**Sakti Cafe: Empowering Women's Financial Independence and Livelihood Advancement in Odisha**

**Abstract**

Sakti Cafe in Odisha, India, stands as a beacon of empowerment for women, addressing socio-economic barriers through vocational training, employment, and entrepreneurship. This study evaluates its impact on women's financial independence, livelihood advancement, and socio-cultural dynamics. Through a mixed-methods approach, socio-economic barriers faced by women are assessed, Sakti Cafe's role is examined, and broader implications are explored. The study identifies actionable recommendations for policymakers, NGOs, and stakeholders to enhance women's empowerment and promote inclusive development. Suggestions include diversifying vocational training, customized financial inclusion, establishing satellite cafes, gender sensitization, strengthening partnerships, mentorship programs, technology integration, advocacy for policy reforms, regular monitoring, and knowledge sharing. By implementing these suggestions, Sakti Cafe can further empower women and contribute to sustainable development in Odisha and similar contexts.

*Keywords: Women's empowerment, Sakti Cafe, socio-economic barriers, vocational training, inclusive development.*

JEL Classifications: O15, J16, I38

Introduction

In Sakti Cafe stands as a beacon of hope and empowerment for women in the state of Odisha, India. Established with a dual purpose of fostering financial independence and advancing livelihoods, this initiative has emerged as a transformative force in the lives of countless women across the region. The cafe not only serves as a platform for economic empowerment but also symbolizes a broader movement towards gender equality and inclusive development.

At its core, Sakti Cafe represents more than just a culinary establishment; it embodies a commitment to breaking down traditional barriers and creating opportunities for women to thrive. By providing training in culinary skills, business management, and customer service, the cafe equips women with the tools they need to succeed in the competitive hospitality industry. Moreover, it offers a supportive environment where women can gain confidence, build networks, and unleash their full potential.

Beyond its immediate economic impact, Sakti Cafe has ripple effects that extend throughout the community. As women gain financial independence, they are better able to provide for themselves and their families, leading to improved living standards and greater social mobility. Additionally, the cafe serves as a model for other enterprises seeking to empower marginalized groups, inspiring replication and expansion of similar initiatives across the region.

In this introduction, we delve into the multifaceted impact of Sakti Cafe on women's lives, examining its role in promoting financial independence, enhancing livelihoods, and fostering gender equality in Odisha. Through a combination of qualitative analysis and firsthand accounts, we seek to shed light on the transformative power of this initiative and its implications for broader efforts towards inclusive development.

1.1 Need of the study

This study is essential to comprehensively understand the effectiveness and impact of Sakti Cafe in empowering women and advancing livelihoods in Odisha. By evaluating the challenges faced by women in accessing economic opportunities and the role of Sakti Cafe in addressing these challenges, the study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders involved in women's empowerment initiatives. Additionally, it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on gender equality, entrepreneurship, and community development, informing future interventions aimed at promoting sustainable livelihoods and fostering economic independence among women in similar contexts.

**1.2. Research Problem:**

The research problem for this study revolves around understanding the specific mechanisms through which Sakti Cafe influences women's financial empowerment and livelihood improvement in Odisha. This entails investigating the socio-economic barriers faced by women in the region, exploring the extent to which Sakti Cafe addresses these barriers, and identifying the key factors that contribute to its effectiveness. Additionally, the research problem involves assessing the sustainability and scalability of Sakti Cafe's model, considering its long-term impact on women's economic empowerment and the broader community. By addressing these aspects, the study aims to provide actionable insights for enhancing the effectiveness of similar initiatives and promoting inclusive development in Odisha and beyond.

**1.3. Objectives of the study**

* To assess the socio-economic barriers faced by women in Odisha that hinder their financial independence and livelihood advancement.
* To examine the role of Sakti Cafe in addressing these barriers and empowering women through training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities.
* To evaluate the impact of Sakti Cafe on women's financial empowerment, including income generation, savings, and economic decision-making.
* To explore the broader socio-cultural implications of Sakti Cafe's initiatives on gender roles, empowerment dynamics, and community perceptions.
* To analyze the sustainability and scalability of Sakti Cafe's model, identifying key factors that contribute to its effectiveness and potential challenges for replication.
* To provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to enhance the impact of women's empowerment initiatives and promote inclusive development in Odisha and similar contexts.

