

How Do Self-Help Groups in Rural Uttar Pradesh Influence the Transition of Dalit Women from Household Labor to Micro-Entrepreneurship?

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Abstract

This paper discusses the role of self-help groups (SHGs) in rural Uttar Pradesh in changing the experience of Dalit (a term attributed to Jyotirao Phule denoting those outside the Indian caste system and stigmatized as “untouchables”) women as unpaid or low-paid household and caste-bound labor to micro-entrepreneurship. It contends that SHGs have the potential to forge a mid-ground institutional support for women moving beyond domestic labor, informal wage reliance, and autonomy by integrating savings, credit, peer accountability, state programs, skill exposure and collective identity. Nevertheless, the transition is not automatic or totally economic. In the case of Dalit women, caste status, gendered mobility, household bargaining power, access to local markets, landlessness, education, mediation of banks and power relations at the village level influence entrepreneurship. Based on a survey of the literature, government material and policy data, the paper demonstrates that SHGs facilitate financial inclusion and social confidence, although their potential to transform is limited in areas where caste hierarchies inhibit market access and power.

Keywords: Dalit women; self-help groups; rural Uttar Pradesh; caste; household labor; micro-entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

One of the most prominent institutional mechanisms used to integrate rural women in India into savings, credit, livelihood and local development programs is the self-help group. SHGs are not merely financial institutions; they also serve important social, developmental and empowerment functions. They establish a small yet regular forum where women can meet outside their homes, discuss financial matters, negotiate credit, learn record-keeping, engage with banks and government functionaries, and gradually develop economic agency. This institutional space is particularly significant for Dalit women in rural Uttar Pradesh, where caste, gender and class are deeply intertwined in the rural economy. Dalit women are often engaged in unpaid household work, agricultural labor, cleaning work, caste-stigmatized

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occupations, animal care, fuel and water collection, and casual labor, all of which are regulated by local social relations.

The main question of the paper is how SHGs can lead to the replacement of household labor of Dalit women with micro-entrepreneurship. The term transition is used cautiously. It does not imply a linear movement from dependence to complete economic independence. Instead, it is a slow and disproportional change whereby Dalit women might start hoarding, borrowing, acquiring productive resources, petty trading, dairy, tailoring, food processing, farm animals, banking correspondence, utility collection or other minor jobs and still do their household chores. This is a partial and negotiated and socially embedded transition.

There is the need to have a caste-society view since entrepreneurship is not merely a capital or a skill issue. In rural Uttar Pradesh, caste influences where women live, where, where, what, and to whom they can sell to, whether they can access dominant-caste neighborhoods, whether their products will be trusted by customers, whether they can be elected to leadership positions and whether their mobility is considered legitimate. Economic programs which consider all women in rural areas as a homogenous group often ignore the multiple limitations of caste stigma, gender norms and poverty on Dalit women. The population of Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh is about one-fifth of the total population as per the Census 2011-based information, so the issue of economic agency of Dalit women is sociologically and developmentally important (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011).

The rationale that emerges here is that SHGs impact Dalit women to move to micro-entrepreneurship in four ways. To begin with, they transform the unorganized household savings into an organized financial practice. Second, they offer shared credibility to women to leave the home front and venture into banks, markets and government offices. Third, they establish access to programs of government like the National Rural Livelihoods Mission and Lakhpati Didi (a Government of India initiative empowering rural women in SHGs) livelihood support. Fourth, they generate social confidence and peer learning. Meanwhile, SHGs do not necessarily undermine caste hierarchy. When markets are caste segmented, there will be inadequate credit, superficial training and local leadership will be captured by large groups, then micro-entrepreneurship will be small, informal and vulnerable.

2. Problem Statement

Ideally, SHGs must empower rural Dalit women to leave behind the invisible labor in their households and caste-restricted informal labor and work toward sustainable income and enterprise-ownership and decision-making. This transition would not only imply access to microcredit, but also control over income, access to market, training in business, collective bargaining, respect of labor and dignity in the household and village economy. In such an ideal scenario, micro-entrepreneurship would dilute reliance on the employers of the dominant caste, diminish exploitive credit arrangements, give women more influence over family choices and a greater voice in the world.

