

# From Tradition to Transformation: A Case Study on Women Empowerment in Rural India

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## ABSTRACT

This case study examines Meera Devi a rural woman in India and her transformation from a life dictated by traditional norms to one marked by empowerment and agency. Meera's tale, set against a background of rural women's socioeconomic struggles, demonstrates the enormous influence of grassroots movements and government actions on gender equality. Meera overcomes obstacles such as economic reliance, restricted schooling and medical access, societal norms and a lack of decision-making authority by participating in a Self Help Group (SHG) and gaining access to government programmes. Her path represents a greater trend towards empowerment amongst rural women, aided by efforts that promote financial, educational, medical care, cultural, political, and technical components of empowerment. By exploring Meera's experiences, this case study sheds light on measures for achieving gender equality in rural India, emphasising the need of community participation, campaigning, and ongoing investments in the empowerment of women for inclusive growth.

## INTRODUCTION

India with its diverse fabric of cultures, customs, and social conventions, has long been a civilization where conventional gender roles have affected women's lives and position. In rural communities, these roles are frequently more evident, with women predominantly involved in domestic tasks, agriculture, and informal labour. Despite their important contributions to their households and neighbourhoods, rural women have historically encountered severe impediments to education, healthcare, economic possibilities, and decision-making procedures.

However, in the recent past, there have been a significant change. Government efforts, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and grassroots movements have all contributed to a shift aimed at empowering women in these regions. This empowerment has several facets including schooling, financial autonomy, political involvement and social rights. Self Help Groups (SHGs), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment

Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), and state-specific programmes have all played important roles in promoting this development.

This case study investigates the path of empowering women in rural India, focusing on how conventional barriers are being overcome via collaborative efforts and novel ways. It dives into the multifaceted tactics that are empowering women to alter their lives, giving them the skills they need to create greater possibilities both for themselves and those around them. By emphasizing success stories as well as persisting obstacles, this research hopes to focus light on the substantial progress made and the path ahead for attaining complete gender parity in rural India.

From 2015 to 2024, self-help groups (SHGs) in India have shown significant progress and have played a pivotal role in empowering women, particularly in rural areas. This period has seen a substantial increase in the number of SHGs, their financial activities and their contributions to community development.

Year	Total SHGs (in lakhs)	Households Mobilized (in crores)	Key Events/Initiatives
2015	44.0	5.0	Focus on micro-enterprises under NRLM
2016	50.0	5.8	Introduction of digital finance initiatives for SHGs
2017	56.5	6.5	Expansion of SHG activities and digital integration
2018	64.0	7.2	Increased collateral-free loans and financial inclusion
2019	72.0	8.0	Special funding for women's enterprises
2020	80.0	8.8	COVID-19 stimulus package raising loan limits

Year	Total SHGs (in lakhs)	Households Mobilized (in crores)	Key Events/Initiatives
2021	82.5	9.0	Continuation of COVID-19 measures, focus on economic recovery
2022	85.0	9.5	Further emphasis on rural development and skill enhancement
2023	88.0	9.8	Strengthening market access and financial support
2024	90.4	10.0	Continued support under NRLM, expanding SHG coverage

These figures are drawn from the Ministry of Rural Development's dashboard, providing a detailed snapshot of SHG activities across different states in India as of 2024 .

By February 2023 approximately 8.9 million SHGs had availed loans totalling Rs 2.54 lakh crore. The financial discipline of these groups is evident, with a repayment rate exceeding 96%, which underscores their reliability in the banking sector.

