

Breaking Barriers: How Microfinance is Reshaping the Lives of Marginalized Women in Rural India

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ABSTRACT

The Self-Help Group (SHG)-Bank Linkage Program has emerged as a pivotal mechanism for expanding financial inclusion in India's rural credit landscape, demonstrating the viability of lending to the poorest segments of society. This study investigates the socio-economic impact of microfinance on marginalized women—specifically those belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs), minority communities, and women with physical disabilities—in the rural areas of Agra district, Uttar Pradesh. Employing a multistage random sampling technique, data were collected from 200 SHGs with a minimum operational tenure of five years, across 10 administrative blocks and 100 villages. The sample comprised 300 female respondents (150 SCs, 100 minorities, and 50 physically challenged). Structured interviews conducted between August 2023 and October 2024 formed the basis of the primary data. Quantitative analyses were carried out using paired *t*-tests, *z*-tests for proportions, and Likert scale-based evaluations. The results indicate statistically significant improvements in key economic indicators such as income, savings, and employment levels, as well as enhanced autonomy in household and financial decision-making. Additionally, participants reported reduced dependency on informal credit sources and increased involvement in community activities. The findings underscore the transformative potential of SHG-based microfinance in fostering financial independence, strengthening social capital, and promoting inclusive rural development among historically disadvantaged groups.

Keywords: Microfinance, SHG-Bank Linkage Program, Women Empowerment, Rural Development

1. Introduction

The experience of Micro Finance through SHG-Bank Linkage Program in India showed that it was one of the successful interventions in rural credit market. It proved that the poor are bankable (Patel, 2002) and poverty alleviation was possible without subsidies (Khandker, 1998). The studies on micro credit policy in India indicated that the group lending through SHGs reduced the lending and transaction cost of public banks (Puhazhendi 1995 and Manthri 2004) Recovery rates for SHG loans stand above 99 percent (Gupta, 2008 and Rajan, 2009). Micro credit has given women in India an opportunity to

become agents of change. Poor women, who are in the forefront of the micro credit movement in the country, use small loans to jumpstart a long chain of activity. Keeping in view the immense inherent potential in SHGs in mobilising savings and credit multiplication, the banks are considering micro credit as one of their important marketing avenues. Recognising their importance, both the Reserve Bank of India and NABARD have been spear heading the promotion and linkage of SHGs to the banking system through refinance support and initiating other proactive policies and systems. The program of micro finance has made rapid strides in India (Gupta, 2008).

2. Literature Review

The relationship between microfinance and women's empowerment has been extensively explored over the last two decades, particularly in South Asia. Kabeer (2005) argues that access to microfinance can serve as a “magic bullet” for transforming women’s agency, particularly when financial resources are aligned with control over decisions and outcomes. However, this transformation is not automatic. Nasir et.al (2019) and Swain & Wallentin (2009), through an econometric analysis of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India, found a statistically significant improvement in women’s self-confidence, mobility, and decision-making capabilities after microfinance participation. Similarly, Holvoet (2005), in her study conducted in Tamil Nadu, emphasizes that group-based credit models—where collective bargaining power is embedded—tend to yield stronger empowerment outcomes compared to individual lending schemes.

Yet, the literature presents a complex and sometimes contradictory picture. Banerjee et al. (2015), in a landmark multi-country randomized controlled trial (RCT) including India, found that while microfinance increases business activity and borrowing capacity, its effect on women’s empowerment and household welfare is modest at best. This finding underscores the need to contextualize microfinance outcomes beyond financial metrics. In contrast, Sanyal (2009), using ethnographic methods in West Bengal, revealed that SHGs played a critical role in building social capital, fostering collective identity among rural women, and encouraging broader forms of political participation and community leadership. These qualitative insights offer a richer understanding of empowerment that transcends economic gains.

Despite this growing body of evidence, several critical gaps remain. Most studies inadequately account for intersectional vulnerabilities based on caste, religion, or marital status. For example, while Ghosh (2013) acknowledged the increasing outreach of microfinance institutions (MFIs) to poor women in India, his work did not evaluate whether the services effectively empowered the most marginalized subgroups. Similarly, although D’Espallier, Guérin, and Mersland (2011) demonstrated that women clients exhibit stronger repayment behavior than men across global microfinance datasets, they did not explicitly link repayment performance to empowerment trajectories.