Practically, social and economic structures restrict the transition. Dalit women tend to be members of SHGs with low assets, low education, low mobility, lack of pay, high care load and low bargaining power. A significant number of borrowers spend SHG loans on

consumption smoothing, health costs, debt settlement, children education or household costs then invest on income-producing investments. It is not a sign of failure but an indicator of the poverty environment in which the entrepreneurship is being ventured. Research on SHGs and microfinance has demonstrated time and again that savings and credit can help women feel more confident and empowered in making decisions, yet economic empowerment does not necessarily lead to social or political empowerment (Sahu, 2015).

The issue is more acute with Dalit women since caste determines the social arena where business is conducted. The woman can take a loan, yet her business still requires customers, suppliers, transport, family consent, caste relations and local power brokers. Dairy, tailoring, grocery, poultry, food processing or petty trading can be technically open to anyone, but actual market entry requires trust and reputation and are dependent on caste-coded notions of purity and network access. In cases where Dalit women are producing food stuff, taking up service jobs or dealing with people of superior castes, caste bias can restrain the growth of the business. SHGs can, therefore, open a door to entrepreneurship, but it is the caste-based society that decides the extent to which that door will be opened.

The policy dilemma is not then merely to create more SHGs or to give more loans. The more difficult question is to learn how SHGs can change the social positioning of Dalit women. In the absence of attention to caste, the entrepreneurship of SHGs may only be measured in terms of repayment rates, the number of groups established, or credit provided. To be asked in a sociology and economics approach is whether SHGs transform relations of dependency, recognition, bargaining power and market participation, or whether they are simply introducing small debt financed activities to the already existing unpaid labor load of women.

3. Research Gap and Objectives

The available literature on SHGs in India is usually involving the empowerment of women, alleviation of poverty, saving habits, microcredit and livelihood diversification. Less literature is available on caste and social exclusion. Nevertheless, the particular alteration of Dalit women of household labor to micro-entrepreneurship in rural Uttar Pradesh as a sociological and economic process are under-studied. Research can indicate that SHGs enhance financial inclusion, and less concern is paid on how caste hierarchies affect business choice, market entry, leadership, respectability, mobility and the social significance of business.

The other gap is the household labor treatment. The work of Dalit women is usually summed up only when the work is paid but their unpaid household labor, care and caste-based service labor is the backdrop on which micro-entrepreneurship is produced. When a woman begins tailoring, dairy work or food processing and still needs to complete all her domestic tasks, her entrepreneurship can lead to more workload without a complete autonomy gain. Thus, the paper examines transition as a household-to-caste-based society, to market not only as entry into income generation.

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine how SHGs create financial and social pathways for Dalit women in rural Uttar Pradesh to move toward micro-entrepreneurship.

- To analyze the influence of caste, gender and household labor on Dalit women's entrepreneurial participation.
- To assess how savings, credit, training, collective identity and state livelihood schemes support or limit the transition from household labor to enterprise.
- To critically evaluate whether SHG-led micro-entrepreneurship produces substantive empowerment or remains confined to low-return survival activities.
- To propose policy and institutional reforms for strengthening caste-sensitive SHG entrepreneurship among Dalit women.

4. Research Methodology

The methodology used in this paper is qualitative, analytical and interdisciplinary research. It is founded on secondary data and literature review, based on sociology, development economics, gender studies and public policy. The articles in peer-reviewed journals, government documents, policy documents, program evidence and empirical research on SHGs, microfinance, women's empowerment and caste-based labor systems in rural areas are used in the study.

The paper is not based on primary fieldwork. Rather, it creates a conceptual and critical examination of the role of SHGs in transforming household labor into micro-entrepreneurship of the Dalit women in rural Uttar Pradesh. The argument is built using evidence of national SHG studies, studies on Scheduled Caste women microfinance in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal, policy material of NRLM/Lakshpati Didi and general literature on caste and women labor. The approach is appropriate since the research question involves both quantifiable economic change and social change that is not as obvious.

The analysis does not just consider SHGs as credit institutions but as social institutions that are integrated within the caste and gender relations. Thus, economic indicators (savings, loans, income and enterprise formation) are viewed in the context of sociological indicators (mobility, dignity, household bargaining, caste discrimination, collective identity and public participation). The study has a limitation in that it lacks block-wise primary survey data of Uttar Pradesh. It contributes to the development of theory-based and policy-relevant frameworks of studying the issue of Dalit women as SHG-based entrepreneurs through the prism of caste-society dynamics.

