

Spirituality and Its Impact on Economic Empowerment of Self Help Group Members

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Abstract: The peculiar agenda – ‘Guru Smarana’ (starting with Guru Pooja and Prayer) as the first item in the weekly Self Help Group (SHG) meeting creates a curiosity to know about the spirituality. Are the members spiritually empowered or not? If Yes - what is the impact and to what extent? Economic impact was mainly considered. By using a structured interview schedule with sixteen variables in a Likert scale, 397 samples were collected from North, Central and South regions of Kerala for measuring the spiritual empowerment and thirteen variables for the economic empowerment. The results show that the members are spiritually and economically empowered and correlation shows positive relationship. Regression analysis indicates the level of impact of spiritual empowerment (independent variable) on the economic empowerment (dependent variable) which is only 11% even after ten years of this regular practice. It clearly specifies that along with the spiritual empowerment, technical support and training for capacity building also needs to graduate the members to micro and macro entrepreneurs which is the ultimate solution for sustainable, inclusive economic development and can contribute towards today’s slogan of ‘Make in India’.

Key Words: Economic Empowerment, Micro & Macro Entrepreneurs Religiosity, Spirituality, Spiritual Empowerment

I. Introduction

In a Conversation with a Bank official of Dhanalakshmi Bank shared his experience on how SNMFI (Sree Narayana Micro Finance Institution) was originated. Bank entrusted him the duty of organizing the rural people of Hindu - Ezhava community in Kollam district of Kerala to discuss about Microfinance scheme of the Bank. He was astonished by seeing more than 200 women assembled there and the anxiety and curiosity seen in their eyes inspired him to suddenly light the ‘Nilavilakku’ i.e lamp in front of the photograph hanged on the wall of Sree Narayana Guru, who is the Social reformer -Religious Leader – Revolutionist and the ‘God’ to them and seeing this women started prayer. None of them planned to do so. It was like a miracle and believed that it was definitely inclined by ‘Guru’ only. Otherwise it might not do by a bank officer that too by a Christian. It happens in 2004 in an SNDF Branch building (a local place with a very small space where Ezhava community – members join together) at Karunagappilly. This meeting leads to form 50 Self Help Groups of women. **Why it is mentioned here?** Because - Till today the above practice is continuing and definitely it may continue forever. The first item in the agenda of every week meeting of Self Help Groups at one of the member’s home is ‘Guru Smarana’ (Guru Pooja and prayers) and of Micro Finance Institutions whenever they held meeting. This ‘unique’ practice of Self Help Groups (SHGs) promoted by Sree Narayana Micro Finance Institution (SNMFI) inspired me to make a humble attempt to understand ‘spirituality’ as an important variable in my research study. Studies on Spirituality and its impact in business organization prove that it is positively influenced the economic development, especially in enterprises. The word ‘spirituality’ originates from the word ‘spirit’.

II. Review Of Literature

2.1 Definition of Spirituality and Religiosity

Cavanaugh (1999) defines ‘spirituality’ as a means of many things to different people. Spirituality means a search for personal meaning and a relation to the Supreme Being that many of us call God. Measures of religiosity and religious participation are found to be positively associated with physical health, faith in people, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, depression, and self-esteem.

Brandt (1996) distinguished spirituality and religiosity. Religiosity involves discussions about belief systems and the range of personal, familial, and work-related commitments to those systems. **Whereas, spirituality is a broader concept which is developing an individual as a ‘whole person’.** Religiosity has an element of acting on one’s belief system or religious tradition, spirituality, however, is often thought of as a personality dimension involving the beliefs and values that pervade one’s perceptions of life.

According to Delbecq (1999) spirituality is the unique and personal inner experience of and search for the fullest personal development through participation in the transcendent mystery. **It involves a sense of belonging and a sense of longing for a more complete fulfillment through touching the greater mystery, which in tradition is referred to as God.**

DeNoble A. C, Galbraith G. S., and Stiles C. (2007) established that religion has a sense of community-based activity and ritual, and spirituality represents only the individual experience.

