



## MAHILA SAMAKHYAS ROLE IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Surabhi Mishra

Research Scholar,

Department of Geography, D.D.U.Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur

The Mahila Samakhya programme was launched in 1988 in pursuance of the goals of the New Education Policy (1986) and the Programme of Action as a concrete programme for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly of women from socially and economically marginalised groups. It seeks to bring about a change in women's perception about themselves and the perception of society in regard to women's "traditional roles."

### The policy framework:

📖 The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986) as revised in 1992 was a landmark in the field of policy on women's education in that it recognized the need to redress traditional gender imbalances in educational access and achievement. The NPE also recognized that enhancing infrastructure alone will not redress the problem. It recognized that *"the empowerment of women is possibly the most critical pre condition for the participation of girls and women in the educational process"*.

📖 The programme of Action (POA, 1992), in the section *"Education for Women's Equality"* (Chapter-XII, pages. 105-107), focuses on empowerment of women as the critical precondition for their participation in the education process. The POA states that education can be an effective tool for women's empowerment, the parameters of which are now treated as objectives of MS.

### The objectives of the MS scheme are

- 📖 To enhance the self-image and self-confidence of women
- 📖 Create an environment where women can seek knowledge and information and empower them to play a positive role in their own development and that of society
- 📖 To establish a decentralized and participative mode of management.
- 📖 To enable the Mahila Sanghas to actively assist and monitor educational activities in the villages including the primary school, adult and non-formal educational centre;



- To provide women and adolescent girls with the necessary support structure and create opportunities for their education and
- To set in motion circumstances for larger participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal educational programmes.

### Launching the programme

Mahila Samakhya was launched as a pilot project in Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh in 1989 with Dutch assistance. The project was extended to Andhra Pradesh at the end of 1992 and in two districts in Kerala in 1998. The effectiveness of the MS strategy in mobilising women for education has resulted in it being adopted by other basic education projects in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. The Madhya Pradesh programme closed down in 2001, but has been registered again in 2007. With the end of DPEP funding in Assam, the Assam programme was brought under the National scheme of Mahila Samakhya in 2002. After bifurcation of States, the programme presence is also in Uttaranchal (2003) and Jharkhand (2006) now. MS Societies were registered in Chhattisgarh (2006) and Madhya Pradesh (2007). At the beginning of the XI Plan, MS coverage existed across 83 districts – and is aiming to expand to at least 58-60 new districts during the Plan. Therefore, as of November 2008, e.g. MS coverage is across 89 districts in 9 states - currently being implemented in a total of 28480 villages. Work in 5 districts of Chhattisgarh is in process of being started, as is expansion into new districts in other States under the XI Plan.

| Sl.No | State          | No. of Districts | No.of villages |
|-------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1     | Andhra Pradesh | 12               | 3090           |
| 2     | Assam          | 10               | 2379           |
| 3     | Bihar          | 13               | 4659           |
| 4     | Gujrat         | 07               | 1982           |
|       | Jharkhand      | 09               | 3998           |
| 6     | Karnataka      | 12               | 2701           |
| 7     | Kerala         | 03               | 2587           |
| 8     | UttarPradesh   | 17               | 4668           |



**MAHILA SAMAKHYA ACTIVITIES:-** The Mahila Sangha is the nodal point where all activities are planned. It provides a platform where women can meet, be together and discuss their problems. The funds earmarked for the Sangha can be deposited in a bank or post office account and can be used collectively by the women for a period upto three years. The Sahayoginis look after a group of 10 villages and work as motivators, supporters and guides. The foremost achievement of Mahila Samakhya is that it has been able to lay the foundation for women's empowerment at the grassroots level and that it has brought about a change in the outlook of rural women. The legal awareness programme has fructified in the formation of Nari Adalats. These Nari Adalats have emerged as vocal and effective informal courts and have gained both community respect and acceptability. The Mahila Shikshan Kendras (MSKs) provide a unique learning opportunity for adolescent girls and young women. These MSKs have been especially designed to provide condensed quality education courses with innovative methodology and skills development programmes to equip the women and adolescent girls to continue their education and attain life-skills. In order to achieve a "critical mass" in the district it is anticipated that in the 11th plan period, the programme would cover at least 250 villages in a district. The programme is at present being implemented in 21707 villages in 83 districts of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar, Assam and Jharkhand. MM is running successfully in various districts of India. To ascertain its present status, effect and effort for women empowerment this study has been taken.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:-** The study would achieve the following objectives:

1. To study whether members of Mahila Samakhya program are aware about their objectives, roles and responsibilities
2. To study the role of Mahila Samakhya in the context of women empowerment.