5. Conceptual Framework: Caste, Gender and Micro-Entrepreneurship

The shift from household work to micro-entrepreneurship can be explained through the three mutually related concepts of caste location, gendered labor and collective economic agency. Caste location is the social status inscribed at birth, which affects the rights to land, work, network, public esteem, and market trust. Agricultural wage labor, informal services and subordinate economic relations have been the lifeline of Dalit households in rural North India in many cases. Caste and patron-client relationships still have a significant impact on rural power dynamics even in the presence of a decline in landlordism (Bhattacharya et al., 2022).

Gendered labor is work done by women (unpaid and underpaid) in households and the informal sector. Labor of Dalit women is double devalued first by its deemed naturalness as women's work, and secondly by its positioning in the unprivileged or rejected caste-determined occupations. Household labor is thus a hidden subsidy to the rural economy. A Dalit woman does not renounce her labor when she joins an SHG. She also has to attend savings meetings, pay back loans, and undertake training and business activities.

Collective economic agency refers to the process by which women collectively access resources and recognition they are not able to access as individuals. SHGs are effective due to the fact that they break down the sense of isolation. A Dalit woman can go to a bank alone and may be met with hesitation, fear, lack of information and social distance; but when she goes in a group of SHG, the group becomes a recognized entity and she can approach a bank as a member of a group. The social guarantee is provided by the group in cases where there is no formal collateral. It also creates a moral economy of repayment, mutual assistance and peer monitoring. Recent studies on women's SHGs in rural areas indicate that the involvement of women in microfinance positively affects women's social, economic and psychological empowerment, including their confidence, social networks and decision-making power within their households (Pandhare et al., 2024).

The framework must, however, not romanticise collectives. Local hierarchies can be replicated within SHGs if leadership is taken assumed by a caste group, if records are kept by literate members, if benefits are funnelled through the influential caste group, or if caste-based segregation influences group formation. Collective agency is transformative for Dalit women only when it gives them more control over resources, more independent market participation and empowers them to question notions of belonging to a domestic/servile/low-paid labor role.

6. SHGs in Rural Uttar Pradesh: Pathways from Household Labor to Enterprise

The effects of SHGs on Dalit women's journey toward micro-entrepreneurship in rural Uttar Pradesh is multi-layered. First, there's discipline in your finances. The conscious saving, no matter how small, alters the relationship between money and women. A woman who had previously been engaged in collective saving and collective loan-making and repayment starts using money for household purposes. This is a small, but significant change as it adds financial literacy and confidence.

The second layer is access to credit. SHGs can offer internal finance and subsequently bank linkage. The BL Centre for Development Research and Action study of women of the Scheduled Castes in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal revealed that while SHGs facilitated savings, participation in income-generating activities and awareness of rights, only a fraction of the SHGs engaged in income-generating activities and the mode of accessing training was uneven (BL Centre for Development Research and Action, 2005).

The third layer is livelihood diversification. SHGs enable Dalit women to initiate various income-generating activities, including tailoring, goat rearing, dairy farming, poultry, spice processing, vegetable vending, small shops, food processing and other service-based activities. Women are also linked to roles such as Bank Sakhis, Vidyut Sakhis, community resource persons and enterprise promotion cadres under the NRLM and state livelihood missions. The

Lakhpati Didi initiative recognises an SHG member as a “Lakhpati Didi” when her annual household income exceeds ₹100,000 through diversified and sustainable livelihood activities. The program emphasizes entrepreneurship, effective resource management and multiple income sources that can be sustained across agricultural seasons and business cycles (Ministry of Rural Development, n.d.).

Social recognition comes next at level 4. Women in the household and village are perceived differently because of entrepreneurship. If women bring income, they become more visible to the economy when they manage repayments, or interact with institutions. But this recognition is provisional. The woman's autonomy might not be raised much if the enterprise income is small, irregular, and is controlled by her male relatives. Market expansion can be limited by caste prejudice, with enterprise restricted to intra-community sales or low return activities.

Institutional mediation is the fifth layer. SHGs link Dalit women to banks, panchayats, block offices and government schemes and training agencies. This connection is important because Dalit women tend to be socially removed from the formal institutions. A group format increases the reach of the state. This has, however, resulted in dependence on program quality. In the absence of good training, of bank responsiveness, of linkages with markets, SHGs are savings and-loan groups and not institutions for enterprise building.