2.2 Impact of spirituality and religiosity on entrepreneurial and economic empowerment:

Kauanui S, Thomas K, Sherman C, Waters G, & Gilea M. (2008) distinguished spirituality levels of entrepreneurs into five categories: 'Make me Whole' group, 'Soul Seekers' group, 'Conflicting Goals' group, 'Mostly Business' group, and 'Strictly Business' group. This study stands as a strong background for further studies. It emphasizes that age, gender, years in business, industry or income of the entrepreneurs do not lead to differences on the spirituality level among the groups.

According to Galbraith C.S & Galbraith D.M (2007) religiosity has a relationship with economic growth and hypothesized that there is a direct relationship between religious attitudes and both economic growth and entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurial activity is the factor that actually strengthens the relationship between religiosity and economic growth. They confirmed the findings of previous studies conducted by Champion (2003), Martes and Rodriguez (2004), Galbraith et al (2004), Woodrum (1985), Honig (1988), Kwon (1997) whom found that individuals' participation in religion and their familial religiosity is positively associated with self-employment.

2.3 Spirituality and its impact on micro entrepreneur's performance:

According to Kauanui, S., Thomas, K., Sherman, C., Waters, G. & Gilea, M. (2008). there is no difference between micro entrepreneurs' types of spirituality with their age, gender, year in business, industry and even their business income.

Whereas Mardhatillah, A, and Rulindo (2007 & 2008) establishes the relationship between level of spirituality and micro entrepreneurs' performance, with the use of simple correlation analysis and qualitative analysis to prove the association. They also specified that the impact of spirituality to the clients' poverty status is not directly intervened by their business income, and agreed that these respondents are generally wealthier than their counterparts. Hence supports the common assumption that having high spirituality level is beneficial for human beings.

Mardhatillah A and Rulindo (2007) use only a simple correlation analysis to prove the relationship between the entrepreneurs' spirituality and their business performance. Mardhatillah A and Rulindo (2008) added qualitative analysis and interviewed the entrepreneurs to test how the spirituality helps them in running their business. Both these methods, proves that spirituality of the micro entrepreneurs influence their business performance.

2.4 Islamic studies on impact of spirituality and religiosity on economic performance of micro entrepreneurs:

Rulindo, R. and Mardhatillah, A. (2011) conducted a study among 400 micro-entrepreneurs in Jakarta, Indonesia who were borrowers from BMTs. The results of Multiple and Logistic Regressions confirmed that respondents with higher religiosity levels have higher income and better poverty status compared to their counterparts. But it is insignificant for spirituality. The respondents who had higher spirituality level got greater possibilities to live over the poverty line according to subjective and objective poverty status, especially when the status is measured by using regional extreme and moderate poverty standards. **It was only significant when the poverty status was benchmarked based on household income.** This study also indicates that those having higher spirituality level in overall are wealthier than the counterparts. Even though the finding on spirituality doesn't meet the expectation, the findings were quite powerful as compared to previous studies. Micro-entrepreneurs rarely maintain proper record of their financial transactions, hence Chowdhury M., Ghosh D, and Wright R E (2005) used recall technique in their study to collect information on clients'. In this study also the same principle followed.

Rulindo R. and Mardhatillah A argued that **spirituality does not associate with respondents' business income and is only significantly influence respondents' poverty status when other sources of income were used to measure the status.** The findings show that having higher spirituality in general may be beneficial to enhance economic situation of the respondents. It means that compared to spirituality, religiosity has positive influence to respondents' income and poverty status; even when the status is measured by using business income as poverty benchmark. Hence this study supports the previous findings that religiosity may have influence to the economic aspect of individuals. Spirituality and religiosity have positive association with subjective poverty. It is also proved by this study that Micro-entrepreneurs who have higher level of spirituality

and religiosity level were satisfied with their economic conditions as compared to those who have lower spirituality and religiosity level.

Hence the authors suggested to provide training to enhance spirituality and religiosity and conclude that if the variables – spirituality and religiosity may enhance the economic performance of Muslim micro-entrepreneurs, in the long run, it may help to enhance the impact of the institutions, the utilization of these variables as materials of capacity building may assist the institutions to achieve its objective in eradicating poverty

III. Statement of the Problem, Research Gap, Objectives, Hypotheses, Limitations of the Study

3.1 Statement of the Problem

There are several studies on religiosity and economic performance in entrepreneurial area. Whereas very few on spirituality and economic performance especially in micro and small enterprises. Spirituality shall be considered as one of the important variables that may enhance entrepreneurship development. This study tries to determine whether self help group members of Sree Narayana Micro Finance Institutions (SNMFIs) are empowered spiritually and are they economically also empowered with the regular and weekly spiritual practices in SHGs meetings which is compulsory to them as weekly meeting of SHGs should began with Guru Smarana (Guru Pooja and Prayers) .

