

# Empowering Women: A Study of the Impact on Political Awareness through Participation in SHGs

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## ABSTRACT

*Poverty is a global phenomenon. In its 2023 report, the United Nations indicates that approximately 18 per cent (1.1 billion) of the 6.1 billion people in 110 countries experience acute multidimensional poverty. Despite making up a sizable proportion of the world's population, women are more marginalised, poor, and uninformed and face economic challenges than other demographic groups. Self-help groups are widely acknowledged as an efficient mechanism for reducing women's poverty. Additionally, it provides strength and support to underprivileged people in terms of social and political empowerment. On this ground, this study intends to investigate the impact of SHGs on women's political awareness in the East Champaran district region of Bihar. The primary data used in this study were collected from three blocks of the selected district, namely Kotwa, Motihari, and Banjariya. A descriptive study design has been taken for the purpose of the study. Through the purposive sampling method, 150 potential respondents were interviewed thoroughly. The study's findings revealed that the SHGs process effectively empowers women politically. It is making an appreciable effort to improve women's political awareness in the study area. However, there is still a lack of favourable political advancement among them. Ultimately, this study provides strategies for enhancing the political empowerment of women through SHGs.*

**Keywords:** SHGs, Empowerment, Women, Political Empowerment, East Champaran

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## INTRODUCTION

“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, and it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing”, quoted by Swami Vivekananda, cited in the work of Rani (2017).

Although the status of women has improved over the past 25 years, social and structural barriers still limit full gender equality in essential areas like employment, health care, and democratic freedom (Duflo, 2012). Gender disparities are a major challenge for society. The main component of the gender-biased system is the discrimination against women expressed in the form of male-female differentiation (Uma 2012). The majority of women are in a state of poverty and face more restrictions than any other demographic group. They are subjected to various economic and societal constraints (Gupta & Rathore, 2021), denying opportunities in social and political spheres (Banasode et al., 2013). In this regard, Jotilakshmi et al. (2009) have rightly pointed out that a country’s growth depends upon the optimum utilisation of its population. Without ensuring the improvement of women’s status, we cannot achieve countries’ development.

The SHGs are playing a crucial role in improving the quality of life of rural poor women in India. It is an innovative organisational setup for the upliftment and well-being of women (Ackerly, 1995). The launch of Self-Help Groups is regarded as an indispensable step in the fight against poverty in developing and underdeveloped countries (Kamili & Manzoor, 2019). It evolved from granting small loans to poor people on easy terms. These groups are genuinely involved in eradicating poverty-related dimensions in the country at the grass-roots level (Aggarwal et al., 2021). SHG activities are widely used as development interventions to stimulate women’s empowerment (Jakimow & Kilby, 2006).

To conceptualise the SHGs, authors have relied on the definition of Drishti (2019), which explains that SHGs are informal groups of individuals who wish to come together to find ways to improve their quality of life. It can be characterised as a self-managed peer group of people from similar socio-economic backgrounds who have a desire to work together towards a common goal. There are numerous challenges in rural areas, such as illiteracy, poverty, a lack of formal credit, a lack of skills, and so on. These issues cannot be addressed individually and require a collaborative effort. Thus, SHGs can serve as a change agent for marginalised groups. SHGs are established on the concept of self-help to promote self-employment and reduce poverty.

According to Sarania (2020), the vision of the promotion of SHGs is to empower rural poor women for the country's overall development. Further, Sarania narrated that economic empowerment is the most crucial among the many other dimensions of women's empowerment, including personal, social, psychological, and political aspects. Similarly, Mayoux (2000) observed that economic empowerment encompasses the financial strength of an individual or group. There is a wide notion that economic power is the foundation of social, political, and psychological stability in society. Mandal (2013) explained that one way to define economic empowerment is by increasing income and promoting autonomy in decision-making. In their study, Brody et al. (2017) indicate that apart from the little adverse effects evident on members after the involvement of SHG activities, it has positive impacts on women's empowerment. Thus, it can be stated that SHGs are an upward vehicle for women's empowerment, including their involvement in the political sphere.

