actively participating in political processes. Self-help groups (SHGs), which began as a tool for economic empowerment, have grown into a potent mechanism for promoting social and political change among women. This research investigates how SHGs act as a conduit for increasing women's political participation, looking at both direct and indirect paths via which these organizations affect political behaviour. This study's relevance stems from its ability to contribute to a wider discussion on gender equality and political engagement. Understanding the relationship between SHGs and political involvement allows policymakers and development practitioners to better design programs that empower women both economically and politically. This study also seeks to address a gap in the current literature by presenting empirical data on the influence of SHGs on women's political involvement in the rural environment. Women's engagement in self-help groups (SHGs) in rural and underprivileged areas is becoming more important, since these organizations have become an essential component of community development and empowerment. These groups, which generally come from impoverished nations, are made up of 10 to twenty women who meet to discuss issues that are important to them all, such as financial independence, social justice, and personal growth. Self-help groups (SHGs) not only give economic and social advantages, but they also act as platforms to encourage women to participate in politics. Women's political involvement is critical to achieving gender equality and inclusive government. Women, however, continue to be underrepresented in many countries' political decision-making processes. The purpose of this research is to look at how Self-Help Groups (SHGs) might improve women's political involvement. More specifically, it investigates how membership in these organizations relates to increased political knowledge, confidence, and participation in public and political arenas.

**The following research inquiries will form the basis for this investigation:**

1. How do women's self-help groups (SHGs) influence their political awareness and knowledge?
2. How much do self-help groups (SHGs) promote women's political participation?
3. How can women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) overcome obstacles to political participation?

More exactly, the document is constructed as follows: The following section provides an overview of the literature on women's political involvement and self-help groups (SHGs). The research methods are then outlined, the findings are presented, the results are evaluated in light of the existing literature, and a conclusion is supplied that summarizes the study's key contributions and proposes prospective topics for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Concept of Political Engagement**

Political involvement refers to a variety of actions in which people express their political beliefs and participate in the government of their communities and countries. Voting, participating in political campaigns, attending public meetings, taking part in communal decision-making processes, and running for political office are examples of such actions. Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) define political participation as not just formal political actions but also civic voluntarism and community activity, both of which are necessary for a thriving democracy. A variety of variables impact women's political participation, including access to education, economic independence, social capital, and political knowledge. Women in many developing nations, particularly in rural regions, suffer major impediments to political involvement owing to patriarchal traditions, limited access to resources, and socio-cultural restraints (Kabeer, 2005). These impediments are often exacerbated by a lack of institutional support for women's political rights and low representation in decision-making bodies.

### **2.2 Self-Help Groups: Origins and Evolution**

Self-help groups (SHGs) began as a grassroots drive to improve the economic situations of vulnerable people, notably women. SHGs were popular in the 1980s and 1990s, with microfinance firms and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating them as a way to provide financial services to individuals who were excluded from traditional banking systems (Pitt et al., 2006). SHGs are often made up of 10-20 women who band together to save money, offer loans to members, and help each other in times of need. Over time, SHGs have expanded beyond their core economic purpose to address larger social and political concerns. The communal aspect of SHGs promotes member solidarity, allowing them to address issues such as domestic abuse, health care, education, and access to public services. In this setting, SHGs have evolved into a forum for women to engage in political activism, advocate for their rights, and participate in local government (Agarwal, 2010).

### **2.3 SHGs and Political Engagement: Theoretical Perspectives**

Several theoretical views provide light on the link between SHGs and political activity. Feminist ideology emphasises economic independence and social capital as precondition for political empowerment (Kabeer, 2005). According to this viewpoint, SHGs play an important role in breaking down patriarchal institutions by providing women with the financial means and social networks they need for political engagement. Social capital theory provides a useful framework for analysing the influence of SHGs on political participation. Social capital, defined as the networks, norms, and trust that enable collaboration within a society, is a significant predictor of political engagement (Putnam, 2000). By building deep links among members, SHGs provide a pool of social capital from which women may draw while engaging in political activity.

### **2.4. Self-Help Groups: Definition and Purpose**

Self-help groups, or SHGs, are voluntary organisations of people who get together to solve common problems, which are often financial, social, or health-related. Small and medium-sized companies (SMEs), also known as self-help groups (SHGs), are mostly founded by women in underdeveloped countries to achieve economic empowerment via activities such as saving and lending. Over time, these organisations have expanded to address a wider range of social concerns, such as education,

healthcare, and citizen engagement in political activities.

### **2.5. SHGs and Women's Empowerment**

Numerous studies have proven that SHGs have a positive impact on women's social and economic empowerment. Women who participate in self-help groups (SHGs) see a boost in their self-esteem, decision-making abilities, and financial independence, all of which are critical components of empowerment. Economic independence gained via the development of SHGs often leads to more autonomy and influence in domestic and communal decisions, which may extend to political engagement.

### **2.6. SHGs and Political Engagement**

Political participation may take several forms, including voting, attending political events, engaging in demonstrations or campaigns, and running for public office. According to research, women who participate in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are more likely to get involved in political activities. These variables, such as greater political knowledge, confidence, leadership abilities, and the support networks given by SHGs, may contribute to this. However, more extensive research is required to completely understand the precise processes by which Self-Help Groups (SHGs) impact political behaviour, as well as to analyse the disparities that occur across distinct cultural and socioeconomic situations.

