

Transforming Lives Through Women Empowerment Programmes: A Study Conducted on Rural Women in Ganjam District of Odisha

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Abstract:

Women empowerment has emerged as a major developmental priority in rural India, particularly in Odisha where programmes such as Mission Shakti, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Subhadra Yojana, NRLM initiatives, and financial inclusion schemes have significantly contributed to socio-economic transformation. The present study investigates the role of different women empowerment programmes in transforming the lives of rural women beneficiaries in Ganjam district of Odisha. The study was conducted among 100 women beneficiaries selected through purposive random sampling from different rural blocks of Ganjam district. Quantitative analysis using percentage and mean scores along with qualitative interpretation was adopted. The findings reveal that women empowerment programmes have positively influenced income generation, decision-making capacity, social participation, educational awareness, and self-confidence among rural women. However, challenges such as limited market access, lack of advanced training, patriarchal restrictions, and digital illiteracy still persist.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Mission Shakti, SHGs, Rural Odisha, Ganjam district, Socio-economic transformation, Rural women.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment refers to the process through which women gain access to resources, opportunities, participation, and decision-making power in economic, political, and social domains. In rural Odisha, women traditionally faced problems such as poverty, illiteracy, economic dependency, gender discrimination, and social exclusion. To address these issues, the Government of Odisha and Government of India introduced several women empowerment programmes.

Among these programmes, the Odisha Government's [Mission Shakti](#) has emerged as one of the most successful initiatives for empowering rural women through Women Self-Help Groups (WSHGs). The programme focuses on financial inclusion, livelihood generation, social mobilization, and leadership development. According to the Department of Mission Shakti, nearly 70 lakh women have been organized into approximately 6 lakh SHGs across Odisha.

Ganjam district has shown remarkable participation in SHG activities involving agriculture, floriculture, handicrafts, food processing, and micro-enterprises.

The present study attempts to examine how different women empowerment programmes have transformed the socio-economic conditions of rural women in Ganjam district.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the socio-economic background of women beneficiaries in Ganjam district.
2. To analyze the impact of women empowerment programmes on rural women.
3. To examine the role of SHGs and Mission Shakti in women empowerment.
4. To identify challenges faced by women beneficiaries.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening women empowerment programmes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Naila Kabeer (1999)

Kabeer emphasized that empowerment involves resources, agency, and achievements. She argued that women empowerment is linked to economic independence and participation in decision-making.

Amartya Sen (2000)

Sen highlighted the importance of women's capabilities, education, and freedom in achieving sustainable development.

Bina Agarwal (2001)

Agarwal explained that women's participation in group-based institutions improves bargaining power and social identity.

Malhotra and Schuler (2005)

Ela Bhatt (2006)

Bhatt observed that SHGs and cooperative movements help rural women attain economic self-reliance and leadership skills.

The researchers identified economic participation, education, mobility, and political participation as major indicators of women empowerment.

Krishna Lintas Behera et al. (2025)

A study on WSHG members in Ganjam district found that SHGs positively influenced income, social participation, and livelihood diversification among rural women.

Sasmita Tripathy (2025)

The researcher reported that inclusion of rural women in developmental programmes improved community participation and economic security in Ganjam district.

Department of Mission Shakti, Government of Odisha (2025)

The department reported that Mission Shakti has become a major instrument of social, economic, and political empowerment among women in Odisha.

Dr. Goutam Saha and Dr. Satya Narayan Misra (2025)

The authors observed that Odisha's Mission Shakti programme has significantly contributed to livelihood generation and entrepreneurship development among women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey method.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in rural areas of Ganjam district, Odisha.

Sample

A total of 100 women beneficiaries of various empowerment programmes were selected from different villages.

Sampling Technique

Purposive random sampling technique was used.

Tools Used

- Structured interview schedule
- Questionnaire
- Observation method

Statistical Techniques

- Percentage analysis
- Mean score analysis
- Qualitative interpretation

Women Empowerment Programmes Covered in the Study

1. Mission Shakti Programme
2. Women Self Help Groups (WSHGs)
3. National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)
4. Subhadra Yojana
5. Skill Development Programmes
6. Financial Inclusion and Bank Linkage Programmes

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**Table 1: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents**

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
20–30 years	28	28%
31–40 years	42	42%
41–50 years	21	21%
Above 50 years	9	9%

Interpretation

The majority of respondents (42%) belonged to the age group of 31–40 years, indicating active participation of middle-aged rural women in empowerment programmes.