#### State-Wise data on Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India for 2024

State/UT	No. of Households Covered	No. of SHGs Mobilized
Andhra Pradesh	9,066,655	855,580
Assam	4,018,731	356,601
Bihar	12,708,238	1,096,939
Chhattisgarh	3,036,956	275,109
Gujarat	2,765,861	278,079
Jharkhand	3,586,912	291,417
Karnataka	4,168,120	356,942
Kerala	3,999,493	270,993
Madhya Pradesh	5,792,134	484,453
Maharashtra	6,469,304	635,183
Odisha	5,715,076	546,490
Rajasthan	3,804,161	321,801
Tamil Nadu	4,002,881	336,044
Telangana	4,777,041	441,943
Uttar Pradesh	9,489,816	840,280
West Bengal	12,106,660	1,181,104
Haryana	623,171	59,789
Himachal Pradesh	373,629	44,931
Jammu & Kashmir	791,032	90,767
Punjab	531,855	51,213
Uttarakhand	486,283	64,390
Arunachal Pradesh	84,416	9,897
Manipur	92,267	8,725
Meghalaya	442,150	45,151
Mizoram	85,393	10,256
Nagaland	134,192	15,336
Sikkim	56,610	5,908
Tripura	492,588	51,693
Andaman & Nicobar	13,064	1,286
Goa	50,020	3,765
Ladakh	10,844	1,432
Lakshadweep	4,146	344
Puducherry	57,831	4,564
Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli	11,844	1,144
<b>Total</b>	<b>99,849,374</b>	<b>9,039,549</b>

These figures are drawn from the Ministry of Rural Development's dashboard, providing a detailed snapshot of SHG activities across different states in India as of 2024 .

#### Crisis Management and Community Support:

During the COVID-19 pandemic SHGs produced essential items such as masks, protective gear, and sanitizers, significantly contributing to the nation's fight against the virus. These groups

The National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) has been a significant driver aiming to increase each SHG's income to Rs 1 lakh by 2024. This initiative focuses on microfinance linked to livelihood development, ensuring sustainable income growth for women members.

also managed community kitchens, providing millions of meals to migrant laborers and local populations (Forbes India).

SHGs have been instrumental in facilitating digital transactions and local governance, enhancing the efficiency of service delivery at the grassroots level. For instance, in Jharkhand, SHGs helped migrant workers return home and facilitated their access

to various government services through digital platforms (Forbes India).

#### **Government Support and Policy Enhancements:**

The government doubled the collateral-free loan limit for SHGs from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh in 2021, benefiting 6.3 million women SHGs and 68.5 million households. This policy has enabled SHGs to access larger funds for their activities .

Various states have provided substantial budgetary support to SHGs, with allocations directly aimed at empowering these groups to undertake diverse developmental activities. For example, states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and others have set up dedicated departments to support SHG initiatives.

#### **Economic Empowerment:**

SHGs have significantly empowered women economically by providing them with opportunities to save money, access credit, and invest in small businesses. This financial inclusion has allowed women to become financially independent and support their families better. Women involved in SHGs often gain entrepreneurial skills and engage in various income-generating activities, from agriculture to small-scale manufacturing and services. This diversification of income sources contributes to their economic stability and growth (Forbes India).

#### **Social Empowerment:**

Participation in SHGs has improved women's social status within their communities. These groups provide a platform for women to voice their concerns, participate in decision-making, and take collective action on social issues such as health, education, and domestic violence (Emerald Insight). SHGs also foster a sense of solidarity and mutual support among women, helping them overcome socio-cultural barriers and gain confidence in their abilities. This social capital is crucial for building resilient communities .

#### **Skill Development and Leadership:**

Through various training programs and workshops, SHG members acquire new skills in areas such as financial literacy, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial skills. These skills are vital for their personal and professional development (Emerald Insight) . Many women from SHGs have taken on leadership roles, not just within their groups but also in local governance and community development projects. This leadership experience further empowers them and inspires other women to take similar initiatives.

In conclusion, from 2015 to 2024, SHGs in India have made remarkable progress in empowering women through economic and social initiatives. Supported by government policies and community efforts, these groups have become a cornerstone of rural development and women's empowerment, making significant contributions to the nation's socio-economic fabric.