3.2 Research Gap:

The existence of research gap on spirituality and its influence on economic empowerment in Micro finance industry, Self Help groups and that too in Hindu Religion was another reason of interest behind this study.

3.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the economic status of the respondents before and after joining Self Help Group (SHG) of SNMFIs
2. To measure the opinion of respondents on spiritual and economic empowerment of them through systematic and regular practice of Guru Smarana in weekly SHG meetings.
3. To analyse the relationship existing between spiritual empowerment and economic empowerment.
4. To determine the level of influence of spiritual empowerment over economic empowerment.

3.4 Hypotheses:

H₀: There is no Significant Correlation between Spiritual Empowerment and Economic Empowerment.

H₁: There is Significant Correlation between spiritual empowerment and Economic Empowerment

3.5 Limitations of the Study:

1. House hold income was considered for assessing the economic status of the members and not the income from self employment or business income as there are non-entrepreneurs or non self employed or unemployed members.
2. This study only focused on spirituality and not analysed the religiosity and its impact.

IV. Methodology

This study was focused on Self Help Group Members of SNMFI and an interview schedule was used to collect total 397 samples (133+ 132+ 132) from rural areas of all three regions of Kerala - North, Central and South based on the geographical area. Sample size was determined based on the total population of SHG members in each region and G Power statistics or D Morgan's table. Sixteen variables were used for measuring the spiritual empowerment and thirteen for economic empowerment in a Likert scale of 0-1 for Strongly disagree , 1-2 for disagree , 2-3 Neutral, 3-4 for Agree and 4-5 for Strongly Agree. Men and Women SHG members from rural area were the respondents and convenient sampling was followed. Mean, Standard Deviation and Mean score were calculated to measure the spiritual empowerment and economic empowerment. Correlation analysis examines the relationship between the independent and dependent variable and Regression analysis for measuring the level of influence of spiritual empowerment (independent variable) on economic empowerment i. e. dependent variable. SPSS software was used for the calculations and analysis of the data. Monthly family income of the respondents before joining (2004) and after joining (at present – 2015) were collected and analysed to determine the poverty status or economic status and classified them into below poverty line, (BPL) middle class , upper middle class and upper class . BPL is again classified into extremely poor, poor and moderately poor. The Government of Kerala is one of the few State Governments which have formulated its own criteria for Below Poverty Line status based on nine specific points for urban and rural population. Hence researcher's own classification was formulated for this study considering the International,

National and Kerala standards which is higher than National standards. According to the Planning Commission of India in 2011-12 for rural areas, the national poverty line by using the Tendulkar methodology was estimated at ₹ 816 per capita per month in villages and ₹ 1,000 per capita per month in cities. This would mean that the persons whose consumption of goods and services exceed ₹ 33.33 in cities and ₹ 27.20 per capita per day in villages are not poor. **As on July 2013 it is ₹ 4080 in rural area and ₹ 5000 for urban area.** According to the announcement of Planning Commission of India on 24th July 2013 Kerala has only 7.05% of its population belongs to BPL.

V. Data Analysis And Interpretation

5.1 Spiritual Empowerment of the SHG Members :

Table 1 specifies the Mean score of Spiritual empowerment of SHG members of SNMFI. Mean score of 4.09 is the clear evidence that members are strongly agreed that they are spiritually empowered by joining the SHG and through specific, systematic, weekly spiritual practices in the SHG meetings. Among the 16 dependent variables used for measuring the spiritual empowerment, 11 variables got mean value of greater than 4 in a likert scale. Other 5 variables mean value ranges in between 3.13 to 3.91 which mean that they also agreed to the statement. Mean value of 4.56 which is the highest for the variable - Improved cooperativeness, belongingness and unity through group prayers at SHGs meetings. In Second place variable like Make group members Happier (4.53) and in third place mean value (4. 47) for the variable – Courage and confidence to look into future. Two variables got equal mean value of 4.44 – Positive attitude towards life and satisfaction & Improved cleanliness in family and of SHG members. Lowest mean value was 3.13 for the variable Stopped use of Smoke – Husband/ Son / Brother / Father / Men SHG Member and second to the last 3.21 got for the variable Stopped use of Alcohol – Husband / Son/ Brother / Father / Men SHG members.