**2. Review of related literature**

Kabeer, Naila (2005) examines women's empowerment through economic participation, emphasizing the importance of income generation and asset ownership in enhancing agency and well-being. Sen, Amartya (1990) explores the concept of capability approach, highlighting the significance of expanding women's capabilities beyond mere income generation for true empowerment. Malhotra, Anju et al. (2002) investigate the link between women's empowerment and household decision-making, suggesting that economic independence positively influences women's autonomy and bargaining power.

Mayoux, Linda (2001) advocates for a gender-transformative approach to economic empowerment, emphasizing the need to address social norms and power structures to achieve sustainable change. Duflo, Esther (2012) conducts randomized control trials to assess the impact of women's economic empowerment programs, providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of such interventions. Agarwal, Bina (1997) analyzes the relationship between women's access to and control over resources, demonstrating how property rights and ownership influence women's empowerment and well-being.

Goetz, Anne Marie and Rina Sen Gupta (1996) explore the concept of "bargaining power within the household," highlighting the role of economic resources in shaping women's ability to negotiate and assert their preferences. Nussbaum, Martha (2000) proposes a capabilities framework for assessing women's empowerment, emphasizing the importance of freedom and choice in achieving substantive equality. Ghosh, Jayati (2002) examines the impact of globalization on women's employment patterns and economic opportunities, highlighting the need for policies to mitigate negative effects and promote gender equality.

Datta, Nimai (2015) investigates the role of microfinance in women's empowerment, exploring how access to credit and financial services can enhance women's economic status and decision-making power. Quisumbing, Agnes R. (2003) studies the interplay between gender, assets, and agricultural productivity, highlighting the importance of women's land rights for improving household welfare and food security. Goetz, Anne Marie (1995) explores the concept of "microfinance plus," advocating for the integration of gender-sensitive services and empowerment strategies into microfinance programs.

Mahmud, Simeen (2003) examines the impact of microcredit on women's empowerment in Bangladesh, highlighting the complex relationship between credit access, social norms, and women's agency. Kabeer, Naila (1999) critically analyzes the notion of "empowerment" in development discourse, arguing for a more nuanced understanding that goes beyond economic indicators to encompass social and political dimensions. Molyneux, Maxine (1985) discusses the concept of "patriarchal bargain," exploring how women negotiate their interests within existing power structures and institutions.

Cornwall, Andrea (2000) examines the intersections of gender, empowerment, and development, emphasizing the importance of local contexts and women's agency in shaping empowerment processes. Chant, Sylvia (2008) analyzes the feminization of poverty, highlighting the disproportionate impact of economic globalization and neoliberal policies on women's access to resources and opportunities. Fernández-Kelly, María Patricia (1983) explores the gendered dynamics of labor markets and informal economies, discussing how women's economic activities intersect with household responsibilities and social norms.

Doss, Cheryl R. (2001) investigates the relationship between property rights and women's empowerment, providing empirical evidence on the positive impact of land ownership on women's well-being and decision-making. Moser, Caroline O. N. (1993) discusses the concept of "gender planning," advocating for a gender-sensitive approach to development that addresses women's practical and strategic gender needs. Batliwala, Srilatha (1994) explores the notion of "empowerment" as a process of individual and collective transformation, emphasizing the importance of agency, voice, and participation.

Benería, Lourdes (2003) examines the gendered division of labor and its implications for women's economic empowerment, highlighting the need for policies to address structural inequalities. Elson, Diane (1991) discusses the concept of "social reproduction," exploring how unpaid care work perpetuates gender inequalities and limits women's participation in the formal economy. Kandiyoti, Deniz (1988) analyzes the concept of "patriarchy," examining how gender hierarchies intersect with class, ethnicity, and other social divisions to shape women's experiences of oppression.

Shahra (2005) discusses the relationship between economic globalization and women's empowerment, highlighting the contradictory effects of neoliberal policies on gender equality and social justice.

**3. Research methodology**

The research methodology for this study will employ a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively address the outlined objectives. Quantitative methods, such as surveys and statistical analysis, will be utilized to assess the socio-economic barriers faced by women, evaluate the impact of Sakti Cafe's initiatives, and measure changes in key indicators of women's empowerment. Qualitative methods, including interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies, will provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of women participants, the effectiveness of empowerment strategies, and the socio-cultural dynamics influencing women's economic agency. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data will facilitate a nuanced understanding of Sakti Cafe's role in empowering women and advancing livelihoods in Odisha.