**HYPOTHESES:-** In context of above objectives, these hypotheses were formulated.

- Mahila Samakhya are working as per their objectives, role and responsibilities.
- Mahila Samakhya are making positive effect on women status in rural community.

**RESEARCH DESIGN** -The study is empirical and Descriptive in nature. Survey method of research has been used to conduct the study.



## SAMPLE:-

By using **Purposive Sampling** three districts were selected.30% of the Blocks covered by MS were selected through **Random Sampling**. Next 30% of the villages were selected through **Lottery method of Random Sampling** from the list of villages woman of these villages were chosen by **Incidental Sampling**. The plan for the Sample selection is shown below.

TABLE 1-

Selected Districts, Blocks, Villages and Local community bodies

| Sl. No. | Selected District | Selected Blocks | Villages | women | Local community (rural men) |
|---------|-------------------|-----------------|----------|-------|-----------------------------|
| 1.      | Prayagraj         | 04              | 15       | 2050  | 1740                        |
| 2.      | Maharajganj       | 04              | 15       |       |                             |
| 3.      | Gorakhpur         | 04              | 15       |       |                             |

**PREPERATION OF MEASURING TOOLS:** these tools were prepared.

- Attitude scale to assess community perception regarding women's "traditional roles.
- Questionnaire to assess rural women perception towards effectiveness of Mahila Samakhya.
- Questionnaire related to the functions of Mahila Samakhya.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

The analysis, discussion and interpretation of the data collected from rural women and men of selected districts of Uttar Pradesh, leads to major findings-

**Hypothesis-1-Mahila Samakhya are working as per their objectives, role and responsibilities.**

The Data collected from the 2050 rural women with the help of *Questionnaire related to the functions of Mahila Samakhya* was tabulated and statistically treated to obtain results.



Table-2

**Functions of Mahila Samakhya**

|    | <b>FUNCTIONS</b>                                                                                                 | <b>Positive<br/>response<br/>% age</b> | <b>Negative<br/>Response<br/>% age</b> |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1  | Mahila Sangha has been constructed in the village.                                                               | 100                                    | 00                                     |
| 2  | All relative members perform their respective duties                                                             | 66.67                                  | 33.33                                  |
| 3  | Mahila Sangha hold meeting in every weekend.                                                                     | 85.33                                  | 14.00                                  |
| 4  | Mahila Sangha do efforts to create awareness related to education among rural girls and women.                   | 84.00                                  | 16.00                                  |
| 5  | Sahayoginis give support to women to put up their problem.                                                       | 53.67                                  | 46.33                                  |
| 6  | Compaigns for women awareness has been organized.                                                                | 53.90                                  | 46.10                                  |
| 7  | Sahayoginis motivate girl and women for their education.                                                         | 99.33                                  | .67                                    |
| 8  | Nari Adalat is working for rural women                                                                           | 100                                    | 00                                     |
| 9  | Nari Adalat give legel support and knowledge.                                                                    | 84.00                                  | 16.00                                  |
| 10 | legal awareness programme are organized by Nari Adalats                                                          | 87.00                                  | 13.00                                  |
| 11 | Sahayoginis made contact to with parents related to out of school girls.                                         | 77.33                                  | 22.67                                  |
| 12 | Mahila Shikshan Kendra have been operationalized.                                                                | 65.00                                  | 35.00                                  |
| 13 | Mahila Shikshan Kendras (MSKs) provide a unique learning opportunity for adolescent girls                        | 71.83                                  | 26.17                                  |
| 14 | <u>MSKs provide condensed quality education courses with innovative methodology</u>                              | 72.33                                  | 21.67                                  |
| 15 | MSKs organized skills development programmes to equip the women and adolescent girls to continue their education | 100.00                                 | 00                                     |
| 16 | MSKs organized program for rural women and girl to attain lifeskills.                                            | 73.67                                  | 26.33                                  |



|    |                                                                                                   |        |       |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| 17 | Health awareness program have been organized                                                      | 80.83  | 19.17 |
| 18 | Savings and economic programmes have been organized                                               | 100.00 | 00    |
| 19 | Kishori Kendras are working for for girls who have either never beento school or have left school | 88.67  | 10.33 |

