



THE EMERGENCE OF SELF-HELP GROUPS AS A PROSPECT DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC IN INDIA

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Abstract: This article is about how the COVID 19 pandemic affected the Indian economy and created havoc for the individuals who either lost their employment or their salaries were cut. This way the Pandemic not only created human loss but also snatched their livelihood. The supply chain of essential items was also disrupted due to the implemented lockdown and curfew. This was the time when SHGs emerged as a prospect and got involved in the production of PPE kits, face shields, masks, and affordable hand sanitizers, creating awareness about COVID 19 and helping deliver food and other essentials.

Key words: SHGs, COVID 19 Pandemic, Lockdown, Indian economy

Introduction:

The COVID 19 pandemic in India is a part of the global health crisis caused by the severe and acute respiratory syndrome virus (SARS-CoV-2). The pandemic has hampered economic and social activity as well as caused large numbers of fatalities. Almost all these sectors, such as tourism, telecom, food and agriculture, pharmaceuticals, oil, and gas, etc., have been adversely affected as domestic demand and exports have dropped abruptly, except in a few notable exceptions. A lockdown imposed in March to stop the spread of Coronavirus in India brought a tremor to the Indian economy. It was at this time when SHGs took on the role of lead workers, and these groups played an important role in responding to COVID-19.

Objectives of the Paper:

- 1) To examine the impact of COVID 19 Pandemic on the Indian economy.
- 2) To study the concept of Self-Help Groups.
- 3) To examine the emergence of Self-help Groups (SHGs) as a prospect during the pandemic in India.

What are Self-Help Help Groups:

Self-help groups (SHGs) are those associations of individuals who prefer to be close together informally to enhance their living conditions. Typically, they are self-governed and peer-controlled organizations of individuals who share similar socio-economic statuses and seek to improve their living conditions jointly. In SHGs, 10 to 25 local women between the ages of 18 and 50 years work together to pool savings and discuss common issues. These savings are deposited in the SHG's bank account, which in turn is used to support the women through loans. SHGs, however, provide a variety of benefits beyond financial aid; they are sources of collective actions, mutual support, and comradeship. As a result of group discussions and informal

conversations, SHGs give women the opportunity to share knowledge and wisdom, while also improving their emotional well-being, and creating a bond among them. Furthermore, SHGs also receive formal training from the state or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to create awareness about various issues, such as gender equality, livelihoods, health, gender-based violence, etc.

The spread of Pandemic, lockdown, and economic challenges: A Literature review

The COVID 19 pandemic in India is the part of the Global Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic. The disease affected countries and economies around the world. Public gatherings were suspended, curfews and lockdowns were imposed. Since the first and second phase lockdown measures restricted social movements, this pandemic has had a large effect on India's economy. India's growth in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2020 came to a low 3.1%, according to the Ministry of Health. Chief adviser to the Government of India says the main reason for this drop is the Coronavirus pandemic.

A phased lockdown was implemented. The first phase began on 25 March and was extended until 3 May. India entered its third lockdown on 4 May (extended until 17 May), in which the country was divided into different zones (green, orange, red, containment), and the economy was set off according to the zones. The fourth phase of lockdown took place from 18 to 31 May; it was on 1 June that industries and markets began reopening gradually. Again, curfews and/or lockdowns were enacted during the second wave from 22 Feb to around 7 June. (Wikipedia)

According to the Azim Premji University study from May 2021, around 230 million Indians slipped back into poverty because of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown. This impact was far more severe on female employment. Indian stock markets also witnessed a flash crash. In India, up to 53% of companies have specified a particular amount of impact of shutdowns as per a survey by FICCI (Biman. Mukherji 2020) The percentage increased and around 140 million Indians lost employment, and quite 45% of households across the state reported an income drop.

Numerous businesses, including hotels and airlines, cut salaries and laid-off workers. About 75% of workers are either self-employed or casual workers belong to a group that is extremely vulnerable. (Business today 2020)

A lot of start-ups are impacted as funding has fallen (Goyal, Malini 2020).

The emerging role of SHGs during Pandemic:

The rural economy was also severely disturbed by the pandemic COVID 19 (Mukherjee, Sanjeeb.2020). No work and losing jobs made this period troublesome. Its impact was more on women and girls. They faced more gender-based violence, unpaid labour, anxiety to feed their families. They lost options to move outside their homes and so the opportunity to share what they were going through (Deshpande, Ashwini 2020). It was the time when Ladies' self-help groups emerged as financial and social support to them. During COVID 19 pandemic lockdown when the supply chain for medical and other products was interrupted, they got involved in the production of PPE kits, face shields, masks, and affordable hand sanitizers, creating awareness about COVID 19 and helping deliver food and other essentials. As per the reports in April, about 20,000 SHGs supplied over 19 million masks and 100,000 liters of sanitizer across India (Bhawmick 2020).

In Bihar under the project JEEVIKA by helping vulnerable families, in Uttar Pradesh with the help of Khadi Gramodhyog producing masks of khadi fabric, in Jharkhand through Aajeevika Farm Fresh mobile app by selling fresh vegetables, in Kerala through the Kudmbshree network they are delivering groceries to vulnerable families, providing PPE kits to hospitals. SHG members are also working as BC Sakhi (Banking Correspondence agents), in many states by distributing government relief packs door to door. (Kejriwal2020)

This kind of SHG movement helps women be empowered by not only having financial gains but also helping them be resilient and gain confidence by giving them self-identity and leadership.

Conclusion:

During the time of COVID 19, Pandemic SHGs are playing a crucial role. This is because they have a better understanding of the local communities and have direct access to their members. The community members also have trust in them and can approach them whenever they need. As we can see that the contributions of SHGs are remarkable, their roles must be recognized by society and the government. Considering their emerging roles, they must be given the required financial and social encouragement.

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