INTRODUCTION -

Women are the foundation of every society. Yet for many women in the world’s poorest regions, life is extraordinarily difficult through innovative health, and education. Empowerment through self-help groups builds on the courage and resourcefulness of women to help them realize their potential and improve their families and communities, so we need to study of women Empowerment through self help group because, there is no doubt about the fact that development of women has always been the central focus of planning since independence but keeping this in mind it is crucial to have a reality check on what is happening on paper and what is the actual ground situation. Women empowerment is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social issue. Women empowerment is long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are not going to change overnight but because of this we cannot stop taking action either we cannot stop taking action either the ground level actions should be focused. Towards changing the social attitude and practices prevalent in the society which are highly biased against women empowerment through self-help groups as increasing women’s access and control over resources and their decision making. Further working on the aspect of enhanced mobility and social interaction of women in the society would positively influence all round development and empowerment of women’s.

We know today there are lot of things that is happening in the name of women empowerment and lot of resources are spent in this direction. Women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation economic opportunity and economic participation, political participation access to education or access to nutrition and reproductive health care. A significant few in the society still consider women as sex objects crimes against women are increasing and violence against women is all time high and in most cases go unreported. Work place harassment of women is another phenomenon which is rapidly increasing as more women join the work force. All this is happening despite the fact that there are number of programmers and policy initiatives that is being run by the government and other bodies. The year 2001 was declared as the national policy of empowerment of women.
So it is the time to study and ask the question whether we are moving in the right direction and where are we in terms of the paper actions and the actual ground realities.

In the rural women’s Development and empowerment Project, for example, go percent of the beneficiaries reported increased access to and control over resources such as land, dwellings and live stock, under the livelihoods Improvement project. Another important feature of self – help groups has been the establishment of links between self – help groups and the formal micro finance in situations and commercial banks

As to women’s empowerment – Defined, measured and observed in a multitude of ways, generally the effects of the programme are largely positive. Moreover, women use a more substantial part of their income for health and education of their children. They also play a very important role in reducing poverty within households. Many impact studies conclude that those participating in microfinance programme are more likely to invest in their children’s education and better nutrition and health practices than those not participating. In this perspective based on an empirical study in west Bengal, this paper tries to measure the level of empowerment of women participating in the micro credit programme through SHGs under different criteria – power, autonomy and self – reliance, entitlement, participation and awareness and capacity – building and to examine the effect of empowerment of women participating in SHG programme on their children’s nutritional status and protein – intake of their households, the study suggests that if women participating in the SHGs programme for eight years or more, such a programme might contribute to higher level of women’s empowerment than women’s empowerment under all types of control groups of this study. This paper also finds that women’s earnings from saving and credit have positive and significant effect on nutritional status of the children of women members of SHGs and on the protein – intake for their household level compared with that of among control group. In order to examine the particular objective, this paper will test the following. 1) the average empowerment level of women (the procedure of measurement appears in methodology section participating in microcredit programme for eight years
or more, who are called core group / policy group of this paper (Women SHGs participating under micro credit programme for eight) years or more under SHG – NGO and SHG – Non – NGO models selected for study are called core group or policy group) is higher for both NGO – led and Non – NGO – led programme in relation to the empowerment level of women among all control groups (supporting groups) and no perceptible difference is expected at the level of empowerment of women betwwn NGO and non – NGO led programmes under core group 2) Empowerment of women participating in the micro credit programme through SHGs has a significant positive effect on their children’s nutritional status and protein – intake of their households.

Women alone cannot empower themselves, nor should we expect them to bear that burden. Men too –especially in their status as power holders in the family, community and formal government – must act.

From time immemorial, the women in this land of ours were treated as a sort of thing. Her placing in the society was not at par with other human being. She has no rights. She cannot move nor do anything at her will.

Such was the placement earmarked to our mothers, sisters and even great grand mothers that the heads of humanity bend upon down with shame.

That is why Dr Ambedkar was of the firm opinion that until or unless, by applying dynamite, the Hindu Dharma – Shastras are not blown up, nothing is going to happen. In the name sanskaras, the Hindu women are tied up with the bondage of superstitions, which they carry till their death, They are also responsible for inculcating these wrong notions learnt by them through baseless traditions and preaching of the shastras in the budding minds of their offspring.