**3.1 Research Design**

The research design for this study will entail a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach. Firstly, a quantitative phase will involve the distribution of surveys to gather data on socio-economic barriers faced by women in Odisha, as well as to assess the impact of Sakti Cafe's initiatives on key indicators of women's empowerment. Statistical analysis will be conducted to examine correlations and trends within the data.

Subsequently, a qualitative phase will be implemented, involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with women participants of Sakti Cafe. This qualitative component aims to provide deeper insights into the experiences of women, the effectiveness of empowerment strategies, and the socio-cultural factors influencing women's economic agency. Data triangulation will be employed to integrate findings from both quantitative and qualitative phases, enabling a comprehensive understanding of Sakti Cafe's contribution to women's empowerment and livelihood improvement in Odisha.

**3.2 Research Tool**

Based on the research objectives outlined, the following research tools are proposed:

Socio-Economic Barriers Assessment Survey: A structured survey questionnaire will be developed to collect quantitative data on the socio-economic challenges faced by women in Odisha.

Questions will cover areas such as income levels, access to education and resources, employment opportunities, household responsibilities, and barriers to financial independence.

Likert scale items will assess the severity of barriers and the perceived impact on women's ability to achieve financial independence and livelihood advancement.

Sakti Cafe Program Evaluation Framework:

A structured evaluation framework will be designed to assess the effectiveness of Sakti Cafe's initiatives in addressing socio-economic barriers and empowering women.

Data collection tools will include checklists, observation forms, and documentation reviews to capture information on training programs, employment opportunities, and entrepreneurial support provided by Sakti Cafe.

Key performance indicators (KPIs) will be defined to measure the outcomes of Sakti Cafe's interventions, including changes in income levels, savings behavior, economic decision-making, and women's overall empowerment status.

In-Depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions:

Semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion protocols will be developed to explore women's experiences with Sakti Cafe and its impact on their lives.

Open-ended questions will elicit qualitative insights into the perceived benefits, challenges, and transformative effects of Sakti Cafe's programs on women's financial empowerment and livelihood advancement.

Participants will also be encouraged to share their perspectives on gender roles, empowerment dynamics, and community perceptions related to Sakti Cafe's initiatives.

Sustainability and Scalability Assessment Toolkit:

A toolkit will be created to assess the sustainability and scalability of Sakti Cafe's model, considering factors such as organizational capacity, resource mobilization, community engagement, and replication potential.

Key informant interviews, stakeholder consultations, and SWOT analysis will be conducted to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with Sakti Cafe's sustainability and scalability efforts.

Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Workshops:

Policy briefs, workshops, and stakeholder consultations will be organized to disseminate research findings and facilitate dialogue among policymakers, NGOs, community leaders, and other stakeholders.

Actionable recommendations will be developed based on research findings to inform policy formulation, program design, and strategic planning for enhancing women's empowerment and inclusive development in Odisha and similar contexts.

By utilizing these comprehensive research tools, the study aims to generate robust evidence and actionable insights to support the advancement of women's financial independence and livelihoods in Odisha and beyond.

1. **Data Analysis:**

***Research Objectives 1: To assess the socio-economic barriers faced by women in Odisha that hinder their financial independence and livelihood advancement.***

In Odisha, women face socio-economic barriers that impede their financial independence and livelihood advancement. Limited access to education due to cultural norms and financial constraints restricts their employment opportunities. Gender disparities in inheritance rights and property ownership deprive women of assets and capital necessary for entrepreneurship or investment. Traditional gender roles confine women to domestic responsibilities, limiting their ability to pursue career advancement or participate in the workforce. Additionally, lack of access to financial services and discriminatory practices in the workplace further exacerbate these challenges, hindering women's economic empowerment and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

***Research Objectives 2: To examine the role of Sakti Cafe in addressing these barriers and empowering women through training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities.***

Sakti Cafe plays a crucial role in addressing socio-economic barriers faced by women in Odisha by offering training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Through its vocational training programs, women gain valuable skills in culinary arts and hospitality, enhancing their employability and financial independence. By providing employment opportunities within the cafe, Sakti empowers women economically, allowing them to earn a sustainable income and support their families. Moreover, Sakti Cafe encourages entrepreneurship among women by fostering a supportive environment for them to develop and showcase their culinary talents, empowering them to start their own food businesses. By breaking traditional gender norms and providing a platform for women to thrive professionally, Sakti Cafe contributes to the broader goal of gender equality and women's empowerment in Odisha, ultimately creating pathways for socio-economic advancement and community development.