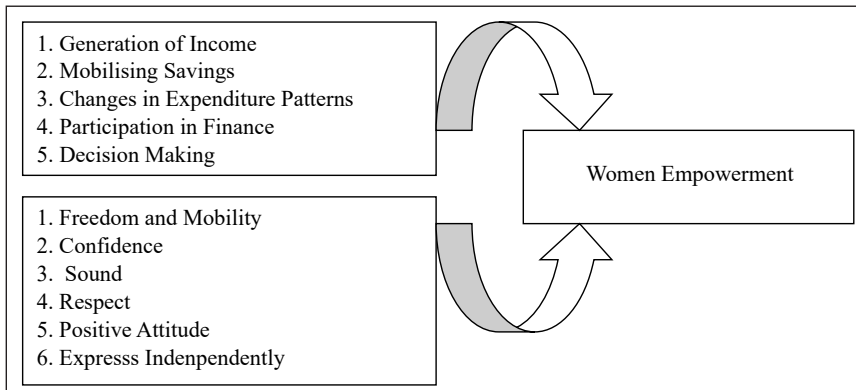
## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Empowerment (Conceptual and Theoretical Aspect)**

For a general understanding of empowerment, authors have opted for the definition provided by Page and Czuba (1999), as empowerment is a multidimensional social process that enables individuals to gain control over their own lives. Empowerment is the procedure that helps people develop power, which facilitates them to apply it in their own lives, society, and community by taking action on issues that they identify as important. Further, they have suggested three components of understanding empowerment. As a multidimensional process, it occurs within economic, psychological, sociological, and other dimensions. Empowerment occurs at different levels, encompassing individual, group, and community levels. Empowerment is a process that resembles a journey and evolves as we work through it.

Kabeer (2001) explained that empowerment implies "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." Its extensive interpretation indicates the enlargement of freedom of choice and action. In the context of empowerment, Chakrabarti and Biswas (2012) have cited in their work that the Government of India (2002) identified women's empowerment as a global issue. It has also been stated that empowerment

is a multidimensional, ongoing process that allows women to find their sense of self and reach their most significant potential in all spheres of life.



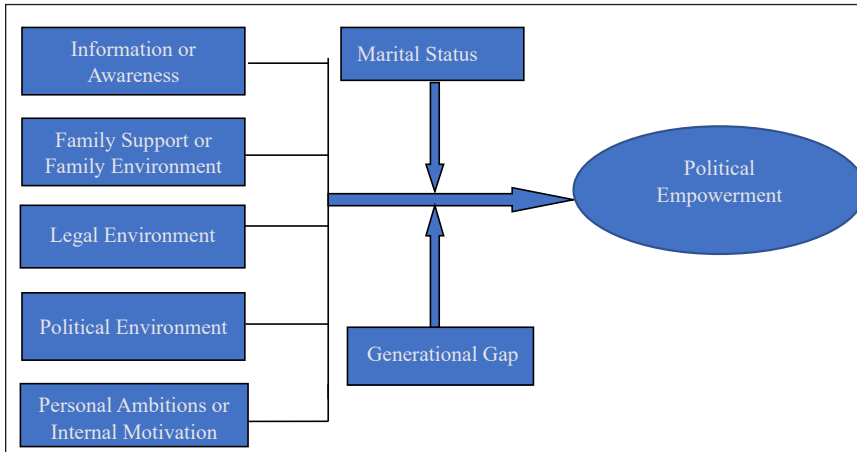
Source: (Chen & Mahmud, 1995).

**Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework for Women's Empowerment**

### Political Empowerment of Women

The increasing momentum of women's political empowerment is the outcome of an awakening at the individual and societal level aimed at creating an environment where women can live with dignity (Sharma, 2020). The opinion of UNDP (1995) on the political empowerment of women is that giving women greater control over the aspects that influence their lives and amplifying their voices in the decision-making process are two critical ways to empower them politically. Beteille (1999) stated that the prime objective of political empowerment is to transform society through a restructuring of powers to achieve proper balance. Brody et al. (2017) mentioned political empowerment outcome indicators in their work entitled 'Can SHGs programme improve women's empowerment?'. These indicators are political participation such as voting, awareness regarding women's rights and law, ability to own land and inherit property legally and ability to contest election and acquire leadership positions in the government. The Women Public and Policy Programme (2018) expressed that a woman who is politically aware is a valuable resource for her community; working collaboratively, she contributes to the overall development of the country. It represents a sustained commitment to include women in political engagement as a part of a holistic approach. Hence, political empowerment refers to providing a platform so that they can actively participate in political activities and assisting them to be

recognised as change agents at both the national and international levels (Fadia, 2014). Khan and Ara (2006) mentioned in their study that FWCW (1995) highlighted that achieving goals regarding equality, development, and peace cannot be realised without the active involvement of women and the incorporation of their perspectives at all levels.



Source: (Sharma, 2020).

**Fig. 2: Political Empowerment Model for Indian Women**

At the national level in our country, India, the progress of women's political development is insufficient, despite the implementation of political reservation for women at the local level. Jensenius (2019) stated that despite having around 48% of the female population, women constituted only 9% of all contesting political candidates in India's 2019 national election and about 14% of those who were able to secure seats in the parliament (AICTE; Jensenius, 2019). The focus on empowering women to play an important role in Indian politics gained steam in 1980, when the enactment of the "Panchayati Raj" constitutional reform took place regarding 33% of women's reservations. This initiative brought the participation of one million women in political life (Iyer & Mani, 2019). In September 2023, the Indian Parliament introduced the Women's Reservation Bill (one hundred twenty-eighth amendment), which also gave a fresh start to the aspirations of Indian citizens. It marks the initial stage towards attaining gender equality (Makhija, 2023). Based on the studies mentioned above, it can be narrated that if women's participation in politics increases, the country will lead in the desired direction.

## Political Empowerment, SHGs and Gap in the Literature

According to Narayan (2005), in addition to enabling women to become more economically and socially empowered, SHGs act as catalysts in promoting women's participation in grass-roots socio-political institutions like caste, gram sabha, gram panchayat, and village-level committees. It has also worked for scheduled caste women in creating opportunities to participate in gram sabha and gram panchayat. Tiwari (2010) observed that women SHGs members have effectively overcome social barriers based on caste and religion and can form new bonds of solidarity by referring to each other as '*didi*' (sisters). Similarly, Ramesh (2007) opined that the increasing bond between SHGs and PRIs is strengthening political engagement at the grass-roots level. However, some scholars stated that participation in SHGs does not ensure women's empowerment. Sud (2003) expressed that male community elders and village-level government officials predominately make decisions in SHGs rather than the women of the SHGs.

Although it is evident from the review of the extent of the literature that studies have explored the relationship between SHGs and the political empowerment of women, the literature is scarce on the effects of SHGs on political awareness of women, such as knowledge about women's policy and law, women's reservation in PRIs, raising voice against antisocial activities, problems of localities consulted with elected representatives, voting and wish to contest elections, attending political party meetings, and resolving conflicts within families in areas like East Champaran. This study aims to provide a comprehensive description of all these phenomena and proceed with the following objectives:

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study's general objective is to evaluate women's political empowerment after their participation in SHGs. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To prepare the socio-economic profile of sample SHG members;
- To know the impact of SHGs on the political awareness of women;
- To provide a suitable strategy to improve women's political awareness.

## METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted in three blocks, namely Kotwa, Banjariya, and Motihari in East Champaran. East Champaran is a district located in the northern region of Bihar (East Champaran District Administration, n.d.). The selection of blocks is based on purpose. All the respondents selected under this study belong to the SHGs developed by JEEViKA, an autonomous body under the Department of Rural Development of Bihar (BRLPS, n.d.). The study has opted for a descriptive method to know the impact of SHG on political awareness among members.