Table 2: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	18	18%
Primary Education	34	34%
Secondary Education	30	30%
Higher Secondary & Above	18	18%

Interpretation

Most women possessed basic education, which helped them participate effectively in SHG activities and training programmes.

Table 3: Participation in Empowerment Programmes

Programme	Frequency	Percentage
Mission Shakti	40	40%
SHGs	25	25%
NRLM	12	12%
Subhadra Yojana	15	15%
Skill Development Training	8	8%

Interpretation

Mission Shakti emerged as the most widely utilized programme among rural women beneficiaries.

Table 4: Improvement in Monthly Income after Joining Programmes

Income Change	Frequency	Percentage
Significant Increase	46	46%
Moderate Increase	38	38%
Slight Increase	11	11%
No Change	5	5%

Mean Score Analysis

Using a 4-point scale:

- Significant Increase = 4
- Moderate Increase = 3
- Slight Increase = 2
- No Change = 1

$$\bar{X} = \frac{(46 \times 4) + (38 \times 3) + (11 \times 2) + (5 \times 1)}{100}$$

Mean Score = 3.25

Interpretation

The high mean score indicates substantial improvement in the economic condition of women beneficiaries.

Table 5: Impact on Decision-Making Ability

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Improved	44	44%
Moderately Improved	36	36%
Slightly Improved	15	15%
No Improvement	5	5%

Interpretation

Participation in women empowerment programmes significantly enhanced women's role in household and financial decision-making.

Table 6: Social Empowerment Indicators

Indicator	Mean Score
Self-confidence	3.7
Leadership Ability	3.4
Social Participation	3.5
Awareness of Rights	3.6
Financial Independence	3.8

Interpretation

Financial independence and self-confidence recorded the highest mean scores, indicating strong positive outcomes of empowerment programmes.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**Positive Transformations Observed****Economic Transformation**

Women reported increased income through activities such as tailoring, goat rearing, food processing, poultry farming, and handicrafts.

Social Recognition

Many respondents stated that they now participate in Gram Sabha meetings and village-level decision-making processes.

Leadership Development

SHG participation enhanced communication skills, leadership qualities, and confidence among rural women.

Educational Awareness

Women became more conscious about children's education, health, nutrition, and sanitation.

Reduction in Dependency

Women experienced reduced financial dependency on male family members.

Challenges Faced by Beneficiaries

1. Lack of advanced vocational training
2. Limited market linkage facilities
3. Inadequate digital literacy
4. Social restrictions and patriarchal attitudes
5. Irregular financial support in some areas
6. Lack of transportation and infrastructure

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Mission Shakti played a crucial role in rural women empowerment in Ganjam district.
2. Women empowerment programmes significantly improved economic independence.

3. Participation in SHGs increased self-confidence and leadership qualities.
4. Financial inclusion programmes enhanced savings and credit accessibility.
5. Women actively contributed to household decision-making after joining programmes.
6. Educational and health awareness improved among beneficiaries.
7. Social participation and community leadership increased substantially.
8. Despite progress, rural women still face challenges related to training, marketing, and digital access.

SUGGESTIONS

1. More skill development and entrepreneurship training should be provided.
2. Digital literacy programmes must be strengthened in rural areas.
3. Government should ensure better market linkage for SHG products.
4. Financial assistance and loan disbursement should be simplified.
5. Awareness programmes regarding women's rights and legal protections should be expanded.
6. Rural women entrepreneurs should receive branding and marketing support.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment programmes in Odisha have emerged as powerful instruments for rural transformation. The study conducted in Ganjam district clearly indicates that initiatives such as Mission Shakti, SHGs, NRLM, and Subhadra Yojana have positively influenced the economic, social, and psychological status of rural women. Women have become more confident, financially independent, socially active, and aware of their rights.

However, empowerment is a continuous process requiring sustained policy support, capacity building, digital inclusion, and social awareness. Strengthening women empowerment programmes can contribute significantly to inclusive rural development and gender equality in Odisha.

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