



Research Paper

Assessing the Role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Empowering Scheduled Castes: A Case Study of Indira Kranthi Pathakam (IKP) in Nalgonda District

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Abstract

This study assesses the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under the Indira Kranthi Pathakam (IKP) program on the economic and social empowerment of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Nalgonda District, Telangana. By examining selected villages from Devarakonda, Miryalaguda, and Nalgonda divisions, the research evaluates how SHGs have improved income generation, financial stability, social participation, and leadership roles among women from marginalized communities. The study found that SHG participation led to significant improvements in economic autonomy, with women reporting an increase in household income, better financial management skills, and greater involvement in income-generating activities. Moreover, the research highlighted the role of SHGs in social empowerment, where women gained enhanced social status and became more engaged in decision-making at both the household and community levels. However, the effectiveness of SHGs varied across regions, with stronger community engagement, local leadership, and market access leading to more successful outcomes. The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address barriers such as social stigma, market access, and financial literacy in underperforming regions. Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening financial literacy programs, promoting local leadership, and improving market access to enhance the sustainability and impact of SHGs.

Keywords: *Self-Help Groups, Indira Kranthi Pathakam, Economic Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Scheduled Castes.*

I. Introduction

The Indira Kranthi Pathakam (IKP), launched by the Government of Andhra Pradesh (now Telangana) in 2000, is one of the most significant poverty alleviation programs in India. The program primarily aims to empower women and improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalized communities, especially Scheduled Castes (SCs), in rural areas. IKP's central strategy involves the creation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), where women come together to pool their resources, gain access to microfinance, and engage in income-generating activities. Through SHGs, women not only receive financial resources but also undergo skill development and capacity building, which allows them to become more economically independent and socially active.

In the context of Scheduled Castes, the program addresses the persistent challenges these communities face, including social exclusion, economic deprivation, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. IKP has become an important tool for breaking these barriers by empowering women to take on leadership roles within their households and communities. This program offers a platform for social mobility, helping women improve their financial stability, access basic services like healthcare and education, and become more involved in local governance. The empowerment of women through IKP not only impacts their own lives but also has a ripple effect, improving the lives of their families and communities. Despite its successes, the program's effectiveness varies across regions, with some areas witnessing greater success in poverty reduction and empowerment than others. This research aims to explore these regional differences, focusing on the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in empowering Scheduled Castes in the selected villages of Nalgonda District.

II. Research Problem

The research problem addresses the need to understand the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the selected villages of Nalgonda District, Telangana. While the Indira Kranthi Pathakam (IKP) program has made strides in empowering women through SHGs, there is limited exploration of its specific effects on Scheduled Castes, who are often the most marginalized communities in rural areas. This research seeks to identify how participation in SHGs has contributed to economic empowerment by improving financial independence, access to microcredit, and the ability to engage in income-generating activities. Additionally, the study will examine the social empowerment aspects, focusing on how SHG membership has influenced women's leadership roles, decision-making within households and communities, and involvement in local governance.

Furthermore, the study aims to explore the barriers and challenges faced by women from SC communities in realizing the full potential of SHGs, such as social stigma, financial illiteracy, and lack of market access. By understanding these dynamics, the research will contribute valuable insights into how SHGs can be better structured to address the specific needs of Scheduled Castes and enhance their overall socio-economic mobility. This exploration will help inform future policies and interventions aimed at inclusive empowerment through SHGs in rural India.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the role of SHGs in empowering women from Scheduled Castes (SCs).
2. To explore the impact of SHGs on economic outcomes, social standing, and decision-making.
3. To examine the factors influencing the success and challenges of SHGs in different regions of Nalgonda.

Research Questions

1. How do SHGs empower women from Scheduled Castes in terms of financial inclusion, social empowerment, and leadership?
2. What are the key barriers and enabling factors for the success of SHGs in the selected villages?

III. Literature Review

India has implemented several poverty alleviation programs over the years, with a focus on empowering marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs), through Self-Help Groups (SHGs). One of the most prominent programs is the Indira Kranthi Pathakam (IKP), launched in 2000 by the Government of Andhra Pradesh (now Telangana). The program aimed to address poverty and social exclusion by organizing rural women into SHGs, providing them with access to microcredit, skill development, and training in entrepreneurship. Studies, such as Saidanna & Sailaja (2011), have highlighted the success of IKP in improving the livelihoods of women, enabling them to initiate income-generating activities and gain financial independence. However, research by Prennushi & Gupta (2014) has shown that the impact of SHGs is not uniform across regions, with success rates varying depending on local infrastructure, community engagement, and the availability of markets.

SHGs have been widely regarded as a means to empower women economically and socially. Kabeer (2010) and Reddy et al. (2016) emphasize the economic autonomy achieved by women through access to microfinance, which allows them to start businesses and become self-reliant. Additionally, Milon (2024) and Thirupalu & Muninarayanappa (2025) argue that SHGs enable women to play leadership roles and become more involved in community decision-making, thereby increasing their social participation.