Table 1: Mean Value and Standard Deviation of Spiritual Empowerment of the SHG members

Measuring Items	Mean	Sd	Ranking of Mean values
Strong Desire to live	4.34	.56	6
Positive attitude towards life and satisfaction	4.44	.61	4
Self confidence and purpose in life	4.39	.59	5
Ability to face Challenges / adversity and Stress	4.30	.77	7
Courage and Confidence to look in to future	4.47	.60	3
Make group members Happier	4.53	.61	2
Reduced Stress	4.30	.72	7
Improved cleanliness in family & of SHG members	4.44	.71	4
Make members and family Healthier	4.23	.68	8
Improved cooperativeness, belongingness and unity through group prayers at SHGs meetings	4.56	.64	1
Reduced use of Smoke – Husband/ Son / Brother / Father /Men SHG Member	3.51	1.34	12
Stopped use of Smoke – Husband/ Son / Brother / Father /Men SHG Member	3.13	1.34	14
Reduced use of Alcohol – Husband/ Son / Brother / Father /Men SHG Member	3.61	1.28	11
Stopped use of Alcohol – Husband/ Son / Brother / Father /Men SHG Member	3.21	1.44	13
Improved coping skills and adaptability to accept the life as it is	3.91	.94	10
Physical & Mental Health and overall development	4.05	.69	9
Total Mean value and Standard Deviation	4.09	0.85	

5.2 Economic Empowerment of the SHG members :

Table 2 envisages the Economic empowerment of the members. 13 variables were used to measure the economic empowerment. Here also Likert scale was used. **Mean score of 3.44 is an indication that members are economically empowered through micro finance.** It is also able to know from the Highest mean value (4.65) for the variable increased savings. Second Highest Mean value was (4.25) for the variable – avoided informal sources (money lenders / others) and in third place the variable reduced informal sources (money lenders / others) . Fourth place it is (4.18) which goes to the variable reduction in interest rate by preferring formal source / SHG / SNMFI. **Mean value of 4.08 stands in fifth place clearly specifies that micro finance helps them to overcome from the poverty status. .**

It is to be specifically noticed that among 13 variables only five variables mean value got above 4 (4.08 to 4.65) i.e they strongly agreed that they are economically empowered. Another four variables mean vale varies from 3.20 to 3.85 envisages that respondents agreed that they are economically empowered through micro finance. Whereas remaining four variables mean value comes in between 1.41 to 2.91 for the variable - Change in assets of the Livestock's, Tools, Machineries and Equipments Mean value (2.91) . It is 2.85 for variable such as increase in assets of the households. It comes as 2.44 for the variable like started self employment by member or members together or jointly. Lowest mean value was for the variable - availed loan from Kudumbashree (1.44). It is because of the reason that only women SHG members are eligible for this credit facility under Kudumbashree scheme of Govt. of Kerala. Whereas the respondents considered for this study was

both men and women and the whole female members availed this facility i.e. Multiple borrowing was enjoyed by them due to low interest rate and subsidy from Government. These are the four variables got less than 3 as mean value.

Table 2: Mean value and Standard Deviation of Economic Empowerment of the SHG members

Measuring Items	Mean	Sd	Ranking of Mean Values
Income increased	3.24	1.50	8
Financial assistance for children's education / higher education	3.20	1.46	9
Increased Savings	4.65	.65	1
Improved Ability to reduce or manage expenses	3.85	1.11	6
Change in assets of the Livestock's, Tools, Machineries and Equipments	2.91	1.37	10
Ability to manage income efficiently & budgeting the expenses	3.41	1.22	7
Started self employment by member (s) jointly	2.44	1.31	12
Increase in assets of the households	2.85	1.19	11
Reduced informal sources (money lenders / others)	4.23	.87	3
Avoided informal sources (money lenders / others)	4.25	.83	2
Reduction in interest rate by preferring formal source / SHG/ SNMFI	4.18	.66	4
Availed loan from Kudumba Sree at reduced interest rate (Women Only eligible)	1.41	.49	13
Reduced poverty	4.08	.57	5
Total Mean value and Standard Deviation	3.44	1.02	