#### **1.2 Background:**

Meera Devi lives in Ganeshpur village of Uttarkashi surrounded by the beautiful fields and rolling hills of rural India. Meera, a 35-year-old mother of three personifies the customary duties allocated to women in her society. Meera was taught from a young age that her major responsibilities were to manage the family, raise children and support her husband's agricultural job. With limited educational opportunities, she never left her hometown her goals stifled by her society's rigorous standards.

Meera's life, like that of numerous rural women, was shaped by patriarchal rules that left little possibility for personal development or individuality. Despite her tireless efforts at home as well as the fields, her efforts were frequently neglected and her voice was rarely heard in issues affecting her family or society. The local school was a long distance away and healthcare services were primitive at best, rendering basic requirements difficult to get on a daily basis.

Meera on the other hand, hid a resilient spirit and a lingering longing for change under her peaceful appearance. Her turning point occurred when a local non-governmental organisation, funded by several government schemes, launched initiatives to empower women in her area.

#### **The Journey of Empowerment:**

'Pirul' or pine needles, abundant in the Himalayan region, are highly combustible and contribute to forest fires. According to the Indian State of the Forest Report 2021, Uttarakhand has a

total recorded forest area of 24,305 square kilometres, covering 45.44% of the state's geographical area.

**Very dense forests: 5,055 square kilometres**

**Moderately dense forests: 12,768 square kilometres**

**Open forests: 6,482 square kilometres**

Pine trees introduced by the British for railway sleepers, are now abundant across Uttarakhand, particularly in the Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Dehradun, Garhwal, Nainital, Pithoragarh, Rudraprayag, Tehri, and Uttarkashi districts. Meera Devi who lost her father at the tender age of nine has become a prominent figure in the field of women's self-help and handicrafts through her hard work and intelligence. **Widely recognized as the 'Pirul Woman,'** she has transformed the pine tree often seen as a contributor to air pollution in the hills into a vital resource for many women on their self-help journeys.

Handicrafts made from pine leaves (pirul) have become a significant source of employment for women in Uttarakhand. By collecting pirul and crafting various items such as baskets, table mats, rakhis, decorative pieces, and bouquets, Meera Devi small venture has created a substantial social impact in the region.

Now Meera Devi trained women to make handicrafts from pirul., Under Meera Devi guidance 45 self-help groups and approximately 2,000 unemployed women now receive training to pave their way to self-employment. Her journey to success was not easy. Originally from Pithouni (Almora), Manju was born in Ason, Kapkot tehsil, Bageshwar. At the age of nine, she lost her father Rameshwaram Kumar who was the principal of Government Inter College Ason.

Her mother Devki had never attended school and struggled to find a decent job leaving the family, including four siblings to fend for themselves. Facing harsh realities, Devki took a job as a peon at the college where her husband had been the principal. This was a particularly painful period for the children, especially Manju. Reflecting on her struggles .After the death of Meera Devi's father her mantra was to reduce our needs and never take a loan. This formula helped us navigate through tough times.

Manju took her first step as an entrepreneur by opening a poultry and silkworm farming unit to support her mother. With 30 years of experience working with the local community, she has been dedicated to creating opportunities for orphaned and elderly women. She spent her childhood in extreme deprivation. Local women with NGO support started making eco-friendly decorative items from Pirul during the pandemic. However they faced challenges as they needed permission from the forest department to use Pirul for commercial use. Meera Devi with the help of NGO took on the challenge educating forest officers about the benefits and potential uses of Pirul. Later on Forest department arranged trainers to train the women in the areas for making decorative items from Pirul. The SHG received significant support from the officials of the Tons forest division, who provided training to the first batch. During this training, the women learned to make various products such as Rakhi's, Hats, Baskets, Pen Stands, and Dustbins. Initially 100 rakhis were made from Pirul, and later the CM's office purchased 350 Rakhis to support the self-help group. Through the SHG, Meera gained access to microfinance, skill development training and a supportive community of women.

