

Women Financial Empowerment through Entrepreneurship in India: A Case Study of Women Entrepreneurs in Food Industry

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Abstract:

Women are an essential part of the labor market. Their role in the development of the country cannot be ignored. The growing number of women entrepreneurs in India has had a major impact over the economy of the country. Entrepreneurship improves the position of women in society. This paper highlights the growing influence of women in the field of entrepreneurship and how has that proven a positive step towards their financial empowerment. This paper specifically focuses on the women entrepreneurs in India who have made a mark in the field of food and nutrition.

This paper is divided into four sections. Section one of the paper focuses on the need of ensuring financial empowerment of the women. The second part of the paper highlights the different domains of empowerment that need to be studied and understood. The third section is a case study of different Indian entrepreneurs who have significantly contributed in the field of food and nutrition in India. The last section concludes the paper by suggesting recommendations that can improve the current scenario.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Financial Independence, Economic Activities, Women Empowerment

Introduction:

Since ancient times women have been considered inferior to men in all domains of life. Due to this constant subjugation, women have faltered behind men in different fields. They have mostly been confined to the boundaries of their homes. The lack of access to resources, lack of education and lack of property rights worsened the situation further. Women constitute approximately half of the population and thus, their role in the economic activities cannot be ignored. The lack of gender representation in the informal structures can mostly be attributed to the institutional and social constraints faced by them at large. The position and development of women determines the success of any nation. They are an essential part of the developmental activities of the nation and thus, ending years of oppression is essential for the progress of the nation.

C.Rani in her work, *Potential Women Entrepreneurs* (1986), studies that the main motivation for the women entrepreneurs to start something was a need to be independent and to do work without external interference. J.B Cunningham and J. Lischerson in their book, *Defining Entrepreneurship: Journal of Small Business Management* (1991), defined the different aspects of entrepreneurship and explained that entrepreneurship is all about realizing the profitable opportunities by handling the risks and managing the business operations.

P.C Iona in the book, *The Potential of Female Entrepreneurship as a Regional Growth and Development Engine in the Western Romania* (2003), studies in-depth the motivations of the women entrepreneurs to start their work and the difficulties faced by them. It also highlights the role played by these business women in the success of the economy of any nation. Overall, this paper encourages the spread of entrepreneurial education in all the countries to increase the percentage of women involved in business activities. C.F Babaria and Chheda Mittal in their work, *Women Entrepreneurs in India* (2010), highlight that education make women aware of their rights and encourages them to demand better opportunities, equal pay for equal work and respect from the society.

The framers of the Indian Constitution were aware of the challenges that may arise in the country due to gender inequality. So, they ensured that provisions for gender equality, be it economic, social or political, are enshrined in the Constitution. Since Independence in 1947, India has constantly worked towards formulating policies that would ensure welfare of the women. Article 14 of the Constitutions provides for right to equality before the law for

all. Article 15 ensures that there is no discrimination based on gender and empowers the State to take appropriate measures to support the women. Article 16 provides equal opportunities to both men and women in terms of employment. Article 39 provides for equal means of livelihood for both men and women and also encourages for equal pay for equal work irrespective of gender. Article 42 provides for humane and just conditions of work and providing maternity relief to the women. The formation of National Commission for Women and establishment of the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women have been landmark steps in this direction.

Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in India:

The concept of women empowerment is a very contested issue. It has been spoken about multiple times but hardly any real work has been done in this direction. By empowerment it means, increasing the capability of an individual so that one can make decisions for their own benefit. But understanding all aspects of empowerment is extremely important. It is a critical concept that requires social, political, economic and psychological development of all sections of the society. Empowerment is all about challenging the prevalent power relations in the society. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept and requires a similar approach.

Entrepreneurship is one of the most promising fields of management. The ability of an entrepreneur can be assessed by qualities like the ability to sense opportunities and mobilize resources for attaining success in their pursuits; ability to make competent plans and prompt and sound decision; capability to take calculated moderate risks and initiate new ventures; being innovative, imaginative and prepared to sacrifice; intelligent and hardworking; and having the managerial ability to generate profits (Akhter, 2010). Gender cannot be a defining factor for the development of these abilities. United Nations in 1980s reported that even though women perform two-third of the world's work, still they are paid one-tenth of the world's income.

The role of women as entrepreneurs is significantly increasing across the world. Entrepreneurship not only makes women self-sufficient but only improves their standing in the society and makes them the employment providers. Women self-employment has seen a boom in last few decades. The increasing enrolment of women in the educational institutions has made them aware of the need to be financially independent. Today, a woman wants to ensure her own economic security which is essential for the sustainability of their life. From

being dependent on the male members of the family, who were earlier considered the sole bread earners, women have now taken the route of financial independence breaking the glass ceiling. Not only are women applying for more jobs today, they are working towards establishing their own business entity. Self-employment creates a feeling of ownership amongst women and motivates them towards increasing their productivity. It helps them develop in three domains. Firstly, at an individual level, it increases the skills and capability of the women by making them more responsible and instilling in them creativity and self-discipline. Secondly, at the social level, women become more interactive with the other social elements of the society. They work towards economic gains and for creating more job opportunities for others. Lastly, economic development ensures that women are no more considered inferior to men as far as sharing the financial responsibilities of the household are concerned. Thus, self-employment helps in the holistic development of the women. Many women are choosing the path of self-employment as it gives them a sense of personal autonomy. It enables them to make their own decisions and attain financial independence. It also helps them in entering fields that were traditionally male-dominated. But it is nowhere to say that the path for women entrepreneurs is any easy. In most cases, they face several obstacles related to procurement of finance for their work. Their lack of training and little access to the policymakers poses more problem. Since, they are comparatively new in the market, it takes them time to get used to the expertise required for the functioning of the business. But with proper support from the government and civil society organizations, these barriers can be conveniently overcome.