Otherwise also the women in India have remained a matter of joy and a source of amusement as such she was used and miscued by men just to serve their evil ends. She has been used just like a machine for procreation. It has also been mentioned in Hindu shastras that the women is the bond slave of her father when she was young, to her husband when she is middle aged and to her son when she is a mother. Of course, all the epigrams, aphorisms, proverbs, platitudes and truisms bear necked truth about the stature of women in India.
It does not mean that no efforts have been made in the past to bring dignity to women. As in Europe, Christianity inaugurated the Era of equality, liberty and fraternity by preaching that a prince and pauper are equal in the eyes of God. There is also a very long tradition of social reforms by our saints and other social reformers, but the proprietors of the orthodoxy thwarted these efforts in the absence of any legal sanction or authority, these efforts could not sustain.

The uneducated women are subjected to exploitation at the hands of government machinery. It will not be prudent on our part to restore the rights of the women belonging to the affluent section of the society only. Therefore, our efforts should be directed towards all-round development of each and every section of Indian women by giving their due share. It is a must to maintain and protect chastity, dignity and modesty of women. It is the need of the hour to give due share to each and every section of the Indian women. I am sure without removing social stigma, no progress or development could be achieved.

Now the question arises as what sort of empowerment our women needed prior to restarting their equal property rights? There are lot of nodal agencies including the national commission for Women said to have been working for the welfare of the women apart from governmental efforts. Where does they reach in this direction? Leaving a meager number of urban and suburban women. The Indian women are still crying for simple justice. Which is not even allowed to have been accessed to them. With their age, no help, they have been raped, kicked, killed, subdued & humiliated almost daily. Why? Because of our indifferent attitude towards them. This indifferent attitude and approach of our crops up at the time of the birth of female child. They are subjected to rebuke and ignored so far as their education and other facilities are concerned which are required for their proper and healthy growth / development. The male child is given preference over the female child? With this attitude of our own, we use to suppress and remained unfair towards the fair sex.

Let us be a little bit honest to diagnose the illness by taking into consideration all the aspects and aspirations in changed scenario, circumstances and atmosphere Only then we could have a perfect planning to achieve our cherished aim that is empowerment of Indian women and could be able to restore their property and other rights in order to bring her at par with other human beings. This could be achieved only if we are able to
blow up the heinous Hindu – Shastras by using dynamite as affirmed by none else than Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the emancipator of the millions including Indian women.

The Government of India and state authorities alike have increasingly realized the importance of devoting attention to the economic betterment and development of rural women in India. The Indian Constitution guarantees that there shall be no discrimination on the grounds of gender. In reality, however, rural women have harder lives and are often discriminated against with regard to land and property rights, and in access to medical facilities and rural finance. Women undertake the more onerous tasks involved in the day – to – day running of households, including the collection of fuel wood for cooking and the fetching of drinking water and their nutritional status and literacy rates are lower than those of men. They also command lower wages as labour: as rural non – agricultural laborers, women earn 44 rupees per day compared to 67 rupees for men.

Women’s voice in key institutions concerned with decision making is also limited. In 2007 only 8 per cent of all seats in the national parliament were occupied by women.

Women’s empowerment has long been a central feature of the partnership between IFAD and the Government of India. Key instruments for supporting women’s empowerment are self – help groups, whereby 10 -20 rural women from the same village, mostly poor women, come together to contribute two – weekly or monthly dues as savings and provide group loans to their members. The self – help group approach was not created by IFAD – supported operations but IFAD has contributed to the mainstreaming of this approach in India and to financing programmes for promoting self – help groups in states such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra supported by the Women’s Development Corporation an arm of the State Government involved in supporting women’s development.

There is a natural convergence of interest between the needs of women and the need to conserve natural resources and environment. Women maintain rich storehouse of technical environmental knowledge, which can be mobilized in the problem – solving process. In addition to their profound knowledge of fragile ecosystem management and sustainable resource use, women have a remarkable ability to work together and in taking care of children. Women also have a powerful influence over future attitudes towards the environment (International Consultation 1993) Women are organized as collectives
towards the overall goal of achieving gender equality as well as sustainable, comprehensive community development (Puruhothaman 1998)

They created an empowerment indicator built on the following eight criterions: mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, large purchases, involvement in major household decisions, and relative freedom from domination by the family, political and legal awareness, participation in public protests and political campaigns.

The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them) awareness of gendered goals and act upon them) awareness of gendered power structures self – esteem and self – confidence power structure