**Table-2 reflects responses of rural women on various functions of Mahila samakhya program. The entire respondents accepted that Mahila Sangha has been constructed in the village.**

- ☐ 97.94% of respondents accepted that all relative members of Mahila Sangha perform their respective duties.
- ☐ 60% of respondents agreed that Mahila Sangha related meetings were held in every weekends frequently .
- ☐ About 84% of respondents reported that Mahila samakhya makes effort to create awareness related to schools among adolescent girls. About half of the respondents (53%) viewed that Manch tries to create educational awareness among adolescent girls and their parents. They also reported that their parents were consulted to know the reason of their daughter absenteeism.
- ☐ About 56% of the respondents accepted that forum tries Sahayoginis give support to women to put up their problem.
- ☐ 90% of adolescent girls accepted Campaigns for women awareness has been organized.
- ☐ 53.67 of the women acceptra that Sahayoginis motivate girl and women for their education.
- ☐ Cent percent rural women accepted that Nari Adalat is working for rural women right and Nari Adalat give legel support and knowledge.
- ☐ More than 85% of the respondents reported that legal awareness programme are organized by Nari Adalats to make them aware of domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- ☐ 77% of the respondents proclaimed that they have been contacted by Sahayoginis to support their girls education.
- ☐ About 65% of the village women accepted that Mahila Shikshan Kendra are running.



- ☐ More than 72% of the respondents accepted that these Kendras (MSKs) provide a unique learning opportunity for dropout adolescent girls and it also provides condensed quality education courses with innovative methodology.
- ☐ 74.67% of the respondents accepted that MSKs organized skills development programmes to equip the women and adolescent girls to continue their education and these kendras also organized program for rural women and girl to attain life-skills.
- ☐ More than 81% of the respondents accepted that Health awareness program have been organized for them.
- ☐ 85% of the rural parents accepted that Savings and economic programmes have been organized to make them aware of career opportunities.
- ☐ 89% of the adolescent girls proclaimed that Kishori Kendras are working for girls who have either never been to school or have left school and they make efforts to support girls and women education.

Through the results reflection we can conclude that Mahila Samakhya are working as per their objectives, role and responsibilities.

## Hypothesis-2-

***Mahila Samakhya are making positive effect on women status in rural community.***

- ☐ The Data collected from the 2050 rural women with the help of *Questionnaire to assess rural women perception towards effectiveness of Mahila Samakhya* was tabulated and statistically treated to obtain results.

**TABLE-3**

**Rural women perceived effectiveness of Mahila Samakhya**

| S.N. | Items                                                           | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|
| 1    | You like the work of Mahila samakhya                            | 55      | 45     |
| 2    | Mahila Sangha are a platform to make rural women self dependent | 80      | 20     |



|    |                                                                                           |       |       |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 3  | Impressed by activities of Mahila samakhya.                                               | 72.52 | 29.48 |
| 4  | Mahila samakhya formation has improved self confidence.                                   | 53.50 | 46.50 |
| 5  | Mahila samakhya helps women in understanding one another.                                 | 46.01 | 53.99 |
| 6  | Manch provided a platform for expression of thoughts and views.                           | 61.78 | 39.22 |
| 7  | Sangha is developing awareness among girls towards themselves.                            | 72.68 | 27.32 |
| 8  | Due to formation of Sangha health related problems are easily taken into care.            | 60.95 | 39.05 |
| 9  | Group discussions in Sangha has made get rid from hesitation.                             | 49.16 | 50.84 |
| 10 | Sangha made positive attitude towards them.                                               | 59.06 | 40.94 |
| 11 | Sangha is creating awareness of health among rural adolescent girls.                      | 56.02 | 43.98 |
| 12 | Mahila samakhya is a new start for women empowerment till adolescent.                     | 50.30 | 49.70 |
| 13 | Formation for Kishori Kendras created affection towards school.                           | 54.81 | 45.19 |
| 14 | Kishori Kendras helps in creating awareness towards education among rural girls.          | 68.20 | 31.80 |
| 15 | Kishori Kendras is helpful in changing negative attitude of rural community toward girls. | 53.44 | 46.56 |
| 16 | Mahila samakhya motivates adolescent girls to live better life.                           | 70.07 | 29.93 |
| 17 | Nari Adalat created sensitization towards women related problems.                         | 72.72 | 27.28 |
| 18 | Nari Adalat created sensitization towards evils like child marriage and dowry system.     | 70.44 | 29.56 |
| 19 | Nari Adalat is developing appropriate understanding of Rights and Laws for women.         | 66.89 | 33.11 |
| 20 | Nari Adalat creates confidence for using own right.                                       | 47.87 | 52.13 |
| 21 | Mahila sangh made able to perceive problems related to rural community.                   | 50.25 | 49.75 |
| 22 | Mahila Shikshan Kendra enforce rural adolescent girls to be self dependent in future.     | 72.72 | 27.28 |