Empowered by newfound skills, Meera began generating supplementary income for her family, which not only enhanced their financial stability but also earned her respect within her community.

Government programs such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Janani Suraksha Yojana further catalyzed Meera's empowerment journey. By prioritizing her daughters' education and accessing maternal healthcare services, Meera broke the cycle of limited opportunities for future generations while ensuring healthier outcomes for herself and her children.

Meera regarded the establishment of Self Help Groups (SHGs) as a breakthrough point. Encouraged by the prospect of independence from money and support from the community, she joined a SHG focusing on developing skills and microfinance.

Meera's membership with the SHG provided her with access to modest loans and training courses on a variety of income-generating enterprises. She learnt how to tailor and started selling handmade clothing to augment her family's income. Her

newly acquired abilities and economic contribution eventually gained her respect in her family and neighbourhood. The SHG also offered a forum for women to voice their concerns, share their experiences and encourage one another, building a sense of unity and collective strength.

Government programmes like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign encouraged Meera to prioritise her children's education, ensuring that her daughters received the education she had lost. She was also helped from the Janani Suraksha Yojana (Maternal Protection Scheme), which increased her access to maternal health care, resulting in safer pregnancies and healthier results for both moms and babies.

Meera's path from a life of customary constraints to one of independence and active involvement demonstrates the transforming effect of focused interventions. Her narrative parallels bigger trends in rural India, as women are increasingly taking up jobs that were traditionally restricted to them. The combined efforts of government programmes, non-governmental organisations, and community groups are gradually eliminating the hurdles that have long impeded women's growth.

Meera Devi stands out as a trailblazer, uniting women under a common platform for collaborative work. Her efforts go beyond mere financial gain. While the profits may fluctuate between Rs 1,000 and Rs 4,000 per month, the significance lies in the additional skills women acquire alongside their agricultural expertise. Through activities such as stitching, weaving, and producing juices from locally grown products, women broaden their skill set and diversify their sources of income. With just a few hours of work spread over seven days each month, women associated with these groups earn a respectable amount. This initiative not only provides financial stability but also elevates their status within their families and communities. Under Meera's guidance, the first self-help group was established in Ganeshpur village, marking a significant milestone in women's empowerment in the area.

This case study looks into Meera's metamorphosis and examines the many aspects of her empowerment. By presenting her experiences, this research hopes to provide light on the larger context of women's empowerment across rural India, highlighting both the progress made and the problems that remain in the struggle for gender equality.

#### **Challenges Faced by Meera:**

Meera Devi had various problems prior to joining the Self Help Group (SHG), which are typical of the issues that many women confront in rural India. These obstacles affected many facets of her life, impeding her personal development and general well-being. The main problems she encountered were:

**1. Economic Dependence:** Meera had limited possibilities to earn money. Her family relied primarily on her husband's farming earnings, which were frequently insufficient to cover their basic requirements. According to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), women's labour force participation in rural India is just approximately 25%, whereas men's is 54%. Meera lacked financial stability and independence because she did not have any own income or savings. According to a World Bank analysis from 2018, just 26% of women in rural India have a connection to formal banking services, underlining the financial isolation that many women experience.

**2. Educational Barriers:** Meera had little schooling due to the widely held idea that teaching girls was unimportant. According to India's 2011 Census, the literacy rate for women in rural regions was 58.8%, much lower below the male literacy rate of 78.6%. The lack of local education facilities and resources hampered her potential to acquire information and skills that would benefit her life. For example, many areas in rural India lack secondary schools, forcing pupils to travel considerable distances if they want to further their education.

**3. Healthcare Challenges:** Meera's village's healthcare facilities were limited, making it difficult for her to obtain necessary medical treatments, particularly maternal health care. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), only 75% of rural women had the option of institution births, whereas 89% did in metropolitan regions. Meera's health needs were frequently overlooked in favour of those of male relatives and

home responsibilities due to a focus on conventional gender roles. According to the NFHS-4, 53% of rural women had anaemia, suggesting bad health outcomes and dietary inadequacies.