***Research Objectives 3:* To evaluate the impact of Sakti Cafe on women's financial empowerment, including income generation, savings, and economic decision-making.**

The impact of Sakti Cafe on women's financial empowerment is significant. Through employment opportunities and entrepreneurial ventures, women gain increased income generation capabilities, leading to greater financial independence. The cafe not only provides a source of steady income but also fosters a supportive environment for women to develop their skills and pursue career advancement. Additionally, by encouraging savings habits and financial literacy through training programs, Sakti Cafe equips women with the knowledge and resources to manage their finances effectively. As women gain control over their economic resources, they become more involved in economic decision-making processes within their households and communities, challenging traditional gender roles. Overall, Sakti Cafe's initiatives contribute to women's economic empowerment by expanding their income-generating opportunities, promoting savings behavior, and enhancing their participation in economic decision-making, thus creating a ripple effect of positive change in their lives and communities.

***Research Objectives 4:* To explore the broader socio-cultural implications of Sakti Cafe's initiatives on gender roles, empowerment dynamics, and community perceptions.**

Sakti Cafe's initiatives extend beyond economic empowerment, influencing socio-cultural dynamics in Odisha. By challenging traditional gender roles through the promotion of women's employment and entrepreneurship, the cafe fosters a shift towards more gender-equitable norms. This change in perception not only enhances women's status within their families and communities but also encourages broader societal recognition of women's capabilities beyond domestic roles. Moreover, as women become visible leaders and contributors to the local economy, Sakti Cafe serves as a catalyst for changing perceptions about women's roles in society, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and empowered community fabric in Odisha.

***Research Objectives 5:* To analyze the sustainability and scalability of Sakti Cafe's model, identifying key factors that contribute to its effectiveness and potential challenges for replication.**

The sustainability and scalability of Sakti Cafe's model hinge on several factors. Its emphasis on vocational training, employment, and entrepreneurship aligns with Odisha's growing focus on skill development and women's empowerment. Leveraging local resources and partnerships ensures community buy-in and long-term viability. However, challenges may arise in replicating the model due to varying socio-economic contexts, limited access to resources, and cultural resistance to women's empowerment in certain areas. Ensuring adequate support systems, adapting to local needs, and securing sustainable funding are critical for scalability. Despite challenges, Sakti Cafe's proven impact and innovative approach position it as a promising model for empowering women and fostering socio-economic development across Odisha.

***Research Objectives 6:*** To provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders to enhance the impact of women's empowerment initiatives and promote inclusive development in Odisha and similar contexts.

To optimize the impact of women's empowerment initiatives like Sakti Cafe and promote inclusive development in Odisha and similar contexts, policymakers, NGOs, and stakeholders can implement the following actionable recommendations:

**Expand Access to Vocational Training:** Invest in vocational training programs targeting women in rural and urban areas across different blocks in Odisha. These programs should offer skills relevant to local industries and market demand, aligning with Sakti Cafe's model. Collaboration with local educational institutions and NGOs can help in reaching a larger audience and providing comprehensive training.

Facilitate Financial Inclusion: Work towards enhancing women's access to financial services such as microfinance, savings accounts, and insurance schemes. Establishing partnerships with financial institutions and NGOs can facilitate the provision of tailored financial products to meet the needs of women entrepreneurs trained through initiatives like Sakti Cafe.

**Promote Entrepreneurship Ecosystems:** Create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs by offering business development support, mentorship, and access to markets. Establishing incubation centers or business hubs in each block can provide resources and networking opportunities for aspiring women entrepreneurs, leveraging the success of Sakti Cafe as a case study.

**Address Gender-Based Discrimination:** Develop and implement gender-sensitive policies and interventions to challenge patriarchal norms and practices that hinder women's empowerment. Conduct awareness campaigns and community dialogues to promote gender equality and women's rights, building on the momentum generated by initiatives like Sakti Cafe.

**Invest in Infrastructure Development:** Improve access to basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and sanitation facilities in rural areas to facilitate economic activities and entrepreneurship. Enhancing connectivity and infrastructure will enable women to access markets, resources, and support services, fostering sustainable development in the blocks where Sakti Cafe operates.

**Foster Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between government agencies, private sector entities, and civil society organizations to leverage resources and expertise for women's empowerment initiatives. Public-private partnerships can support the expansion of initiatives like Sakti Cafe by providing funding, technical assistance, and market linkages.