### Sampling

The researcher has used the purposive sampling technique to select the sample respondents for the study. One hundred fifty respondents (50 respondents from each block) who have continued their membership for at least five years up to the interview date were included in the present study. Respondents were informed in advance about the face-to-face interview. They had the opportunity to discontinue themselves during the interview at any time and for any reason.

### Tools and Techniques of Data Collection and Analysis

The study is mainly based on primary data. Primary data were collected from the field between September and December 2022 through an interview schedule. The required secondary data for the present study were collected through books, journals, government websites, government reports, and other agencies. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to analyse the data.

## FINDINGS

### Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1: Classification of Respondents Based on Age

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Below 20	5	3.33%
21-30	30	20%
31-40	56	37.33%

<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
41-50	33	22%
51-60	23	15.34%
Above 60	3	2%
Total	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Analysing the age pattern of the respondents, it was observed that out of 150 respondents, 37.33% and 22% belong to the age groups of 31-40 and 41-50, respectively, followed by 20% in the age group of 21-30. The data reveals that the age group between 31-40 years is the majority engaged in SHG activities in the study area. 15.34% of respondents fall into the age group 51-60. Respondents in the categories of below 20 and above 60 are few in Table 1.

**Table 2: Classification of Respondents Based on Education**

<i>Education</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Illiterate	46	30.67%
Only Signature	33	22%
Primary (1 to 5)	9	6%
Middle (6 to 8)	11	7.33%
Secondary (9 to 10)	19	12.67%
Senior Secondary (+2)	18	12%
Graduation	14	9.33%
Graduation Above	0	0%
Total	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Table 2 shows the educational status of respondents. The most important advantage of the SHGs programme is that it allows both illiterate and literate women to participate (Saranian, 2015). Table 2 reveals that 30.67% and 22% of respondents have no formal education. The respondents who could only sign were taught by JEEViKA staff through the '*danda and roti*' method. 6% of the respondents have completed the primary level, while 7.33% and 12.67% are educated up to the middle and secondary levels. 12% of respondents have completed senior secondary education, and 9.33% have a graduate degree.

**Table 3: Occupation-Wise Classification of the Respondents**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Housewife	39	26%
Livestock Farming	50	33.33%
Agriculture	10	6.67%
Micro-enterprises	13	8.67%
Staff	25	16.66%
Others	13	8.67%
Total	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

The classification of the respondents based on their occupations reveals that the majority of the SHG members (33.33%) are engaged in livestock farming (Table 3). However, 26% of women are still unengaged in income-generation activities as they are either unemployed or performing housewife activities. Additionally, 6.67% of respondents engaged in agriculture farming, while 16.66% have been observed as staff. Another 8.67% of respondents involved themselves in micro-enterprises, and the remaining 8.67% fell into other categories. Members who are included in “others” are labourers. The staff category encompasses positions holding posts in JEEViKA and blocks for rural development like VRP, MRP, CNRP, and Vikashmitra.

**Table 4: Category-Wise Classification of Respondents**

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Unreserve	25	16.67%
OBC	30	20%
SC	90	60%
ST	5	3.33%
Total	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Table 4 reveals that the majority of the respondents, i.e., 60%, belong to the SC category. Out of 150 respondents, 20% and 16.67% are from OBC and UR, respectively. Moreover, only 3.33% of respondents have been observed in the ST category.

**Table 5: Marital Status of the Respondents**

<i>Status</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Married	136	90.67%
Unmarried	6	4%
Widowed	8	5.33%
Divorced	0	0%
Total	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Based on Table 5, it is evident that the majority of respondents (90.67%) are married, and 4% of the women are unmarried. 5.33% of respondents are widowed, and no respondents reported being divorced.