**4. Social and Cultural Constraints:** Meera inhabited a culture where patriarchal norms imposed tight gender roles, restricting her independence, mobility, and decision-making authority. According to an International Labour Organisation (ILO) survey, women in rural India spend around 352 minutes per day on unpaid care duties, while males spend only 36 minutes. Social norms that women ought to remain at home and shun public settings led to social isolation, preventing her from connecting with other women and sharing her experiences. According to studies, only approximately 10% of rural women participate in any community organisation or social media site.

**5. Lack of Voice in Decision-Making:** Meera had little influence in home issues that affected her and her children's well-being. According to the NFHS-4, just 42% of rural women are involved in household decisions. Her role in communal affairs was limited, since women were rarely represented in village councils or decision-making procedures. According to research, women hold just 14% of leadership posts in local Panchayats (village councils).

**6. Limited Access to Resources and knowledge:** Despite her involvement in agriculture, Meera had little access to agriculture resources and knowledge that may boost production and profitability. According to NSSO data, women account for just 13% of agricultural landowners in India, restricting their access to loans, technology, and training.

#### **Transformation after joining the SHG:**

Meera Devi's life has changed significantly when she joined the Self Help Group (SHG). These improvements not only demonstrate her personal development, but also mirror wider socioeconomic changes in her neighbourhood. The main alterations noted are:

**1. Economic Empowerment:** Meera's participation in the SHG has led to new income-generating opportunities. She was able to establish a small company after studying tailoring and receiving loans. Her salary adds ₹5,000 per month to the household budget, enhancing their financial security. According to studies, women who participate in SHGs boost their income by 20-25%. Meera has around ₹20,000 in personal savings thanks to minor loans and the capacity to save. This financial buffer gives her a sense of stability and freedom. According to NABARD, about half of women in SHGs claimed to have their personal savings accounts.

**2. Educational Empowerment:** Meera may now prioritise her children's schooling. Her girls attend school on a regular basis, and the eldest is one of the best students in her class. The rate of literacy among women in her community has increased by 15% in the last five years, with more females enrolling in secondary school. Girls' enrollment rates in her village had reached 85%. Meera has benefited from the SHG's adult literacy programmes, which have helped her improve her writing and reading abilities. This has not only increased her confidence, but also allowed her to help her children with their education. Her community's engagement in adult literacy programmes has increased by 30%.

**3. Healthcare Improvements:** Meera has learned about numerous health programmes and has improved her access to healthcare services thanks to the SHG. Her family now makes frequent visits to the local health centre, and she receives appropriate maternity care. Institution births in her area had grown to 90%, indicating better maternal health services. Meera's involvement in health seminars has boosted her understanding of diet and cleanliness, lowering the occurrence of common ailments in her household. The anaemia prevalence among women in her neighbourhood has fallen by 20% in recent years.

**4. Social and Cultural Shifts:** Meera's strong engagement in social and economic endeavours has challenged her village's conventional gender standards. She now attends neighbourhood meetings and has a voice in home choices. The percentage of women involved in local government and community organisations has quadrupled in the last five years. The SHG provides a robust support network where women may discuss

their experiences and difficulties. This unity has enabled women to work together to confront issues like domestic abuse and gender discrimination. Approximately 70% of the women in her town now participate in some type of community organisation.

**5. Access to Resources and Information:** Thanks to the SHG, Meera and the other women in her community now have improved access to agricultural resources and training. They now utilise new agricultural practices and have created a cooperative to better market their goods. Crop yields in her village have grown by 25% because of these better techniques. The SHG has organised training workshops on the use of technology to improve farming methods and financial management. Women in her neighbourhood increasingly use mobile phones to get information on the weather, market pricing, and health services, which boosts their happiness and work efficiency. The use of cell phones among women in her hometown has risen by 60%.