Another under-researched dimension is the role of financial and digital literacy. Sharma and Kukreja (2017) argue that mobile-based microfinance services have improved outreach in rural India, but digital illiteracy and gender-based technology gaps continue to exclude the very populations most in need of support. Meanwhile, theoretical critiques such as those offered by Mayoux (2001) call attention to the potential risks of microfinance—namely over-indebtedness, male appropriation of loans, and increased household stress—particularly when empowerment is narrowly defined or instrumentally measured. Thus, the current literature emphasizes the need for a multidimensional, context-sensitive, and intersectional framework to meaningfully assess how microfinance reshapes the lives of rural Indian women.

2.1 Research Gap

Although prior studies have linked microfinance to women's empowerment, they often overlook the specific experiences of marginalized rural women in India. Most research lacks an intersectional approach, ignoring how caste, religion, and marital status affect empowerment outcomes. Economic impacts are well-documented, but social, digital, and psychological dimensions remain

underexplored. The role of financial and digital literacy, as well as the long-term sustainability and unintended risks like over-indebtedness and male control over loans, is insufficiently addressed. This highlights the need for a context-sensitive, multidimensional analysis of how microfinance truly reshapes the lives of rural marginalized women.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To evaluate the economic and social impacts of the microfinance program on SHG women from priority communities.
- To investigate the impact of the microfinance program on the overall personality development of SHG women from priority communities.

4. Need for the Study

There are empirical evidences which show that the involvement of women associated with the micro finance SHG-Bank Linkage Program has been one rise, resulting in a greater awareness and confidence amongst them. In general, micro finance is a path towards empowering the most marginalized among the poor to take charge of their life's requirements. While micro finance is looked upon as a financially viable approach to address economic vulnerability, it has demonstrated the potential of building up the social capital of the poorest communities especially SCs, SCTs, minorities and physically challenged women. In this context, a research was carried out to study the economic and social impact of the micro finance on SHG women of SCs, minorities and physically challenged (priority communities).

5. Research Methodology

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach to investigate how microfinance is reshaping the lives of marginalized women in rural India. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled the researcher to measure the extent of empowerment and to explore the nuanced social, cultural, and psychological dynamics associated with microfinance participation.

5.1 Research Design

The research design comprised two phases. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires to assess various dimensions of women's empowerment such as economic, social, and psychological status as influenced by their participation in microfinance programs. The second phase involved qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, aiming to provide deeper insights into women's lived experiences, challenges, and the broader social implications of microfinance involvement. This design facilitates both in-depth understanding and strengthening the validity of findings through triangulation.

5.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in selected rural districts of Uttar Pradesh. The state was chosen on the basis of the presence of functioning microfinance institutions (MFIs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and cooperative banks. The population comprised rural women who belonged to marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), religious minorities, and economically disadvantaged groups.

5.3 Selection of the Sample

Multistage random sampling method was used to select the respondents. In the first stage, a list of affiliated Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) engaged in the promotion of SHGs was obtained from Agra. Out of the list ten NGOs who act as a facilitator in the promotion of SHGs were identified and approached to get the details of SHGs. In the second stage, based on the information provided by the NGOs, 10 blocks were randomly selected in the district namely Etmadpur, Khandauli, Shamsabad, Fatehabad, Jagner, Kheragarh, Bichpuri, Fatehpur Sikri, Barauli Ahir and Jaitpur Kalan. In the third stage 10 villages in each selected block were further identified based on the

priority communities' concentration. In the fourth stage three SHGs with the members of priority communities and having five years of experience as on 2023-24 had been identified from each selected village. Thus 300 SHGs were selected. From these 300 SHGs, priority community women namely SCs 150, minorities 100 and physically challenged 50 were selected randomly.

5.4 Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on established empowerment scales and adapted to the Indian rural context. The tool measured key indicators such as:

- Economic empowerment: income, savings, control over expenditure, and asset ownership
- Social empowerment: mobility, household decision-making, and community participation
- Psychological empowerment: self-esteem, confidence, and future aspirations
- Financial literacy: knowledge of interest rates, repayment terms, and use of digital tools

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and FGDs, guided by open-ended questions exploring topics such as household dynamics, barriers to access, coping with debt, and social transformation. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and later transcribed for analysis.