One popular initiative in India is that of SEWA (The Self-Employed Women's Association), which was founded in 1972 as a trade union for the poor and self-employed women workers. The main aim of this organization was to provide employment to the poor women and to make them self-resilient. Currently, SEWA has a membership of more than 1.25 million women and is spread across 11 states of India. It mainly focuses upon training the women at the grassroots and making them aware of the powerful technological tools to enhance their capabilities.

In the 21st century, a boom in the digital economy has been witnessed. With this came the rise of number of women involved in online business activities as it provides a neutral platform. Digitalization has improved the number of women in the labor market by going beyond the traditional selective industries as earlier presented several social and economic barriers. The

digital media has helped women mitigate barriers like cultural bias of the organization, inequality issues, mobility issues and security concerns.

Women Entrepreneurs in the Food and Nutrition Sector in India:

There is no dearth in the number of women entrepreneurs in India. Last few years have seen a major jump in this number. One dominant field where several women entrepreneurs are being seen is that of food and nutrition. Even though food industry seems to be a very convenient business for women, it is far away from truth. It is a highly competitive business and sustaining it for long is very tedious and requires too much of hard work. Despite these difficulties, many Indian women entrepreneurs have not been able to make their name in this business but have successfully maintained it too. One such example is of Shri MahilaGrihaUdyogLijjatPapad (Popularly known as Lijjat), which started as a women's cooperative in 1959, with a mere capital of 80 rupees and today has an annual turnover of 650 crore rupees. Mainly known for its papad making, this women run organization in Mumbai provides employment to more than 42,000 people.

Another prominent example is Sheetal Saxena, who has successfully started a chocolate and dessert brand, Colocal in Delhi to change the overall chocolate experience in India. Pooja Dhingra, owner and pastry chef of Le15 Patisserie has changed the dynamics of baking business in India by understanding the growing market was vegan and nutritious bakery products. Understanding the love for Italian food amongst the youth in the country, Sambhavi Joshi, started a unique venture, Casarecce during the pandemic, that offers handmade pasta. Due to its distinctive nature, it has become a big brand name in the food industry. Jyoti Ganpathi, despite not being from the hospitality background, today runs a successful South Indian restaurant, DosaInc. in different parts in Delhi.

Nidhi Pant along with her colleagues Vaibhav Tikde, Tushar Gaware, Swapnil Kokate, Ashwin Pawade and Ganesh Bhede, started a revolutionary start-up, S4S (Science for Society) Technologies in Maharashtra, which aimed towards combining technology with business. This initiative focused on tackling the problems faced by the food industry and hinterland farmers by building a sustainable and consumer-centric platform. This start-up has been so successful that it has been able to increase the annual income of the involved small women farmers by 100-200 percent. As a result of this, this initiative has been able to reduce the gender inequalities prevent amongst the rural women farmers. S4S Technologies has now

increased its base to Tamil Nadu and Odisha and has involved 60000 small holder farmers in this venture.

Celebrity nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar, is a big brand name in the field of food and nutrition. She has changed the way people look up to dieting and healthy living. She has now made a career out of it by encouraging people to turn back to their ancient food habits and uncomplacating the eating habits. Another famous nutritionist is Avni Kaul, who has been able to motivate her clients to discover nutrition as a way of active life than just seeing it as a diet. By promoting a balanced way of eating, she has been able to make a name for herself in this industry. Her success has been so prominent that she has been appointed as diet advisors to many national sportsmen and sportswomen by the Government of India. Started with a capital of 10 lakh rupees, her venture today is tentatively estimated at rupees 490 billion. These are just a few examples of exemplary work done by Indian women entrepreneurs in this sector.

What makes all these women unique is their drive to do something different from what is already existing and their constant urge to significantly contribute to the society. Most of them have moved ahead keeping in mind their passion. They have worked not only for their own profits but for the development of society at large. Their success can be attributed to their intellect to cover the field of food and nutrition holistically. They have successfully been able to carve a niche for themselves in this male-dominated industry.

Conclusion:

Even though the number of women in the entrepreneurial domain are increasing, it is the responsibility of the concerned bodies to work towards boosting these numbers. Increasing the educational opportunities, special vocational training courses, special assistance to women entrepreneurs and easy financial support from banks and institutions can be a few helpful steps in this direction. Empowerment is about the growth of an individual and entrepreneurship provides one such opportunity to women.

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