#### **The government's role in empowering women in rural areas**

The government plays an important role in empowering rural women through a variety of policies, programmes, and initiatives. These programmes are intended to overcome the socioeconomic hurdles that rural women encounter, improve their skills and abilities, and foster gender equality. Key government projects and their outcomes include:

#### **1. Economic Empowerment:**

- a. **Self Help Groups (SHGs):** a. The government encourages Self Help Groups (SHGs) through initiatives such as the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM). As of 2023, over 70 million women have joined SHGs, giving them access to microfinance and the ability to create small enterprises.
- b. **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY):** This initiative offers loans of up to ₹10 lakhs to non-corporate, non-farm small and micro companies. By March 2023, almost 68% of the beneficiaries were women, allowing them to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities and achieve economic independence.

#### **2. Educational Empowerment:**

- a. **The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao plan, launched in 2015, intends to enhance social services for females. It focuses on altering attitudes, boosting schooling, and improving the lives of girls. Girls' school attendance has expanded dramatically, with primary and secondary enrollment rates surpassing 95% and 85%, respectively, in many rural regions.
- b. **Saakshar Bharat Mission:** This programme, which focuses on adult literacy, particularly among women, has contributed to higher literacy rates. According to the 2011 Census, the female literacy rate in the countryside of India was 58.8%, a figure that has subsequently improved significantly due to continuous efforts.

#### **3. Healthcare Improvements:**

- a. **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY):** This plan supports institutional deliveries by offering cash incentives to pregnant mothers. The percentage of institutional deliveries has risen from 47% in 2007-08 to more than 90% in several states by 2023, dramatically lowering maternal and newborn death rates.
- b. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** This maternity benefit programme offers financial incentives to pregnant women and nursing mothers to enhance their health and nutrition. Over ten million women have benefitted from this programme, which provides improved care before and after pregnancy.

#### **4. Social and Cultural Empowerment:**

- a. **National Commission for Women (NCW):** Established to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women, the NCW addresses

grievances and promotes the legal and social status of women. Its interventions have empowered women to fight against domestic violence, dowry, and other social issues.

- b. **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK):** This initiative provides microcredit to poor women in the informal sector, fostering financial inclusion and entrepreneurship. Since its inception, RMK has disbursed over ₹350 crores in loans, benefiting more than 1.5 million women.

#### **5. Political Empowerment:**

- a. **Reservation in Panchayats:** The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution mandates that at least one-third of the seats in Panchayats (local self-government institutions) be reserved for women. This has resulted in over 1.3 million elected women representatives at the grassroots level, enhancing their participation in governance and decision-making.
- b. **Mahila E-Haat:** An initiative under the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Mahila E-Haat is an online marketing platform to support women entrepreneurs. Since its launch, over 26,000 women have showcased their products and services, increasing their market reach and business opportunities.

#### **6. Access to Resources and Information:**

- a. **Digital India Campaign:** Aimed at bridging the digital divide, this campaign ensures that rural women have access to the internet and digital literacy programs. By 2023, around 40% of rural internet users were women, facilitating their access to information, education, and market opportunities.
- b. **Agricultural Schemes:** Programs like the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) empower women farmers by providing training, resources, and support. Approximately 2.5 million women farmers have benefited from these programs, improving their agricultural productivity and income.

The government's diverse approach to empowering women in rural regions includes financial, educational, medical care, cultural, social, political, and technical components. These projects have made a tremendous difference in the daily lives of rural women by increasing their independence, leadership skills, and engagement in numerous aspects of life. Continued and increased efforts are required to preserve and expand on these accomplishments, to guarantee rural women have the backing and assistance they require to succeed.

### **CONCLUSION**

Meera Devi's story exemplifies the significant transition occurring in rural India, where women have broken free from conventional restraints to express their agency and make important contributions to their communities. Significant progress towards women's empowerment has been accomplished thanks to grassroots initiatives like as Self Help Groups (SHGs) and concerted government efforts at the municipal, state, and national levels. Meera's experience demonstrates how access to economic possibilities, schooling, medical care, and social support may catalyse empowerment by allowing women to take on patriarchal conventions and actively engage in decision-making processes.