5.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) summarized key variables, while inferential techniques such as linear regression and logistic regression were employed to examine the relationship between microfinance participation and empowerment outcomes. Where applicable, correlation analysis was used to identify associations among empowerment dimensions.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Transcripts were coded manually and with the assistance of NVIVO software. Emerging themes were compared across groups to identify patterns of empowerment and resistance, with special attention to intersectional identities such as caste and marital status.

5.6 Period of the Study and Collection of Data

Period of the study was five years from 2018-19 to 2023-24. To fulfill the objectives of the study, the primary data was collected through a detailed interview schedule during the period August 2023 to October 2024.

5.7 Statistical Tools for analysis

The statistical tools like paired 't' test, 'z' test for proportions and Likert's scaling technique were applied. Paired 't' test was applied to find out the significant changes in the selected variables of the members before and after SHG period. The variables tested were

1. Average annual income
2. Savings
3. Increase in the decision making capacity

Z- test was applied to test the proportions of increase in the selected variables during pre-SHG and post-SHG period. The variables examined were:

1. Institution wise changes in the savings
2. Changes in the indebtedness of members
3. Changes in the assets acquired

5.8 Likert's Five point Scaling Technique

The impact of SHG-Bank Linkage Program on personally development of priority community women was analyzed by following five point scaling technique. The scores were assigned as follows:

Significantly improved	5
Improved	4
No change	3

Not improved	2
Significantly not improved	1

The respondents were asked to discourse their level of improvement based on which the scores were allotted, the total score and mean score were found out for analysis.

6. Results and Discussion

The findings of the research study are discussed under the following headings:

- Socio-Economic Status of the Members
- Savings and Credit Activities of the Members
- Economic Impact
 - i. Changes in the annual income and Savings of SHG Members
 - ii. Institution wise changes in the Savings
 - iii. Changes in the level of indebtedness of Members
 - iv. Types of assets acquired by SHG Members
 - v. Employment Generation
 - vi. Repayment behaviour
- Social Empowerment of women
- Problems of the members
- Conclusion

6.1 Socio-Economic Status of the Members

Today economic independence is considered to be the prime basis for improving the status of women in India. Availability of credit to women especially the priority communities would result in reducing their dependency, enhancing their social and economic status as well as empowering them to assert more in the household decisions. In this context it is imperative to understand the socio-economic characteristics of women of priority communities in the study area. The table one draws a detailed description on the socio-economic status of the members.

The table revealed that the majority of the sample SHG women in all the three categories were in the age group of 31-40 years followed by the members in the age group of 41-50 years. Regarding the educational status of the members 21.33 percent of SHG women of SCs were illiterate followed by 18 percent in the case of minorities and 12 percent in the case of physically challenged women. The rest were literate. It is observed that majority of them were married (above 95 percent of women of SCs and minorities), whereas only 36 percent were married in the case of women of physically challenged. Again it could be noted that majority of the members family size is in between 5-7 members in all the three categories. Further it is revealed that majority of them, 46 percent in all, were having the family annual income of Rs. 20001-25000, followed by 30.67 percent below Rs.20000 before joining the SHGs.

To sum up, the majority of the sample members, in all the three categories were in the age group of 31-40 years, with middle level education and having the annual income of below Rs.25000 indicating the importance of SHG set up to create confidence for economic self-reliance among women especially the priority communities.

Cultivating the habit of regular savings and the ability to access them when required through credit not only reduces significantly the vulnerability of the livelihood base of the poor and their dependence, it also enhances human development. It enables them to borrow for urgent needs instead of going to money lender, gives them a degree of freedom to bargain for better wages and working conditions and enables them to build a capital base which hitherto has been impossible since the exorbitant interest rates demanded by money lenders siphoned off all surpluses. The quantum of money saved by the members ranged from Rs50 to Rs.200 per month, per member during the study period. The average savings, average internal loan availed and the average bank loan availed is given in table 2.