5.3 Economic Status of SHG Members before Joining SHG (2004):

Table 3 & Fig.1 gives a clear picture about the Economic status of the SHG members before joining SHG in the year 2004. It shows that 96.1% of the respondents come under below poverty line with monthly income of less than ₹ 1000 to ₹ 3000. It means that per day income comes to ₹ 33.33 – ₹ 100 ranges. Further detail analysis shows that among them , 74.6 % belongs to extremely poor, 14.4% is in poor category and remaining 7.1% are in moderately poor status. Respondents of 1.3% belong to middle class who were in the income group of ₹3000 - ₹ 5000. Under the upper middle class category comes .5 % of the respondents and their income level was ₹ 8000 - ₹ 9000. Remaining 2.1 % was in upper class income level of ₹ 9000 - ₹ 10000. It envisages the truthful situation that majority of the respondents were the poorest of the people

Table 3 Frequency for Economic Status of SHG Members before Joining SHG (2004)

Labels	Frequency	Percent	*Economic Status
Less than ₹ 1000	296	74.6	Extremely Poor
₹1000 - ₹ 2000	57	14.4	Poor
₹2000 - ₹ 3000	28	7.1	Moderately Poor
₹3000 - ₹4000	3	.8	Middle Class
₹4000 - ₹5000	2	.5	Middle Class
₹8000 - ₹9000	2	.5	Upper Middle Class
₹9000 - ₹10000	9	2.1	Upper Class
Total	397	100.0	

Source: Survey

Note: Researcher's own calculation for Poverty line based on specific 9 points of Kerala

5.4 Economic Status of SHG Members after Joining SHG / at present (2015)

Table 4 & Fig. 2 denote the economic status of the SHG members after joining SHG / at present (2015). It is seen that only 33.5% of the members are in the below poverty status who are in the income level of less than ₹ 5000 and another 34.3 % improved their status to middle income group whose income level is ₹ 5001- ₹ 10000 per month. Another 20.2 % is in the upper middle class income group of ₹ 5001-₹15000. Remaining 12. % belongs to upper class income group i.e above ₹ 15001- ₹ 30000.

Table 4: Frequency for Economic Status of SHG Members after Joining SHG / at present (2015)

Labels	Frequency	Percent	*Economic Status
Less than ₹ 5000	133	33.5	BPL
₹5001 - ₹10000	136	34.3	Middle class
₹10001 - ₹15000	80	20.2	Upper Middle Class
₹15001 - ₹20000	29	7.3	Upper class
₹20001 - ₹ 25000	10	2.5	Upper class
₹25001 - ₹ 30000	9	2.2	Upper class
Total	397	100.0	