At the local level, programmes such as SHGs provide a forum for women to gather, exchange experiences, and have access to resources that promote social and economic empowerment. State-level policies and programmes, like as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign and healthcare plans, supplement grassroots initiatives by tackling systemic hurdles while encouraging gender equality in education, health, and social services. Meanwhile, at the national level, a comprehensive strategy to women's empowerment includes financial, academic, medical care, cultural, social, political, and technical components. Government efforts such as Panchayat reservation, computer

literacy programmes under the computer India Campaign, and agricultural policies empower women on a large scale, promoting autonomy, skills, and involvement in a variety of areas of life. Moving forward, continued engagement between government agencies, civil society, and communities is critical to building on the accomplishments made and ensuring that women in rural India keep on growing and live satisfying lives.

#### Teaching Note

#### From Tradition to Transformation: A Case Study on Women Empowerment in Rural India

##### Case Summary:

The case study follows Meera Devi, a rural woman in India, as she transitions from a life defined by traditional norms to one of empowerment and agency. Meera's narrative exemplifies the problems that rural women confront, such as economic dependency, restricted access to education and healthcare, social and cultural restraints, and a lack of representation in decision-making processes. Meera embarks on a transformative journey through her membership in a Self Help Group (SHG) and government initiatives, achieving economic independence, prioritising her children's education, obtaining access to better healthcare, defying societal conventions, and actively participating in community affairs. The story underlines the multifaceted character of women's empowerment and the critical role of grassroots initiatives and government actions in promoting gender equality in rural India.

##### Learning Objectives:

1. To understand the socio-economic challenges faced by rural women in India and their implications for gender equality.
2. To analyze the role of grassroots initiatives, such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), in empowering women and fostering community development.
3. To evaluate the impact of government policies and programs on women's empowerment at local, state, and national levels.
4. To explore strategies for promoting gender equality and overcoming systemic barriers in rural contexts.
5. To discuss the importance of community engagement, advocacy, and sustained investments in women's empowerment for sustainable development.

##### Suggested Teaching Methodology:

1. **Case Discussion:** Begin by presenting the case study of Meera Devi and facilitate a discussion on her journey towards empowerment. Encourage students to analyze the challenges she faced, the interventions that facilitated her transformation, and the broader implications for women's empowerment in rural India.
2. **Lecture and Presentation:** Provide an overview of the socio-economic context of rural women in India, highlighting key statistics, challenges, and government initiatives. Use visual aids and real-life examples to enhance understanding.
3. **Group Activities:** Divide students into groups and assign each group a specific dimension of women's empowerment (e.g., economic, educational, healthcare, social, cultural, political, technological). Task them with researching government programs and grassroots initiatives addressing their assigned dimension and presenting their findings to the class.
4. **Role-play:** Conduct a role-play activity where students portray different stakeholders, such as rural women, government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders. Encourage them to explore the perspectives, challenges, and strategies for promoting women's empowerment in a rural setting.
5. **Guest Speaker:** Invite a guest speaker, such as a representative from an NGO working on women's empowerment or a government official involved in implementing relevant programs, to share insights and experiences with the class.

##### Discussion Questions:

1. What are the primary socio-economic challenges faced by rural women in India, and how do these challenges perpetuate gender inequality?
2. How do grassroots initiatives like Self Help Groups (SHGs) empower rural women and contribute to community development?

3. What role do government policies and programs play in promoting women's empowerment at local, state, and national levels?

4. How can communities, civil society organizations, and government agencies collaborate to overcome systemic barriers and promote gender equality in rural contexts?

5. What are some strategies for sustaining the gains achieved in women's empowerment and ensuring long-term impact in rural communities?

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- Academic research articles on women's empowerment in rural India.