7. Caste-Society Dynamics in the Transition to Micro-Entrepreneurship

From the perspective of caste-society, it can be observed that Dalit women entrepreneurship is not just an economic activity but a struggle for social recognition. Rural markets are not neutral places. They are influenced by caste-based settlement, customer-based relations, social distance, trust, purity norms, networks and inherited reputations. Dalit women may be encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship but the range of entrepreneurship available and acceptable to them may be narrow. Some activities such as livestock, craft activities, services and small vending, which are connected to wages, may be acceptable, but entry into other higher-value trade activities, food supply to dominant caste households or a public-facing business may be resisted.

Time and mobility are also a function of caste. Resource-poor Dalit women may have less control over their time since they work at home, they have to work on the jobs and then participate in SHGs. Permissibility, transport, safety and social norms may be required for mobility to markets, training centers or banks. Then there is the social aspect – a woman stepping out of home to go to work may be viewed differently through the lens of caste and gender. An entrepreneur, therefore, needs not just economic capital, but also social acceptance.

More caste-sensitive is the leadership of the SHGs. Women who are literate or have access to more social networks can become group leaders, group book-keepers or intermediaries. This can be beneficial to the group if leadership is responsible, but can also lead to internal inequality if Dalit women rely on others for the interpretation of the records or bank procedures or the rules of the scheme. The studies conducted on women's SHGs of the different SC groups reveal that training on book keeping and correspondence and bank procedures is still a huge demand and many women SHG members need better capacity building to make the utilization of group participation for earning income (BL Centre for Development Research and Action, 2005).

That transition from household labor to micro-entrepreneurship, however, is a transition of identity – it is a transition from being a laborer to being a producer, from being a passive recipient to a borrower, from being a domestic subject to a public actor, from being an unpaid helper to an income contributor. However, this change may be constrained by the caste hierarchy, which restricts Dalit women's businesses to be small, local and low margin. The sociological question is not if any income comes out of SHGs, it is the question of whether it changes the status of Dalit women in the village society.

8. Economic Effects: Income, Credit, Assets and Enterprise Viability

The economic effects of SHGs on Dalit women appear in savings, credit access, income diversification, asset acquisition, and risk management. The first role of SHG finance for poor families might not be entrepreneurial but protective. Loans can help people avoid moneylenders, help treat ill health, pay school fees or for consumption. These uses are frequently demeaned as non-productive uses, but are economically logical in fragile households. The first requirement for enterprise is to stabilise the household.

The second economic impact is production of small productive investment. Women can purchase goats, sewing machines, raw materials, shop supplies, dairy livestock, and poultry birds and food-processing equipment. Such an investment is typically a relatively small one. This implies that SHG entrepreneurship is seen as a survival business and not as a growth business. It adds to the income but can't replace wage labor or dependence on the family.

Larger SHG programs provide evidence that empowerment and debt portfolio improvements might be more effective than livelihood transformation. During the assessment of JEEViKA in Bihar, it was noticed that there was a considerable impact on debt portfolio, women's empowerment, and negligible changes in livelihood options (Datta, 2015). mobilization does not automatically lead to enterprise upgrading. Women can be more effective borrowers and more confident market players without necessarily being a part of profitable markets.

Market linkages are a key enabler for enterprise viability. If they don't have access to customers, packaging, transport, quality certification, digital payments or repeat orders, training to produce pickles, stitch garments or dairy products is not enough. The vast majority of Dalit women's businesses are still confined to the local market, where the competition is strong and the profits are slim. The transition is strengthened if the SHGs can be connected to producer groups, cooperatives, procurement systems, local exhibitions, digital platforms, and government supply chains. In other cases, the micro-entrepreneurship sector is at risk of indebtedness, seasonal fluctuations in income, and household appropriation of income. An entry platform may thus be the most significant economic contribution of SHGs. They reduce the barriers for Dalit women to engage in finance, institution and enterprise attempts. It is the challenge to make this entry point into viable enterprises and not limited to people's castes and gender.