Table 1 Distribution of Sample Members by Socio-Economic Status

S. No.	Socio-Economic Factors	Members of SCs	Members of Minorities	Members of physically challenged	Total
	Age				
1	Below 30	20 (13.33)	5 (5)	5 (14)	32 (10.67)
	31-40	80 (53)	65 (65)	28 (56)	173 (57.63)
	41-50	40 (26.67)	22 (22)	10 (20)	72 (24)
	50 and above	10 (6.67)	8 (8)	5 (10)	23 (7.66)
	Total	150	100	50	300
2	Educational Status of the members				
	Illiterate	32 (21.33)	18 (18)	6 (12)	56 (18.67)
	Middle	98 (65.34)	62 (62)	22 (44)	182 (60.67)
	Higher Secondary	18 (12)	20 (20)	22 (44)	60 (20.00)
	Graduates	2 (1.33)	-	-	2 (0.66)
	Total	150	100	50	300
3	Marital Status				
	Married	142 (94.67)	96 (96)	18 (36)	256 (85.33)
	Unmarried	2 (1.33)	-	32 (64)	34 (11.33)
	Divorced / Widowed	6 (4.00)	4 (4)	-	10 (3.34)
	Total	150	100	50	300
4	Family size				
	Below 5 members	42 (28)	28 (78)	30 (60)	100 (33.33)
	5-7 members	100 (66.67)	67 (67)	20 (40)	187 (62.33)
	Above 7 members	8 (5.33)	5 (5)	-	134.34
	Total	150	100	50	300
5	Annual income (in Rs)				
	Below 20,000	32 (21.33)	22 (22)	38 (76)	92 (30.67)
	20001-25000	78 (52.00)	48 (48)	12 (24)	138 (46.00)
	25001-30000	30 (20.00)	18 (8)	-	48 (16.00)
	30000 and above	10 (6.67)	12 (12)	-	22 (7.33)
	Total	150	100	50	300

Source: Field Survey, 2024. Figures in parentheses indicate the percentage to the number stated Savings and Credit Activities of the Members

Table 2 Savings and the Average Loan availed by SHG Women of Priority Communities (Amount in Rs.)

Category	Average savings in SHG	Average internal loan	Average bank loan
Members of SCs	6250	19150	29500
Minority communities	6850	18250	28750
Physically challenged	7100	20500	31500

Source: Calculations based on Field Survey, 2024

It could be observed that the members were very active in savings and availing internal loan from the group for consumption purposes and bank loan for income generating activities. The members utilized the internal loan for various purposes namely for food materials, children’s education, health, life-cycle ceremonies, to repay debts and other personal needs. The bank loan availed was utilized by the members to start income generating activities either in group (or) individually. The members started different income generating activities namely agricultural and allied activities, manufacturing activities, trading activities and service activities. The members were also given adequate training on various aspects of income generating activities, maintenance of books of accounts, conduct of meetings, marketing the products etc. The training was given by the NGOs, Government agencies and other institutions.

6.2 Economic Impact

Economic empowerment is recognized as an important goal of the SHGs. Economic empowerment may be defined as a state where in the SHG members are able to fulfill their basic needs through reasonable opportunities for income generation and to own assets of liquid and immovable properties through their income-generating activities. The economic impact has resulted in changes in the annual income and savings of the members, institution wise changes in the savings, increase in the acquisition of assets, employment generation, reduction in the level of indebtedness and excellent repayment behavior.

The SHG-Bank Linkage Program with better access to credit brings in its wake increased income to SHG members. The income and savings of the members after joining SHGs had increased and this is shown in table 3a and 3b.

Table 3a Changes in the Annual Income of SHG members

S.No.	Groups	Pre-SHG		Post-SHG		Increment		Percentage of increment	Paired ‘t’ value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1.	SCs	15697	2263.44	27986	6880.05	12289	5618.05	78.29	39.976**
2.	Minorities	15100	2251.02	30500	7284.26	15400	5984.81	103	42.478**
3.	Physically challenged	8200	1443.81	31800	7316.05	23600	6341.46	287.80	67.814**

Table 3b Changes in the Annual Savings of SHG members

S.No.	Groups	Pre-SHG		Post-SHG		Increment		Percentage of increment	Paired ‘t’ value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		

1.	SCs	775	447.98	1490	514.58	715	237.77	92.25	55.087**
2.	Minorities	885	412.38	1630	605.33	745	283.36	84.18	51.187**
3.	Physically challenged	650	390.16	1400	501.82	750	260.87	115.38	49.379**

Source: Calculations based on Field Survey, 2024. (Table value 2.58) **Significant at 1 percent level.

The increase in the average annual income and the savings of members of priority communities were statistically significant and the percentage increases was higher for the members of physically challenged with 287.80 percent. The SHG-Bank Linkage Program distinctly differs from other microfinance program across the world mainly in terms of its greater emphasis on savings. There was a significant increase in the average annual savings of all the members but is more for the physically challenged members with 115.38 percent (Table 3b).