### Political Awareness of Women

The double barrier of gender and poverty in India limited women's participation in grass-roots political organisations. Nevertheless, engagement in SHG activities enables them to participate in these institutions and break down social barriers. Of course, these barriers are deeply embedded in culture; however, the SHGs programme is a bold step towards breaking down barriers and has received success, to some extent, in this direction (Nayak, 2018). This paper examines the impact of SHGs on the political awareness of women under the following headings:

**Table 6: Increase Awareness and Knowledge of Respondents After Being a Part of SHGs**

<i>Awareness/ Knowledge</i>	<i>Women's Reservation in PRIs</i>		<i>Women's Rights and Law</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	45	30%	52	34.67%
No	105	70%	98	65.33%
Total	150	100%	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Based on Table 6, 30% of members reported an increased understanding of PRIs after their involvement in SHGs. On the other hand, 70% of respondents did not know PRIs. Additionally, 34.67% of members were informed of rights and laws related to women following their participation in SHGs, while 65.33% were unaware of such provisions.

In response to the inquiry about the title of women's laws, three members could recall the complete title, and 12 members could remember half. One hundred thirty-five respondents had no knowledge about the title of women's laws.

In this context, it is noted that SHG members have the opportunity to attend awareness programmes frequently. The purpose of these programmes is to enhance members' knowledge in different areas, including the functions of PRIs and women's law. Over time, women who are actively participating in these activities have gained an understanding of these subjects.

SHGs give women a supportive environment in which they can share important information from one another's experiences. This peer learning enhances the knowledge of women and clarifies doubts regarding legal matters. Members actively engaged in the SHGs process have access to pamphlets, videos, and internet resources that offer comprehensive knowledge on women's law and PRIs.

**Table 7: Distribution of Respondents Based on Attendance at Gram Sabha Meetings**

	<i>Before Joining the SHGs</i>		<i>After Joining the SHGs</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	5	3.33%	42	28%
No	145	96.67%	108	72%
Total	150	100%	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

According to Table 7, only 3.33% of members had attended Gram Sabha meetings before their involvement in SHGs. However, after becoming members of SHGs, 28% of members attended such meetings. Still, after participation in SHGs, 72% of respondents have not participated in these types of meetings.

The general impression from the above table is that due to the participation in SHGs, members have started to be involved in Gram Sabha meetings. Increased involvement in these meetings provides women with opportunities to impact decision-making processes within their locality. Members attending Gram Sabha are able to express their concerns regarding community needs because of their active involvement. They also have the courage to criticise politicians and officials who do not follow their commitments to address community issues (Table 8).

**Table 8: Distribution of Respondents Regarding Raise Voice Against Antisocial Corrupt Activities**

	<i>Before Joining the SHGs</i>		<i>After Joining the SHGs</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	2	1.67%	34	23.33%
No	148	98.33%	116	76.67%
Total	150	100%	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Before joining the SHGs, only 1.67% of respondents had spoken out against antisocial corrupt activities, but after becoming involved in the SHGs, this number increased to 23.33% out of 150 members. These members have organised themselves to address issues such as liquor, child marriages, and corruption by authorities. However, 76.67% of members had not yet engaged in such types of activities even after their participation in SHGs.

The above table indicates very few participants had voiced their concerns against antisocial activities before joining the SHGs. In contrast, the proportion of women engaging in such type of activities is not satisfactory, but it can be stated that SHGs' participation facilitated women to move in the right direction concerning political awareness. SHGs have boosted women's confidence to raise their voices against wrongdoing and promote justice in the community.

*“One community mobiliser recalled her courageous work. She stated unfortunate incidents as a boy from her locality lost his life in the school. The boy's family was seeking answers about the death cause and the dead body, but the school authority was not cooperating. In response, the women of her group organised themselves and took action. They raised their voices and confronted the school administration. They called the media, and in doing so, they were able to expose school authority.”*

**Table 9: Distribution of Respondents About Problems Consultation with an Elected Representative and Officials**

	<i>Before Joining the SHGs</i>		<i>After Joining the SHGs</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	3	2%	41	27.33%
No	147	98%	109	72.67%
Total	150	100%	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Before joining the SHGs, only 2% of respondents complained about personal issues with elected representatives and officials. However, after becoming involved in SHG activities, this number increased. Among the 150 respondents, 27.33% of members interacted with local leaders and consulted problems with them. However, 72.67% of respondents had not interacted with any issues with local leaders. When the researcher asked about the reasons for their lack of interaction, most respondents said they had not gotten the opportunity, and some of them stated that it was the job of male members (Table 9).