However, studies like Ballem et al. (2012) and Neelaiah (2017) point out that SHGs face several challenges, including social stigma, gender norms, and lack of market access, which limit their effectiveness. In regions like Miryalaguda and Nalgonda, cultural barriers and financial illiteracy have been identified as key obstacles that hinder the success of SHGs in achieving long-term empowerment. Reddy & Rani (2023) also argue that the limited reach of SHGs due to poor infrastructure and low community engagement leads to unequal outcomes across regions, making it essential to tailor interventions to local needs. Moreover, Simangunsong & Sihotang (2023) highlight the importance of continuous training and market access for ensuring the sustainability of SHG-led businesses.

The regional disparities and the various challenges highlighted in these studies suggest that while SHGs have the potential to empower women and alleviate poverty, the program's success is contingent on addressing local barriers and improving financial literacy, market linkages, and social inclusion for marginalized communities.

IV. Methodology

Research Design: Qualitative case study design

The research employed a quantitative approach to assess the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on the economic and social empowerment of Scheduled Castes (SCs) under the Indira Kranthi Pathakam (IKP) program. This approach utilized survey questionnaires to collect numerical data from SHG members across selected villages in Nalgonda District, Telangana. The data focused on key indicators such as income levels, business outcomes, market access, and participation in decision-making. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics and inferential techniques like t-tests and chi-square tests, was used to identify patterns, compare regions, and draw conclusions about the program's effectiveness.

Study Area:

The study was conducted in Nalgonda District, Telangana, focusing on selected villages across three divisions: Devarakonda Revenue Division, Miryalaguda Revenue Division, and Nalgonda Revenue Division. These areas were chosen due to their regional diversity and varying levels of IKP implementation, allowing for a comparative analysis of the program's impact on Scheduled Castes (SCs). In the Devarakonda Division, the study focused on Cherukupally, Kandukoor, Bollenapally, and Nizam Nagar. These villages represent a rural setting with better infrastructure and higher levels of SHG participation. The Devarakonda region has seen notable success in terms of economic empowerment, largely due to effective local leadership, strong community involvement, and better market access, making it a key area of interest for analyzing successful IKP outcomes.

In Miryalaguda Revenue Division, the study included Venkatadri Palam, Chillapuram, Kothagudem, and Goguvargudam. This region experiences moderate participation in SHGs and faces challenges such as limited market access and financial literacy issues. The research here will explore how such barriers impact the effectiveness of the IKP program in empowering women from Scheduled Castes. The third region, Nalgonda Revenue Division, consisted of Nakkallapalli, Palle Pahad, Shapalli, and Ammanabol. These villages have faced socio-economic challenges due to poor infrastructure, lower SHG participation, and strong gender norms. The study will investigate how these factors have influenced the success or failure of the IKP program in improving socio-economic mobility for women in these villages.

Sampling Technique:

The study utilized purposive sampling to select representative villages from the Devarakonda Revenue Division, Miryalaguda Revenue Division, and Nalgonda Revenue divisions in Nalgonda District. Villages were chosen based on the diverse outcomes observed in the implementation of the Indira Kranthi Pathakam (IKP) program, ensuring a mix of areas with varying levels of success and challenges in terms of economic empowerment, social participation, and SHG engagement. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the program's effectiveness across different regions, providing valuable insights into both successful and underperforming areas.

Data Collection Methods

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys conducted with Self-Help Group (SHG) members, local leaders, and IKP officials. The semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives on how SHGs contributed to economic empowerment and social change. Focus groups facilitated discussions among SHG members to understand collective impacts and challenges. Additionally, surveys were administered to gather quantitative data on income levels, market access, and social participation. Secondary data was gathered by reviewing government reports, IKP documentation, and program evaluations. These sources provided valuable background information on the program's objectives, strategies, and official assessments, offering a comprehensive understanding of its implementation and outcomes in different regions.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis involved several methods to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of the IKP program. Thematic coding was used to analyze the qualitative interview data, identifying key themes related to economic empowerment, social participation, and leadership roles within SHGs. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the personal and collective experiences of SHG members across different regions. A comparative analysis was conducted to assess the economic outcomes and social impacts across regions, focusing on income generation, poverty reduction, and community involvement. This helped identify regional variations in the program's effectiveness. For the survey data, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the responses and provide insights into the regional trends in financial independence, market access, and social empowerment, highlighting the factors contributing to varying success rates across villages.

V. Results and Discussion

Economic Empowerment:

1. Impact of SHGs on Income Generation and Financial Stability for Women from Scheduled Castes

The analysis of economic empowerment of Scheduled Castes (SCs) women participating in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) revealed substantial improvements in income generation and financial stability. The data collected from the surveys showed a marked increase in household income and financial independence for women involved in SHGs. A descriptive analysis of the data revealed that 70% of the SHG members reported an increase in income after joining SHGs. Women also indicated improved financial management skills and the ability to contribute to household savings.

Table 1: Income Generation and Financial Stability for Women in SHGs

Indicator	Percentage of SHG Members Reporting Improvement
Income Increase	70%
Financial Stability	65%
Household Savings	60%
Increased Business Activities	55%

Additionally, a correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between SHG participation and income generation. The findings showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that increased involvement in SHGs was closely linked to higher income levels and financial independence.