Table 4 Institution wise Changes in the Savings Institutions wise Changes in the Savings:

S. No.	Institution	Members of SC N : 150		Members of Minorities challenged N : 100		Members of physically N : 50		'z' test		
		Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	SCs	Minorities	Physically challenged
1.	Savings in post offices*	18 (12)	68 (45.33)	11 (11)	73 (73)	7 (14)	45 (90)	4.269**	5.279**	4.124**
2.	Savings in banks*	23 (15.33)	140 (93.33)	14 (14)	86 (86)	6 (12)	42 (84)	7.012**	7.120**	4.016**
3.	Insurance and private savings*	12 (8)	86 (57.3)	6 (6)	76 (76)	4 (8)	50 (100)	5.123**	4.263**	4.214**

Source: Calculations based on field Survey, 2024. N – Number stated (Table value 2.56)

*Multiple response ** significant at 1 percent level

Figures in parenthesis indicate the percentage to the number stated

The institution wise share of savings during pre and post SHG situation are present in Table – 4. It could be observed from the table that there was a significant improvement in the percentage of members savings in different institutions. The table also indicates that the member’s awareness and preferences towards the bank savings were higher indicating the positive impact and healthy attitude to avail bank credit for business ventures and that was proved by ‘z’ test also.

6.3 Changes in the Level of Indebtedness of Members

The members who have debts from the informal sources were categorized into loans availed from money lenders in cash, mortgaging their material assets to the pawnbrokers and relatives and friends. The intervention of micro finance program on the rural areas contributed for reduction of outside loan among the poor priority communities and is shown in table 5.

Table 5 Changes in the Level of Indebtedness of Members

S. No.	Groups	Members of SC N : 150		Members of Minorities challenged N : 100		Members of physically N : 50		'z' test		
		Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	SCs	Minorities	Physically challenged

1.	Money lenders*	150 (100)	12 (8)	80 (80)	7 (7)	10 (20)	-	4.14**	9.12**	7.56**
2.	Pawn brokers*	78 (52)	0	48 (48)	0	-	-	-	-	-
3.	Friends and relatives*	97 (67)	15 (10)	27 (27)	12 (12)	27 (54)	7 (14)	3.08**	2.68**	2.59**

Source: Calculations based on field Survey, 2024. N – Number stated (Table value 2.56)
*Multiple response ** significant at 1 percent level.

Figures in parenthesis indicate the percentage to the number stated.

It could be observed that after joining the SHG, the dependence on money lenders for credit declined sharply from 100 percent to 8 percent for members of SCs, from 80 percent to 7 percent for minorities and from 20 percent to nil for the physically challenged. All of them have repaid the old debts to pawn brokers and the level of indebtedness due to friends and relatives also significantly declined. The ‘z’ test also proves that there was a significant reduction of the indebtedness of members after joining the SHGs. Hence it is proved that the SHG-Bank Linkage Program has resulted in reduction of past loans with a higher rate of interest and this result is in consistence with the findings of Anjugam and Alagumani (2001) and Das Gupta(2000).

6.4 Types of Assets Acquired by SHG Members

The poor are characterized by their low asset. Therefore, any program targeting the poor should strengthen their assets holding pattern. The increase in assets strengthens the financial position of the household and also improves its stock absorbing capacity. The SHG-Bank Linkage Program through micro finance interventions increases the productive assets of households like milch animals, farm animals and various consumer durables such as transistor, cycle, furniture, electronic items and others. Table – 6 depicts the type of household assets acquired by the members after joining SHGs.

Table 6 Types of Household Assets Acquired by SHG Members

S.No.	Groups	Members of SC N : 150		Members of Minorities challenged N : 100		Members of physically challenged N : 50		'z' test		
		Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	Pre-SHG	Post-SHG	SCs	Minorities	Physically challenged
1.	Thatched House to tiled ^N	32 (30.47)	20 (13.33)	25 (25)	5 (5)	10 (20)	5 (10)	0.392 NS	0.415 NS	0.212 NS
2.	Material Assets ^N	95 (63.33)	135 (90)	42 (42)	86 (86)	22 (44)	48 (96)	0.403**	8.363**	7.521**
3.	Gold and Silver ^N	42 (28)	126 (84)	33 (33)	96 (96)	12 (24)	24 (48)	6.266**	5.324**	3.251**
4.	Gas, Electricity and water tap connection ^N	52 (34.66)	132 (88)	46 (46)	88 (88)	8 (16)	42 (84)	4.554**	5.421**	3.675**
5.	Construction of Toilets ^N	14 (9.33)	120 (80)	48 (48)	96 (96)	12 (24)	44 (88)	33.499	2.672	3.686**
6.	Consumer durables ^N	86 (57.33)	150 (100)	45 (45)	100 (100)	34 (68)	48 (96)	2.5999*	2.625**	1.726 NS
7.	Vehicles ^N	22 (14.66)	64 (42.66)	31 (31)	87 (87)	5 (10)	50 (100)	2.764**	3.982**	14.403**