Respondents who interacted with local leaders and officials mentioned that their community social networks have been established due to their active participation in SHGs. Women who participate in SHGs have the opportunity to communicate with local leaders and government representatives. This has made it simpler for members to approach officials and elected representatives to discuss issues.

**Table 10: Distribution of Respondents Regarding Participation in Casting Vote**

	<i>Before Joining the SHGs</i>		<i>After Joining the SHGs</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	140	93.33%	142	94.67%
No	10	6.67%	8	5.33%
Total	150	100%	150	100%

Source: Field Work.

Before joining SHGs, a high percentage of women (93.33%) were already participating in voting (Table 10). After joining SHGs, this percentage increased to 94.67%. The participants had not voted earlier because they were under the age of voting rights and had not added names to the voter list. So, it can be stated that there is an admirable level of voting awareness among SHG women in the study area. During the interactions with respondents, it was also found that a few women cast their votes independently before participating in SHGs. However, involvement in SHGs' activities led to a sizable increase in women who can make autonomous decisions while casting their vote. Performing the responsibility under SHG activities, members are able to decide which candidate is suitable to vote for. Sometimes, women usually discuss in the SHG meetings whom to support in the election.

When respondents were asked if they were interested in contesting elections, 14 members expressed a desire to do so, seven members

were unsure, and the rest were not willing to contest elections. The desire to contest the election indicates a positive outcome regarding the empowerment of women as a result of involvement in SHGs.

**Table 11: Respondents' Participation in Political Party Meetings**

<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Before Joining the SHGs</i>		<i>After Joining the SHGs</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	1	0.67	39	26
No	149	99.33	111	74
Total	150	100	150	100

Source: Field Work.

It is noted from Table 11 that only one respondent had attended a political party meeting before joining the SHGs. In contrast, the number has reached 26% after involvement in SHG activities.

It is evident from the above table that women in the study area did not often engage in political activity outside of their homes before joining the SHGs. However, after becoming members of SHGs, they have started attending political and group meetings. Their husbands allow them to participate in political discussions and go outside the house for group activities. This scenario represents a change in society's patriarchal ideas in light of women's empowerment.

During the interaction, it was also noted that members were curious to observe the activities of politicians and willing to know what such personalities used to discuss among themselves. They believe that meeting these people will lead to learning. So, it can be stated that members are enhancing self-determination, which is fostering their empowerment.

One respondent expressed as, "bde logon ko dekhne se samajhne se dimag bda hota hai, budhdhi khulti hai."

This means understanding and observing educated and wise people leads to a change in the mind's thinking and also helps awaken intelligence.

**Table 12: Distribution of Respondents in Resolving Family Conflicts**

<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Before Joining the SHGs</i>		<i>After Joining the SHGs</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	3	2	96	64
No	143	98	54	36
Total	150	100	150	100

Source: Field Work.

The Table 12 indicates that before joining the SHGs, only 2% of respondents played a role in resolving family disputes and tensions. However, this picture significantly changed after joining the SHGs. 64% of respondents expressed that they are actively participating in resolving conflicts among SHGs' family members. Members are advocating for other members whose husbands have a negative attitude towards their wives.

Members of SHGs address disputes within the family and between spouses in this way. They also threaten to take appropriate legal action against a spouse who mistreats his wife. Some respondents mentioned that SHGs have helped in reducing the occurrence of domestic violence in the study area. It demonstrates that the assertiveness of women influences the decision-making process, which contributes to their overall autonomy in social matters.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Women have an important role in the country's development, just as men do, and to improve their status, women must achieve total empowerment. SHGs have emerged as an effective tool for empowering marginalised people and poverty eradication in the new economic era (Sarania, 2020). As women are the most vulnerable segment of society, the rapid growth of SHGs provides a means for women's empowerment. SHGs have helped members improve living conditions and changed their perspectives and attitudes in the study area. In the present study, the impact of SHGs on women's political empowerment has been investigated in terms of awareness of women's reservation in PRIs and women's rights and laws, attending gram sabha meetings, raising voices against antisocial corrupt activities, problems consulting with leaders and casting votes, attending political party meetings, and resolving conflicts within families.