|    |                                                                                                               |       |       |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| 23 | Mahila Sangha increased confidence in expressing and solving their problems.                                  | 73.84 | 26.16 |
| 24 | Mahila Shikshan Kendra is motivating adolescent girls to unite and solve their problems related to education. | 64.31 | 35.69 |
| 25 | Mahila Sangha group formulation has uplift status in rural women community.                                   | 47.87 | 52.13 |
| 26 | Mahila Shikshan Kendra formulation has motivated Parents to continue their daughter's education.              | 60.54 | 39.46 |
| 27 | Mahila samakhya is bringing awareness among rural parents towards women rights.                               | 71.52 | 28.48 |
| 28 | Various aspects related to cleanliness and hygiene has been focusedtowards rural women                        | 66.68 | 33.32 |

**Table-3 indicates a majority of rural women perceived that Mahila Samakhya is effective for them. 54% of the respondents agreed that they are impressed by the activities of MS and they like to be as Meena.**

- ☐ 54% of the women viewed that Mahila Sangha has improved their self confidence. About half of the respondents (46.01%) viewed that Sangha helped them in understanding one another.
- ☐ About 61% of the women realized that Sangha provided a platform for expressing their thoughts and views.
- ☐ Majority of the respondents (73%) felt that Sangha is effective for developing renaissance towards them selves.
- ☐ 62% of the adolescent girls and women accepted that Sangha is playing an effective role in solving health related problems.
- ☐ About half of the respondents (50%) accepted that due to increase in communication with others, Sangh has made them to get rid of hesitation.
- ☐ About 60% of the respondents agreed that sangha has developed positive attitude towards them.



- ☐ 57% of respondents accepted that Mahila samakhya activities are creating awareness of towards need of good health.
- ☐ 52% of the respondent agreed Mahila samakhya is a new start for women empowerment from adolescent age.
- ☐ About 55% of adolescent girls viewed that formation of Kishori kendra created affection towards schools.
- ☐ 70% of respondents viewed that Kishori kendra set up helped in creating awareness towards importance of education for girls in rural areas.
- ☐ Although majority of the respondents (55%) viewed that Kishori kendra is helpful in changing attitude towards them but parental perception towards education of daughter is quite different. ***32% of the respondents accepted that women are still treated unequal to men because we ourselves hold traditional notions about our positions.***
- ☐ A majority of respondents (72%) accepted that Mahila samakhya motivates them to live better life but ***30% viewed that the ultimate aim of rural parent is to acquaint their daughters with the house hold work.*** Shilpi & Sanwal (2002) reported ***that Upbringing of girls starts with the notion that they are the temporary members of the family.***
- ☐ About 73% of respondents revealed that Nari Adalat is creating sensitization towards women's related problems.
- ☐ 72% of the girls accepted that Nari Adalat is creating awareness towards evils like child marriage and Dowry System.
- ☐ About 67% of the respondents agreed that Nari Adalat is developing appropriate understanding of rights among girls, but 33% of them expressed that young girls are expected to do household and were left with no time and energy to do anything else
- ☐ Only 48% of the respondents accepted that Nari Adalat is developing confidence to use their own rights but 52% of them expressed that resistance is very much based on the out dated beliefs that a woman's place was inside the house and education was of no use to her.
- ☐ Half of the respondents (50%) accepted that Mahila sangh is developing ability to diagnose rural society problems but 50% of them denied.