Source: Survey

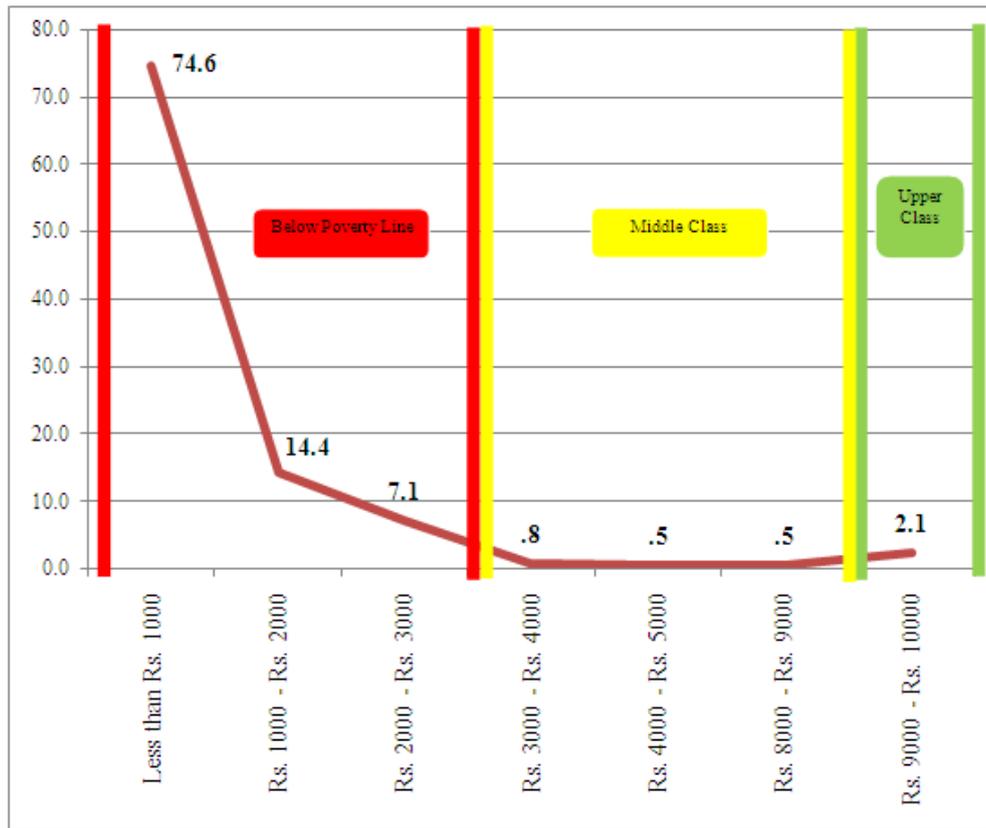
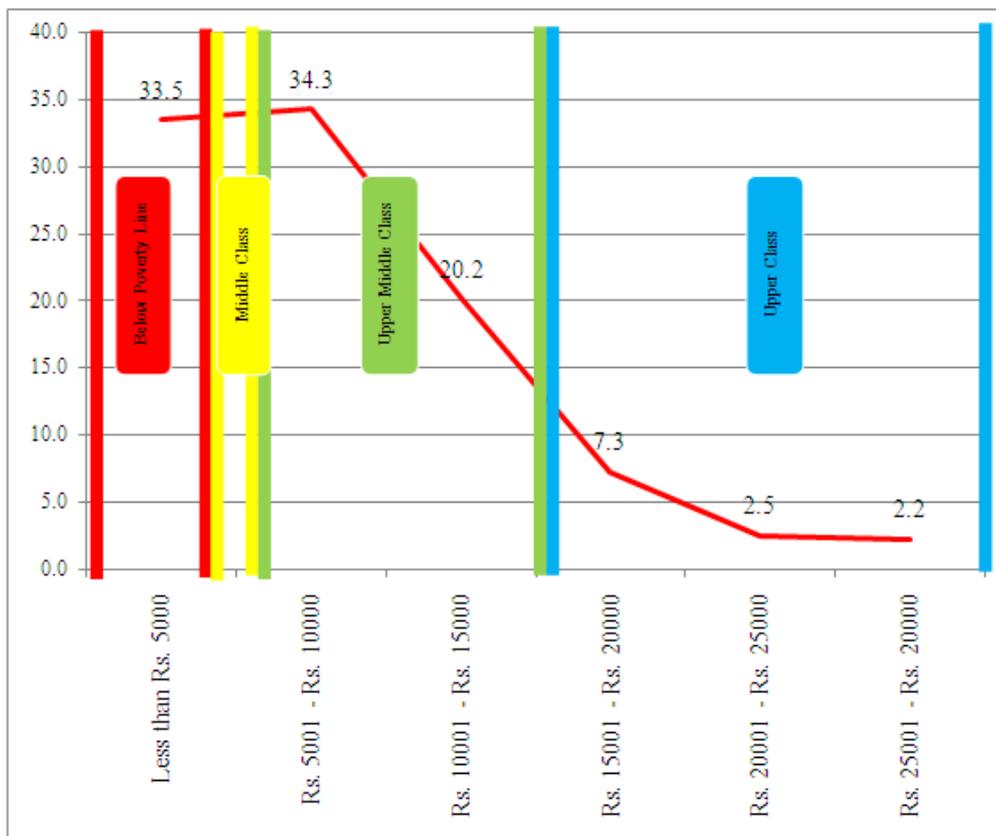


Fig : 1 Economic Status of SHG Members before Joining SHG (2004)

Source: Survey



Source: Survey

Fig: 2 Economic Status of SHG Members after Joining SHG/ at present (2015)

5.5 Correlations between Spiritual Empowerment and Economic Empowerment:

Table 5 indicate the correlation between spiritual empowerment and economic empowerment. It is correlated with each other at 1% significance level which means that these two variables having positive relations with each other.