This study supports the idea that participating in the SHGs programme is a bold step to improve women's political participation. As a result of forming groups and acquiring leadership abilities, women have started to attend Gram Sabha and political party meetings and speak out against antisocial and corrupt activities. Increased knowledge of women's reservations in PRIs, women's rights, and law is an important indicator of political awareness fostered through SHGs. The respondents were asked about their familiarity with PRIs and women's rights and laws; very few women were informed. However, those who were notified attributed their increased knowledge to their participation in SHGs.

Engaging in gram sabha meetings serves as another indicator of political advancement. It has been discovered that SHGs have proven to be effective in encouraging women to participate actively in gram sabha meetings. Following interaction with elected representatives, it was discovered that before joining the SHGs, members were hesitant to communicate with elected representatives about personal and local problems due to fear that they would not hear their concerns. In raising voices against antisocial activities, it was observed in the field that after joining the SHGs, some members were seen to register their protests against antisocial corrupt activities. This is a positive sign for society. Although the number of women participating in such activities is minimal, but these types of activities by women in areas like East Champaran represent a step forward in their empowerment. Now, they dare to speak out against their suppression. Casting votes was already prevalent before joining the SHGs in the study area. However, exposure to SHGs has enabled them to assess which candidate suits them. Sometimes, group leaders inspire the members' decision to vote. Members stated that the decision is generally taken in the family, but a significant number of women can now cast their votes according to their preferences. Some members were also motivated to contest elections in PRIs.

Additionally, women were not allowed to go outside, even for personal reasons earlier. Now, attending political party meetings now demonstrates a positive indicator of their autonomy. Furthermore, it has been widely acknowledged that women have been treated as subordinates for a long time; presently, they have started to resolve the tension within the families of other women, serving as a breakthrough in challenging the imposed gender norms of society.

Sharma (2020) has discussed that women's political empowerment is essential to the advancement and development of the country. The imposed gender roles have limited women's involvement in politics. However, participation in SHGs has enabled them to participate in these matters. While these barriers are very strong and there are still miles to go, but SHGs activities have assisted in achieving partial success in improving women's political awareness in East Champaran.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following points serve as limitations of the study:

- The study has been conducted in only three blocks of East Champaran, Bihar;
- The research article's limitations lie in its small sample size of 150 respondents, which may limit the generability of findings on a large population;
- The study has included SHG members who are associated only with JEEViKA;
- The study has not included members as respondents who have been involved with JEEViKA for less than five years on the date of the interview;
- The study has focused on the primary condition of political empowerment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A policy recommendation to raise women's political awareness in areas like East Champaran through SHGs should focus on training and targeted education within SHGs. There should be some provision for the SHG that has crossed the infancy stage, and it should be mandatory for all the members. This research suggests the following strategies, which are influenced by the work of Panwar and Kumar (2012).

- *Workshops on Political Education:* Time over time, arrangement of seminars to teach women in SHGs about their rights, the political system, and the value of civic engagement.
- *Leadership Development:* Motivations should be given to members to develop leadership in SHGs. It will enable women to take proactive roles in their communities and engage in grass-roots governance.
- *Networking Opportunities:* In the SHGs process, events should be arranged for women from various SHGs to exchange best practices, strategies, and experiences related to political participation.
- *Information Access:* Organisations involved in SHGs should ensure that SHGs can obtain pertinent information regarding local elections, political processes, and involvement opportunities.
- *Advocacy for Policy Changes:* At the local and country levels, organisations should advocate for policy changes that will promote gender equality and women's involvement in politics.

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