

“ROLE OF MICRO FINANCE IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN BELONGING TO BRAHMIN COMMUNITY”.

VINU GOVIND

Guest Faculty

Department of Economics

Mar Thoma College, Tiruvalla

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women”

-Kofi Annan

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women has been emerging as a burning issue not only in India but all over the world also. Women empowerment is the key slogan of the 90s and of the new millennium. Women constitute nearly half of the rural population in India and play a vital role in its rural economy. Microfinance is a type of banking service that is provided to unemployed or low-income individuals or groups who would otherwise have no other means of gaining financial services. Micro finance through Self Help Group (SHG) has been recognized internationally as the modern tool to combat poverty and for rural development.

Women empowerment occupies a prominent role in the discussion among various communities especially in the Brahmin community. During the Vedic period, Brahmin women occupied a crucial role in making necessary arrangements for ritual practices. However they did not given necessary attention in their life. They were called ‘Antharjanam’ meaning ‘she who spends her life inside’. Realising the importance of women in community transformation, ‘Yogakshemasabha’ - a leading organization of Brahmin community is giving much attention to the upliftment of Namboothiri women. This led to the ushering in of Microfinance in Brahmin community also. A number of microfinance units were started among Brahmin community in various parts of Kerala under Yogakshemasabha. This study is intended to analyze the effects of microfinance in empowering the Namboothiri women.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of the present investigation is to analyze the impact of microfinance in empowering women belonging to Brahmin community. Therefore the study is entitled as “ROLE OF MICRO FINANCE IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN BELONGING TO BRAHMIN COMMUNITY”.

DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERMS

➤ MICROFINANCE

A type of banking service that is provided to unemployed or low-income individuals or groups who would otherwise have no other means of gaining financial services. Ultimately, the goal of microfinance is to give low income people an opportunity to become self-sufficient by providing a means of saving money, borrowing money and insurance.

➤ EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment can be viewed as means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. It strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power and experience (Hashemi Schuler and Riley, 1996).

➤ BRAHMIN COMMUNITY

Brahmin (also called Brahmana) is a varna in Vedic Hinduism and also a caste of people who are members of it.

OBJECTIVES

The general objectives of the study are to examine the nature and extent of women empowerment through Microfinance in Brahmin community in Kottayam District and the specific objectives are as follows:

- To study the overall performance of women microunit groups in Kottayam District
- To evaluate the benefits derived by the members of Microunits
- To assess the degree of upliftment in the socio-economic status of group members.

METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

- **Sources of Data:** The study is undertaken in Kottayam district. Both primary and secondary data were used. Convenience sampling is followed. Since the members are large in number they are divided into groups and randomly selected for data collection.
- **Sample Size:** 100 samples have been collected for the research from all the five microunits.
- **Statistical tools used:** Percentage analysis has been used to analyze and interpret the data.
- **Method of Data Collection:** A structured interview schedule was prepared by the researcher and used for collecting data from the members who are engaged in Micro enterprises through microfinance.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Educational Qualifications of Respondents

Sl.No	Educational Qualification	No. Of Members	Percentage
1.	Post graduation	18	18
2.	Graduation	30	30
3.	Higher Secondary	34	34
4.	SSLC	13	13
5.	Below SSLC	5	5

Majority of the women possess higher secondary level qualification.

Maintenance Level of the Family by Women

Sl.No	Educational Qualification	No. Of Members	Percentage
1.	Great extend	64	64
2.	Some extend	25	25
3.	Low extend	11	11

64% of the respondents said that they can able to maintain their family to great extent after joining in Microfinance.

Expressing opinions freely			
Sl.No	Opinions	Frequency	percent
1	Yes	72	72
2	No	28	28
Total		100	100

72 out of 100 respondents agreed they can able to express their opinions freely both in group and in family because of the training they received from the Microfinance activities.

Moving independently			
Sl.No	Opinions	Frequency	percent
1	Yes	68	68
2	No	32	32
Total		100	100

68 respondents are moving independently without the help of family members to banks, government offices and other places which indicate the social mobility.

Role of decision making in family			
Sl.No	Opinions	Frequency	percent
1	Yes	81	81
2	No	19	19
Total		100	100

Most of the respondents (81 %) agreed they play a vital role in decision making in their houses.

Purpose of getting microfinance by respondents			
Sl.No	Opinions	Frequency	percent
1	Household purpose	38	38
2	To start business	9	9
3	To promote existing business	18	18
4	Education purpose	11	11
5	Low rate of interest	24	24
Total		100	100

Participants use the funds they receiving from various activities in microfinance to various purposes including new business.

FINDINGS

- It is noticed that all the respondents agreed that micro finance brought courage and self confidence and improved their skill and self worthiness.
- It is found that microfinance improved the knowledge of women about various income generating activities.
- The respondents accepted that microfinance has brought happiness and peace in the family.
- Women are economically and socially empowered after joining micro finance.
- They are given full freedom to express their opinions confidently.
- Microunit activities helped a lot to make them cooperative minded.

CONCLUSION

The focus on women's empowerment in the context of microfinance brings to light the significance of gender relations in policy development circles more prominently than ever before. Women are vaunted as a 'weapon against poverty' (DFID 2006, 1). The rationale for providing women access to microfinance services is that gender inequalities inhibit economic growth and development (World Bank, CIDA, UNDP, UNIFEM). Microfinance makes women economically independent by putting capital and financial resources in their hands. Economic independence results in higher bargaining power for women in their households and communities, and subsequently results in higher prestige and self-esteem. Here the functions of microfinance are synchronous with its potential to empower.

REFERENCES

- escijournals.net/index.php/JBF/article/download/447/401
 www.ifad.org/operations/projects/regions/pi/paper/13.pdf
 http://jms.nonolympictimes.org/Articles/Article1.pdf
 http://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/microfinance.asp#ixzz3Wnhyz8cX
 Christabell, P.J.,(2009). *Women empowerment through capacity building- The role of microfinance*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.