9. Social Empowerment and Household Bargaining

Social impact of SHGs is sometimes more significant than financial impact. The women who attend meetings, sign documents, engage with bank staff and manage their savings and

participate in group decisions become more confident. SHGs provide a genuine opportunity for women to meet outside their homes. This collective visibility holds significance for Dalit women, as in caste-based society women's voice is limited in public and caste-based society also calls upon their labor.

If household bargaining is improved due to women's income or credit control, both practices would be welcomed. Household bargaining could enhance when women bring in income or control credit, in which case both practices would be accepted. They could acquire a more significant role in the education, health spending, assets and debt repayment of children. Empowerment, however, is not a given. Women may be the ones who pay back the loan or the business income, but without decision-making power, due to control of the loan by the male family members. When the enterprise is home-based, it could be perceived as a continuation of housekeeping duties instead of a job. This is the reason why the income generation/empowerment dichotomy is important.

However, the SHGs can contribute to slow social change. There is a possibility of women being able to resist domestic violence, alcoholism, dowry demands, school dropout, wage exploitation or denial of entitlements through collective membership. Grievances can be visible through group identity. In this context, SHGs can be considered as social infrastructure. They are also of significance because by providing a forum for morals and politics they can talk about issues which were previously the preserve of domestic matters of the Dalit family.

10. Policy Context: NRLM, Lakhpati Didi and Uttar Pradesh

The policy landscape in Uttar Pradesh is increasingly portraying SHGs as a force of rural women entrepreneurship. The National Rural Livelihoods Mission aims to establish poor rural households as SHGs and federations, increase financial inclusion, develop skills and foster livelihoods. The Lakhpati Didi program also introduces a new policy shift from inclusion to sustainable income generation. Its official definition is that of the members of SHGs who earn more than INR The approach to implementation of the project is through identification, training, household livelihood planning, value-chain intervention and market linkages, and the sustainable livelihood cycles it generates are 100,000 annually (Ministry of Rural Development, n.d.)

This policy shift is helpful in recognizing the fact that SHGs should not just be savings groups. They need to be platforms for livelihoods and enterprises. There has been a significant increase in the participation of women in SHG activities and some of the activities that have been reported in Uttar Pradesh include livelihood diversification, Bank Sakhi and Vidyut Sakhi, community investment support and identifying Lakhpati Didis. Such figures show scale but only if Dalit women are in the same proportion as men in more lucrative jobs, leadership and market-driven enterprises.

A policy approach that is sensitive to the caste may question the following: who becomes a Lakhpati Didi; who stays as a low-income borrower; who gets access to training; who operates digital tools; who is able to access bank credit; and who's products are sold to larger markets. If left unmonitored, success of the program may mask inequality within the caste group. Dalit

women can be members of SHGs but not in the higher paying business ventures. Hence, the policy of SHG should be “scale and social equity” in Uttar Pradesh.

11. Key Challenges

Household labor to micro-entrepreneurship is limited by a number of challenges faced by Dalit women. First, credit is too small and too late to sustain a viable enterprise. Second, training could be general and not related to the market need. Thirdly, the unpaid domestic time burden of women means lost time and fewer resources for business expansion. Fourth, there is a limitation on networks and public awareness of customers based on the caste. Fifthly, lack of digital literacy restricts access to payments online, e-commerce and scheme information. Sixth, if there is a lack of democracy within SHG, the leadership can create secondary hierarchy.

One of the other challenges is debt without enterprise viability. When women take loans for business without market access, it could create stress within the household. The discipline of SHGs can be beneficial if the earnings are regular, and a problem if the enterprise is uncertain. Even where household men are in charge of money, the value of group repayment can be the moral burden for women. Thus, the planning of livelihoods should be realistic.

The third challenge is that many of the microenterprises have low return. Tailoring, dairy, poultry and food processing and petty trade can be used to supplement income but inputs, quality control, storage, market access and working capital are required. If there is no aggregation, there is no branding nor procurement linkages and each micro enterprise is competing very hard. Collective marketing, producer groups and institutional buyers are needed along with loans for Dalit women.

12. Recommendations

First, the caste-disaggregated data should be used to monitor the entrepreneurship of SHG entrepreneurs in Uttar Pradesh. Beyond merely counting the number of women in SHGs, it is important for the programs to keep records of specific caste groups that receive loans, training, enterprise support, leadership roles, bank linkage and market contracts.