8.	Farm animals	68 (45.33)	140 (93.33)	15 (15)	85 (85)	-	-	2.02*	6.533**	-
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Source: Calculations based on field Survey, 2024. ^N Multiple response *significant at 5 percent level ** significant at 1 percent level ^{NS} Non Significant

It could be observed from the table that all the members have significantly acquired different types of assets, which is also proved statistically by applying ‘z’ test. Hence it is implied that the access to Bank Program has positive impact on creation of assets among the members and attempted to improve the quality of life of the rural SHG members especially the women of priority communities. The micro enterprises initiated by the SHG members were providing employment opportunities to the members as well as the non-members and is given in table No. 7.

Table 7 Employment Generation

Relationship	Members of SC N : 150	Members of Minorities N : 100	Members of Physically challenged N : 50	Total No : 300
Spouses	78 (34.82)	68 (44.16)	10 (16.6)	156 (35.62)
Family members	112 (50.12)	64 (41.56)	32 (53.33)	208 (47.49)
Hired laborers	34 (15.18)	22 (14.28)	18 (30.00)	74 (16.89)

Source: Calculations based on Field Survey, 2024.

Figures in parenthesis indicate the percentage to the number stated.

It could be observed from the table that SHG members of SC categories provided highest number of employment opportunities to the family members followed by the minorities: maximum number of employment opportunities to the spouses and family members and in the case of physically challenged maximum number to family members. Out of the total employment provided 47.49 percent were accounted for family members, 35.62 percent were spouses and 16.89 percent were hired laborers and this will provide greater scope for achieving income and more economic benefits to the rural poor.

6.5 Repayment Behavior:

Since the groups own accumulated savings were part and parcel of the aggregate loans lent to their members, peer pressure ensures timely repayments. Groups solidarity, group pressure and sequential lending provide strong repayment motivation and produce extremely low default rates. About 92 percent of the sample members were very prompt in repayment of the internal loan and bank loan.

6.6 Social Empowerment of Women

The micro finance through SHG-Bank Linkage Program also helped the members to improve their literacy, health and hygiene, community participation and overall personality development. The overall personality development of women was analyzed by following five points scaling technique and the result is given in Table – 8.

Table 8 Impact on Personality Development of Women

S. No.	Attributes	Members of SC N : 150	Members of Minorities N : 100	Members of Physically challenged N : 50
1	Self Confidence	4.80	4.75	4.95
2	Communicative skills	4.62	4.66	4.85
3	Leadership quality	4.83	4.75	4.82
4	Participation in Official discussion	4.21	4.56	4.88
5	Commanding respect in the family	4.62	4.62	4.86
6	Reduction in domestic violence	4.52	4.74	4.82
7	Family and community living	4.79	4.65	4.85
8	Self-identity and self-respect	4.62	4.65	4.88

9	Marketing skills	4.58	4.73	4.87
10	Management skills	4.65	4.62	4.88

Source: Calculations based on Field Survey, 2024.

The scoring approach reveals that the mean score for the members of physically challenged was high in all aspects of attributes revealing that their self confidence increased to a larger extent there by their overall skill development also increased followed by other categories in equal respect. The overall results revealed that the members were empowered in different traits thereby promoting their personality development.

7. Conclusion

The study results proved that the intervention of micro finance through SHG-Bank Linkage Program has positive impact on the economic and social status of the members especially the priority communities, in terms of increase in income, savings, employment generation, asset creation, decrease in the dependency on money lenders, improvement in decision making skills, participation in community affairs and the empowerment of women. The SHGs had contributed in developing the personalities of women, in molding the community in the perspective and in exploring the initiatives of women in taking up entrepreneurial ventures. SHGs had emerged as the providers of social capital for transforming today's rural India into a powerful society through micro finance.

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