Table: 5 Correlations between Spiritual Empowerment and Economic Empowerment

Variables	Test	Economic Empowerment
Spiritual Empowerment	PC	.331*
	Sig.	.000
	N	397
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		
Pc – Pearson Correlation		

5.6 Impact of Spiritual Empowerment on Economic Empowerment:

Table 6 depicts the result of regression analysis that is spiritual empowerment have significant influence over economic empowerment with a beta coefficient of .33. It is also known that even though Spiritual empowerment shows significant influence over the Economic empowerment, only 11% of variation can be seen in economic empowerment.

Table 6: Regression – Impact of Spiritual Empowerment on Economic Empowerment

Model		UC		SC	t	Sig.	R Square
		B	SE	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.803	.239		7.534	.000	.110
	Spiritual Empowerment	.408	.058	.331	6.972	.000	
Predictors: Spiritual Empowerment							
Dependent Variable: Economic Empowerment							
UC - Unstandardized Coefficients							
SE - Standard Error							
SC - Standardized Coefficients							

VI. Findings

6.1 Economic Empowerment:

The study analyses the economic status of the members of SHG before joining and at present or after 10 years of membership duration. It is to be specifically highlighted that 94.6 % of the respondents were in the below poverty line whose monthly income was less than ₹ 1000 to ₹ 3000, before joining this SHG in the year 2004. Now only one third of the members are in the BPL category and another one third cross the border from BPL to Middle class. 20.2% reaches the upper middle class. Remaining 12% belongs to Upper class and at the starting time there were only 2.1%. It clearly indicates that members are able to achieve economic development. Income before Joining and after joining SHG represents the economic empowerment i.e from Below Poverty Line to Middle class – Upper Middle Class to Upper class. Mean value of 2.60 for the variable - started self employment by the member (s) jointly in a Likert scale is an indication that spirituality was not influenced on self employment even then it positively and significantly influenced on economic empowerment.

6.2 Spiritual Empowerment:

The study reveals that age, gender, duration of membership in SHG, educational qualification, occupational status, income of the members, geographic region etc., do not lead to differences on the spiritual empowerment of the group members. The regular and systematic practice of ‘Guru Smarana’ results spiritual empowerment of the members. Analysis of correlation reveals that spiritual empowerment and economic empowerment are correlated with each other and these two variables have positive relations. Regression analysis shows that spiritual empowerment have significant influence over economic empowerment. But the level of influence is not up to the expectation.

VII. Conclusion

In spite of the adequate financial support and spiritual empowerment, inadequacy or lack of training or the mindset of the SHG members creates hindrance to the entrepreneurial or self employment development. It alarms for the keen attention of the policy makers of SNMFIs. They have to concentrate much to achieve the economic goals and to eradicate poverty totally since there are one third of the members is still in BPL. This is the right time to seriously think about the right type of training for capacity building, in the form of enhancement of communication skill, technical skill, entrepreneurial skill, marketing skill and for changing the mindset of the members of SHGs positively which suits for today, tomorrow and also with futuristic

perspective. The dream of this MFI was to establish micro enterprises after 5 years and macro enterprises after 10 years. But even in the eleventh year of existence, not even the first goal couldn't satisfy.

The existence of an effective, transparent and permanent system for grading of SHGs helps SNMFIs to identify the weakness. But lack of planning for an effective enterprise development support / system is the real problem. Sustainability of SNMFIs and SHGs are inevitable for the sustainable economic development. It can be possible through training and graduating the members to micro and macro entrepreneurs. Each SNMFIs and SHGs have to study the market potentiality in their area of operation by analysing the geographical and seasonal specialities. Entrepreneurial development schemes which suits to each area, urban – rural base is needed. Customer driven, flexi and reliable product development by the MFI is the only way to retain these loyal customers. Necessary planning and execution is the need of the time to satisfy SHG members' expectations.

Tripp (1999) opined that for improving the lives of the poor, spiritual commitment and practical support will be more effective than that of mere technical support. This study gives a controversial result. Spiritual empowerment is not positively and significantly motivated to start the self employment or micro enterprises due to lack of technical support inspite of economic development which is measured based on household income and not on business income. It establishes that technical support also equally important with spiritual support for capacity building which in turn results Entrepreneurial / self employment development.

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