2. Comparison of Economic Outcomes in Devarakonda, Miryalaguda, and Nalgonda

A comparative analysis was performed to examine the differences in economic outcomes across the regions of Devarakonda, Miryalaguda, and Nalgonda. The key variables considered included income generation, market access, and financial stability.

Table 2: Comparison of Economic Outcomes Across Regions

Region	Income Increase (%)	Financial Stability (%)	Market Access (%)
Devarakonda	40%	75%	70%
Miryalaguda	30%	65%	60%
Nalgonda	20%	50%	55%

The results of the descriptive analysis revealed that Devarakonda had the highest income increase (40%) and the most notable improvement in financial stability (75%). This region also showed better market access (70%) for SHG products. In contrast, Miryalaguda had moderate economic success, with a 30% income increase and 65% of SHG members reporting improved financial stability. Nalgonda had the lowest reported economic outcomes, with only a 20% income increase and 50% of members reporting improvements in financial stability.

To confirm if these differences were statistically significant, a t-test was conducted. The t-test results revealed that the difference in income generation across regions was statistically significant ($t = 3.48$, $p < 0.05$), with Devarakonda outperforming Miryalaguda and Nalgonda. Similarly, financial stability measures also showed significant differences ($t = 2.65$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3: T-Test Results for Economic Outcomes Across Regions

Comparison	t-value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value	Significance
Income Generation (Devarakonda vs. Miryalaguda)	3.48	97	<0.05	Significant
Financial Stability (Devarakonda vs. Nalgonda)	2.65	97	<0.05	Significant

The results of the t-test confirm that the differences in economic outcomes across regions are indeed significant, reinforcing the idea that local factors, such as community engagement, local leadership, and market access, play a crucial role in the success of the IKP program.

Social Empowerment:

Changes in Social Status, Community Participation, and Leadership Roles Among Women Involved in SHGs

The social empowerment of women participating in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) was assessed by examining changes in social status, community participation, and leadership roles. Survey data revealed significant improvements in the social standing of women involved in SHGs, with 75% of SHG members reporting a noticeable increase in

respect within their households and communities. Additionally, 65% of participants reported increased involvement in community activities, indicating stronger social participation.

A correlation test was conducted to analyze the relationship between SHG participation and social empowerment. The findings showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) between active participation in SHGs and an increase in social status and community engagement. This suggests that as women gained economic independence through SHGs, they also experienced a significant boost in their social standing and community participation, which empowered them to take on leadership roles within their households and communities.

Table 1: Correlation Between SHG Participation and Social Empowerment

Variable	Social Status	Community Participation	Leadership Roles
SHG Participation	0.72**	0.65**	0.70**

Interpretation: The positive correlation values ($r = 0.72$, $r = 0.65$, $r = 0.70$) indicate a strong association between SHG participation and increased social status, community involvement, and the assumption of leadership roles. Women in SHGs reported better social integration and a greater sense of empowerment.

The Role of SHGs in Decision-Making and Community Governance

The study also focused on the role of SHGs in enhancing women's participation in decision-making and their influence in community governance. The results revealed that 60% of SHG members reported greater involvement in household decision-making, especially in decisions related to financial matters and children's education. In addition, 55% of SHG members had taken part in local governance activities, such as village meetings and community-level decision-making. A correlation test was used to examine the relationship between SHG participation and involvement in decision-making. The test revealed a positive correlation ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$) between active SHG membership and increased participation in decision-making at both the household and community levels. This suggests that economic empowerment through SHGs is strongly associated with greater social autonomy and the ability to influence local governance.

Table 2: Correlation Between SHG Participation and Decision-Making/Community Governance

Variable	Household Decision-Making	Community Governance
SHG Participation	0.78**	0.71**

Interpretation: The high positive correlations ($r = 0.78$, $r = 0.71$) indicate a significant relationship between SHG membership and increased influence in household decision-making and local governance. As women became more involved in SHGs, they gained greater confidence to participate in community decisions and assert their voices in governance processes.

VI. Conclusion

The study revealed that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have made substantial contributions to both economic and social empowerment for women from Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the selected villages of Nalgonda District. The data showed that SHG participation led to significant improvements in income generation, financial stability, and social status for women. Women in SHGs also reported higher levels of community involvement and increased leadership roles, indicating a positive shift in their social empowerment. The study highlighted that community engagement, local leadership, and market access were key factors in determining the program's success. In regions where these elements were stronger, women experienced better outcomes in terms of financial independence and social participation.

Based on the findings, several policy recommendations were made. First, financial literacy programs and business skills training should be strengthened to help SHG members manage finances more effectively and engage in more sustainable income-generating activities. Second, tailored interventions are necessary to address cultural barriers and improve market access in underperforming regions like Nalgonda and Miryalaguda, where infrastructure and community engagement were limited. Lastly, promoting local leadership and community mobilization will be essential for increasing the sustainability and impact of SHGs in these areas. For future research, it is suggested that studies explore the long-term sustainability of women-led businesses after SHG participation, especially focusing on financial independence. Additionally, further research should investigate how regional variations influence the success of other poverty alleviation programs across Telangana, to provide insights into effective strategies for inclusive development.

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