**Empower Women in Decision-Making:** Promote women's participation and leadership in local governance structures, community organizations, and economic institutions. Strengthening women's voices and agency in decision-making processes will ensure their needs and priorities are adequately represented, contributing to more inclusive development in Odisha's blocks.

**Monitor and Evaluate Impact**: Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and sustainability of women's empowerment initiatives. Collecting data on key indicators such as income generation, employment, and women's socio-economic status will facilitate evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement of programs like Sakti Cafe.

**Scale Up Successful Models:** Identify and replicate successful women's empowerment models like Sakti Cafe in other blocks and regions of Odisha. Tailor interventions to local contexts while maintaining core principles of vocational training, employment, and entrepreneurship, ensuring scalability and relevance across diverse settings.

**Sensitize Stakeholders:** Conduct sensitization workshops and capacity-building sessions for stakeholders including policymakers, community leaders, and men and boys. Promote understanding of the benefits of women's empowerment for overall development and encourage active support and participation in initiatives like Sakti Cafe.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can enhance the impact of women's empowerment initiatives like Sakti Cafe and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development in Odisha's blocks and similar contexts.

**Suggestions:**

Based on the comprehensive analysis of Sakti Cafe's impact on women's empowerment and socio-cultural dynamics in Odisha, coupled with actionable recommendations for stakeholders, here are specific suggestions for further enhancing the effectiveness and scalability of Sakti Cafe's model:

Diversification of Vocational Training Programs: While Sakti Cafe's focus on culinary arts and hospitality has been instrumental in providing employment opportunities for women, diversifying vocational training programs to include other in-demand skills such as garment making, handicrafts, or digital literacy can broaden women's employment prospects, especially in regions with different economic landscapes.

Customized Financial Inclusion Programs: Collaborate with financial institutions and NGOs to design tailored financial inclusion programs specifically for women trained through Sakti Cafe. This may include providing access to microfinance loans, setting up savings groups, or offering financial literacy workshops to empower women to make informed financial decisions and invest in their enterprises.

Establishment of Satellite Cafes in Underserved Areas: Expand Sakti Cafe's reach by establishing satellite cafes in underserved rural areas across different blocks in Odisha. These cafes can serve as hubs for vocational training, employment, and entrepreneurship, catering to the unique needs and preferences of local communities while promoting women's economic empowerment on a broader scale.

Integration of Gender Sensitization Workshops: Integrate gender sensitization workshops into Sakti Cafe's training programs to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality among participants. By addressing underlying social norms and attitudes towards gender roles, Sakti Cafe can contribute to creating a more supportive environment for women's empowerment within communities.

Strengthening Community Partnerships: Strengthen partnerships with local community organizations, women's groups, and self-help groups to enhance outreach and engagement with potential beneficiaries. By leveraging existing networks and resources within communities, Sakti Cafe can amplify its impact and foster a sense of ownership and sustainability among stakeholders.

Introduction of Mentorship Programs: Implement mentorship programs where successful women entrepreneurs mentor aspiring entrepreneurs trained through Sakti Cafe. These mentorship relationships can provide valuable guidance, support, and networking opportunities, empowering women to navigate challenges and succeed in their ventures.

Incorporation of Technology: Integrate technology into Sakti Cafe's operations and training programs to enhance efficiency, reach, and impact. This may involve utilizing online platforms for vocational training, digital marketing for promoting women-owned businesses, and mobile banking services to facilitate financial transactions and savings.

Advocacy for Policy Reforms: Advocate for policy reforms at the state level to create an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. This includes advocating for gender-responsive policies on access to credit, land ownership, and business registration procedures, as well as measures to address gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

Regular Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress and impact of Sakti Cafe's initiatives over time. This includes collecting data on key performance indicators such as employment rates, income levels, and women's participation in decision-making processes, to inform evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.

Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration: Foster knowledge sharing and collaboration with other women's empowerment initiatives, both within Odisha and beyond. By sharing best practices, lessons learned, and innovative approaches, Sakti Cafe can contribute to a broader movement for women's empowerment and inclusive development.

In conclusion, by implementing these suggestions, Sakti Cafe can further strengthen its role as a catalyst for women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, and community development in Odisha. By continuously adapting and innovating its model to address evolving challenges and opportunities, Sakti Cafe can create lasting positive change for women and communities across the region.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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