Second, SHGs of Dalit women need to be trained on enterprises to ensure the link with the market needs in the region. Bookkeeping, costing, pricing, packaging, digital payment, customer handling, quality control, negotiation skills should be covered during training. This generic motivational training is not enough.

Third, market linkage should be treated as a central component of SHG-based entrepreneurship. Dedicated pathways should be created for Dalit women entrepreneurs through district-level rural marts, school and Anganwadi procurement systems, panchayat-level service contracts, dairy cooperatives, e-commerce partnerships and local exhibitions.

Fourth, asset support and handholding should accompany SHG credit. Dalit women often lack collateral, land ownership and inherited business networks. Therefore, enterprise development requires not only credit, but also capital for equipment, raw materials, mentoring, transport support and working capital.

Fifth, SHGs must recognise and address the burden of unpaid labor carried by Dalit women. Women's care responsibilities should be considered while deciding meeting schedules, training locations and enterprise models. Home-based businesses can be beneficial; however, they should ensure that women receive recognition for their entrepreneurial contributions and retain control over the income generated through their enterprises.

Sixth, it is important to reinforce internal democracy in SHGs. Including Dalit women in decision-making processes instead of passive members can be achieved through rotation of leadership, transparency in records, and literacy support as well as social audits to prevent elite capture.

13. Discussion

The overall analysis reveals that the SHGs act as a link between the domestic invisibility and economic participation in the public sphere for Dalit women, making a positive difference in their shift from household labor to micro-enterprises. It's significant, because Dalit women are seldom entrepreneurs coming from the asset ownership, market confidence and social privilege. They come from a caste and poverty base, and are household laborers with limited mobility. From an economic point of view, SHGs offer savings discipline, access to credit, risk sharing and opportunities for entry-level enterprises. They build a sense of collective identity, public consciousness, and a limited threat to the subordination of caste-gender. This is the essence of their strength when they integrate economic and social duties. A bank loan can't empower a Dalit woman and a collective that can support her to the bank and to have her own records learned, her work recognized and her connection made to the schemes has a different impact.

But the impact of SHGs is not to be exaggerated. A significant number of women have stayed in subsistence enterprises. There are still many who do unpaid domestic chores. Numerous loans are taken to sustain households. There are still a lot of businesses relying on local caste networks. This is not a failure of SHGs, but rather just a fact of how the rural environment is organized in an unequal way. Entrepreneurship can't be divorced from the caste-based society. The most relevant theoretical result is that micro-entrepreneurship can only be viewed as social mobility, and not just income generating. When Dalit women start businesses, they may have to enter business areas where they are not expected to be present, interact with officials, negotiate with customers, deal with money, and accept a new role of a producer instead of a mere worker. This transition has social implications even if the income is not high.

The policy conclusion is that the SHG programs should transcend counting the participants. While scale is important, quality is more important. A caste-sensitive SHG mechanism should question, whether Dalit women are getting control over income, whether they are getting access to better markets, whether they are escaping from that exploitative labor, whether they are getting away from dominant-caste employer and whether they are able to participate in leadership and building intergenerational aspiration for their daughters. In their absence, micro-entrepreneurship could be a shallow level of economic activity on top of a profound growing inequality.

14. Conclusion

In rural Uttar Pradesh, self-help groups affect the shift of Dalit women toward micro-entrepreneurship as opposed to household labor by establishing access to savings, credit, collective identity, institutional networks and livelihood schemes. They assist women to relinquish unrecognized domestic and caste-based labor to recognizable economic activity. This shift has social significance, in that it undermines the notion that the labor of Dalit women pertains solely to the home, farm, or the employer of the dominant caste, or to the informal economy, which involves low wages. Meanwhile the transition is not complete and uneven. SHGs have the ability to open up spaces, but do not in itself eradicate caste hierarchy, patriarchy, market exclusion or unpaid labor burdens. The micro-entrepreneurship of Dalit women continues to be limited by small credit, low quality training, caste-based segmentation of markets, unequal leadership and the control of women by the household over their income. SHGs should therefore be understood as enabling institutions and not automatic engines of empowerment. Their true possibilities are to integrate finance and dignity, collective agency, access to markets and caste-sensitive policy. The transition between household labor and micro-entrepreneurship is not merely an economic one to Dalit women in rural Uttar Pradesh, but a fight to be acknowledged, to have some form of agency and social mobility in caste-based society.

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