- ☐ Majority of the respondents (73%) accepted that Mahila Shikshan Kendra is motivating them to be self dependent in future but 27% of the respondents expressed that their parents prefer education for their brother not for them.
- ☐ 75% of rural respondents accepted that Mahila samakhya has united them on one platform and solve their problems.
- ☐ Half of the respondent (50%) accepted that Mahila sangha group formation has helped them to uplift their status among rural woman community.
- ☐ 61% of the respondents viewed that Mahila sikshan kendra has motivated rural parents to continue their daughter education.
- ☐ About 72% of the respondents accepted that Mahila samakhya is bringing awareness towards women's right in rural society.

***Through the above discussion it is clear that Mahila samakhya in rural area is helping in development of life skills in rural adolescent girls and women and also creating positive effects on girl's education and women empowerment.***

#### **Community attitude towards women traditional role**

- ☐ Majority of the literate person agree in the education of girls. About 83% of the literate men were impressed by the activities of Mahila samakya.
- ☐ Education has positively affected the attitude of literate parents and about 52.90% parents were agreeing with education of female child. While 52.67% of illiterate parents were disagree with education of their girl child and they don't think that the education would be fruitful for her future. This reflects the traditional attitude towards female child education.
- ☐ All the 100% literate person were agreed about with girl's education that is fruitful for her future. A majority of respondents are agreeing that all right like boy should be provided to the girls.. Views about equal treatment to boys and girls, about 83% of literate parents were agreed while illiterate parents are disagreeing. ***All this reflects that the literacy of the parents and the girls' education are positively correlated but illiteracy of parents and views about female child education are negatively correlated.***
- ☐ All 100% of the literate persons agreed that women should be motivated to raise their problems and education makes them to be aware of their rights. But in the case of illiterate



parents only 50% to 74.83% were agree with this view, while 81% of the literate parents viewed that education to women would make them to take decision and able to differentiate between good are bad.

- ☐ 81% of the literate parents were agreeing with this view that their families are proud of girl education.
- ☐ All 100% literate and 47% illiterate parents were agree with the view that the better education is rights of girls and through education they can get better life and mentally strong and about 40% of both literate and illiterate parents were disagree with this view.
- ☐ All the 100% literate men agreed that women should be provided opportunity for development in proper environment rather than child marriage,
- ☐ 59% of the illiterate person viewed that domestic works are more important for girls rather than to send them to school but 69% of literate parents were agree with the view of sending female child to school rather than engaging them in domestic works. About 83% to 100% of the literate persons agreed with the view that education will develop awareness among girls towards their rights in future.
- ☐ 81% of the literate parents were conscious towards their daughter's education while 82% of the Illiterate parents were not conscious towards their daughter's education. 66% literate parents agreed that the educated women educate whole family but about 50% of illiterate parents disagreed with this view. All 100% literate parents accepted that government's efforts are necessary for support girl's and women empowerment.
- ☐ Barriers in female education range from attitudinal to social, economic to political. Comparatively they are experienced more by the women belonging to rural and tribal areas, backward communities.

**SUGGESTIONS BY THE RESEARCHER-** Mahila Samakhya is actually collectives of rural women like a NGO which have been closely associated and evolved into a forum, where they meet to share their inner most thoughts with no reservations and plan to turn their dreams into reality. and they discuss their daily joys and sorrows, their successes and failures, their achievement and disappointment to frame their future life. Yet there are many problems, which are affecting the influence of Meena Manches. This forum could be more effective if we take up



these efforts step by step. The programme is a unique one which focuses on the education of women, who have been left out of the education system. The experience of the programme over the past fourteen years, in different regional contexts, has validated the MS approach as an effective means to mobilise and organise women, and in enabling them to take charge of their lives. This has resulted in many other sectoral programmes seeking to link with MS or adopt/adapt MS strategies. The programme informed strategies adopted in other countries of Africa and Asia. The Mahila Samakhyia Programme was awarded the honorary literacy award of UNESCO in 2001.

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