

Problems and Prospects of Rural Women Entrepreneurship in India - A Conceptual Overview

Dr. A. Vennila

Research Coordinator

Associate Professor, Department of Management, Rathinam Institute of Management, Rathinam
College Arts and Science (Autonomous), Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Abstract

The women have been successful in the recent years by breaking their confinement at homes through entering into diverse avenues in terms of employment and professional services. Also, women entrepreneurs have proved to be on par with their men counterparts in terms of business acumen and are emerging as smart and dynamic entrepreneurs. Hence, they may be regarded as the “better half of the society”. The people living in rural peripheries especially women are illiterate and shoulder the burden of the world’s poverty. Rural women are the major neglected sector. Moreover, developing rural women entrepreneurship is the sheer necessity, which helps to overcome the problems of unemployment and poverty. It increases self-employment and reduces unemployment, under employment and disguised employment. This can be achieved only by the joint efforts of both men and women in this concern so as to bring a healthy change, which helps the country to prosper in terms of socio-economic development. It has been an observation by many researchers that push factors and pull factors influence women to start their own business of their interest to meet their economic challenges and social status, which in turn brings them a qualitative change. Keeping this in view, women require adequate education, awareness, motivation, support and encouragement to avail market opportunities with their inherent initiative, creativity, commitment, risk-taking ability, dedication and devotion as their basic investments. This paper envisages with a conceptual overview of problems and prospects of rural women entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Commitment, Creativity, Risk-Taking Ability, Self-Help Groups, Women Empowerment, Women Entrepreneurship.

Introduction

The women are endowed with innate power that can make them as individuals at par with men and also to become successful in their business domains as entrepreneurs. It has been reported by many researchers that entrepreneurship quality is inherent with men and women. It is a natural

process in terms of skills. The only aspect is grooming and outcome of skills into an economic activity, which defines a potential and successful entrepreneur regardless of gender. Women represent nearly 50 percent of world population but they are receiving only 10 percent of world economy in terms of income and own 1 percent of global assets. Women and girls constitute three-fifth of world's population under poor category. Their poverty level is worse than that of men with regard to gender disparities in education, employment opportunities and decision making power etc. The rural entrepreneurship is considered as one of the most important factors contributing to the economic development in the society. In addition to that, promotion of entrepreneurship among rural women is a major step to increase women's participation in rural economic development. Today, rural entrepreneurship is a buzzword in changing rural economy. It is a purposeful activity initiating, promoting and maintaining economic growth. Furthermore, rural entrepreneurship is not newer dimension to our economic growth. The women empowerment particularly in a country like India is possible with participation of women in rural areas. Thus, women empowerment becomes reality by nurturing their innate qualities of entrepreneurship.

The women are the equi-centric resources for creation of life in this world, which accounts for societal development in terms of population. Likewise, an entrepreneur creates enterprise, which generates employment and creates wealth for economic progression, wherein women possess an equal contribution. Hence, economic contributions of women entrepreneurs are a prerequisite for nation building. Entrepreneurship becomes indispensable for a woman to become empowered and economically prudent. However, women in rural areas are deprived for too long from participating in the opportunities and benefits of economic growth and globalization due to the existence of societal norms and unfavourable conditions over years. Today, rural women entrepreneurs represent a group of women who have broken away from beaten track and are exploring new avenues of rural and economic development. It is to be noted that out of total population in 1990s (948 million people) female comprise of 46.50 percent. There are 126.48 million women workforce (representing 28.90 percent of female population) but as per 1991 census only 1,85,900 women accounting for only 4.50 percent of women were self-employed in the country were recorded. In furtherance, majority of them are engaged in the unorganized sectors like agriculture, agro based industries, handicrafts, handloom and cottage industries. As per 2001 census report, there are 38.5 percent of women workers of the total working population including formal as well as informal sector. In the era of L.P.G (Liberalization, Privatization & Globalization) Indian women entrepreneurs are increasingly entering the non-traditional sectors. The number of women entrepreneurs have grown over a period of time and it is clear that their percentage is showing an increasing trend every year. The present article attempted to conceptually understand the role of rural women entrepreneurs in terms of their contribution to the overall growth of nation. In addition to that, the study intended to envisage on problems affecting their growth and development.