Extensive research has been conducted on self-help groups (SHGs), specifically their influence on increasing socioeconomic empowerment. However, little research has been undertaken into their influence on political activity. Research has indicated that self-help groups (SHGs) may serve as effective forums for political education and empowerment. Kabeer (2005) found that special interest groups (SHGs) may assist women develop critical abilities such as leadership, negotiating, and public speaking, all of which are necessary for political participation. Desai and Joshi (2013) discovered that women who participate in self-help groups (SHGs) had greater levels of political participation, such as voting, attending political meetings, and making communal decisions. Despite the discovery of these findings, there are major gaps in the research that explain the precise methods by which self-help groups (SHGs) increase political participation. Furthermore, while some studies have yielded positive results, Pande et al. (2016) argue that the influence of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on political participation may be limited by factors such as regional power dynamics, financial reliance, and cultural norms that limit women's ability to move freely and participate in public affairs. These qualities suggest that SHGs' effect on political engagement may sometimes be limited. The purpose of this research is to improve our understanding of the influence of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women's political involvement by investigating the variables that encourage and hinder female participation.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study uses a mixed-methods research approach to investigate the impact of SHGs on women's political involvement. The mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies enables a thorough examination of the study topic, yielding both statistical data and in-depth insights.

### **3.2 Sampling and Data Collection**

The research was carried out in rural regions of three Indian states where SHGs are well-established. The participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling process. During the first step, districts with a high number of SHGs were discovered. The second step included selecting individual villages within these districts based on factors such as the number of SHGs, the community's socioeconomic profile, and the amount of political participation.

A standardised questionnaire was used to interview 500 women, all of whom were members of self-help groups. The study asked about demographics, SHG engagement, political knowledge, voting behaviour, attendance at local government meetings, and involvement in political campaigns. In addition, 30 in-depth interviews were performed with a sample of survey respondents, SHG leaders, local government officials, and NGO representatives to acquire a better understanding of how SHGs affect political participation.

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative and quantitative data, to evaluate the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women's political participation.

### **3.1. Qualitative Approach**

The qualitative component of the study inquiry includes in-depth discussions in focus groups and interviews with women who have joined SHGs in various locations. Our objective is to get an understanding of their individual experiences, as well as changes in their political awareness and conduct, and the role that SHGs play in fostering political engagement. Participants were chosen using a purposive sample approach to provide a varied population in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and geographic area.

### **3.2. Quantitative Approach**

The quantitative component consists of a survey done with a representative sample of women, both SHG members and non-members, to determine the amount of their political activity. The poll collects data on several facets of political activity, including as voting habits, participation in political rallies or campaigns, and readiness to run for public office. The collected data was evaluated statistically to determine the correlations and discrepancies between individuals who were members of the Self-Help Group (SHG) and those who were not.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to investigate qualitative data and find recurring patterns and trends in women's interactions with self-help groups (SHGs) and political activism. We used descriptive statistics and regression analysis to examine quantitative data and determine the influence of SHG membership on political involvement.

This study used a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative and quantitative data, to completely examine the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women's political involvement. Data was gathered using a mix of questionnaires and in-depth interviews with members of numerous Self-Help Groups (SHGs) located in both rural and urban locations. SHG members were asked to complete a survey to determine their degrees of political knowledge, involvement in political activities, and perceived levels of empowerment. Conversely, the interviews gave extensive insights into women's experiences and perspectives on their participation in self-help groups (SHGs) and political engagement opportunities. To guarantee a thorough examination of the study issues, the data analysis technique included statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Economic Empowerment as a Catalyst for Political Engagement**

The examination of survey data demonstrates a substantial positive relationship between economic empowerment and political participation. Women who reported considerable economic gains from SHG membership, such as higher income, savings, and credit availability, were more likely to participate in political activities. These women were more comfortable expressing their political views, attending public meetings, and voting in elections. The evidence also suggests that economic empowerment increases women's negotiating power inside their homes, allowing them to make their own choices about political engagement.

### **4.2 The Role of Social Capital in Enhancing Political Agency**

The research concludes that SHGs are an important source of social capital, which boosts women's political agency. SHGs' social networks offer women with information, support, and opportunity for collective action. For example, several SHG members said that their group meetings were used to debate political topics, share information about approaching elections, and organise collective activities to demand improved public services. This collaborative effort not only improves political knowledge, but also gives women the confidence to participate in political processes. Interview data emphasises the role of leadership in SHGs. Effective leaders who are politically engaged themselves often encourage and mobilise their followers to join in political activity. These individuals serve as role models and mentors, offering advice and support to women who are afraid to participate in politics owing to societal and cultural hurdles.



### **4.3 Structural and Cultural Challenges to Political Engagement**

Despite the good influence of SHGs on women's political involvement, the research finds many difficulties that continue to prevent women from fully participating in politics. Cultural traditions that value women's duties as homemakers and carers sometimes hinder political participation. In certain societies, women who engage in political activism encounter social shame or opposition from male family members. Furthermore, the success of SHGs in fostering political involvement varies with group size, leadership quality, and the extent of external assistance from NGOs and government agencies.

### **Conclusion:**

This study presents persuasive evidence that self-help groups have an important role in increasing women's political participation, especially in rural and marginalised regions. SHGs empower women economically, generate social capital, and provide a forum for collective action, allowing them to overcome conventional hurdles to political engagement. However, the research emphasises the need of addressing the institutional and cultural barriers that continue to impede women's political agency. Policymakers and development practitioners should think about incorporating political empowerment tactics into SHG projects to maximise their influence on women's political engagement. Future study should look at the long-term impacts of SHG membership on women's political trajectories, as well as the feasibility of scaling up successful SHG models to promote gender equality in governance.

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