Literature Review

The research study conducted by Smitha and Ramakrishna in 2015 found that rather than push factors, pull factors should influence the rural women to start own business of their interest, which brings a qualitative change. Also, it is possible only by the joint efforts of both men and women in this concern, which can bring in a healthy change that facilitate the country's development in time. A study conducted on promotion of female entrepreneurship in Perambalur District of Tamil Nadu has analyzed the prospects and future challenges of women entrepreneurs and identified certain special factors like education, know-how and training, which are responsible to start business on their own (Vasanth, 2012). This is coherent with the findings of the study conducted on problems and prospects of women entrepreneurship in India (Parimaladevi, 2014). A study conducted by Ramanigopal in 2012 revealed that the socio background including factors, type and mode of business and training programmes are the important problems of women entrepreneurs in Erode District at Tamil Nadu. Moreover, Murugesan in 2014 in his research study has found majority of the educated woman entrepreneurs are having qualities such as: challenge seeking, ambitious, enthusiastic, hard working, skillful etc. Yet another research study indicated that women entrepreneurship must be molded properly with entrepreneurial traits and skills to meet the changes in trends, challenges in global markets and to be competent so as to sustain and strive for excellence in the entrepreneurial arena (Pirakatheeswari, 2015). Meenu in 2011 conducted a case study in Ludhiana in which she revealed the reasons for lack of entry of women entrepreneurs and slow progress is due to the attractive schemes for promotion of women entrepreneurship. A comprehensive research study conducted on problems and prospects of women entrepreneurship has provided a system model for entrepreneurship development, which included entrepreneur, enterprise, environment to that of entrepreneurship (Ganesan, Kaur & Maheswari, 2002).

Driving Forces for Women Entrepreneurs

- To attain economic independence
- To establish their own creativity
- To establishing their own identity
- To achieve excellence
- To developing risk-taking ability
- To attain equal status in society
- To have greater freedom and mobility
- To earn additional income to the family
- To achieve women empowerment
- To make use of unutilized and underutilized local resources

Development of Women Entrepreneurship in Rural India

Women form an important part of the labor force and economic role played by them cannot be isolated from the framework of development. The degree of integration of women in economic development is an indicator of economic independence and higher social status of women. The emergence of entrepreneurship is considered to be closely linked with social, cultural, religious and psychological factors, which accounts for their economic participation at large. These changes seem to have become acceptable norms in the context of women at work in India today, with an increasing number of women participation in economic development. Furthermore, women entrepreneurship in India is a recent phenomenon which has gained momentum only in the late 1970s, but became more prominent in mid 1980s. It is during that time, the gender and development approach (GAD) influenced by social feminism, post modern and post colonial theorists look into account of the totality of women's lives, rejecting the public and / or private dichotomy, which serves to devalue the work of women at home. The focus on perspectives on development makes women as 'subjects' rather than viewing them as 'objects' of development, and as change agents than welfare recipients. Around 73 percent of the women entrepreneurs, in India have launched their enterprises in the eighties and this trend appears to continue in the nineties. Women make the second largest target group for identification of potential entrepreneurs, being slightly less than 50 percent of the total population. There are 99.4 million women workers in a labor force of 272.84 million in India as per 1991 census. It is to be noted that women's share in total employment (40 percent), which is slightly higher than their share in the labor force (33 percent). It is not always easy for women to find employment compatible with their family responsibilities and household chores. Thus, many women are attracted to the idea of self-employment in adjoining their premises with flexible hours allowing them to take care of both home and business without any degree of role conflict. In India we face problems of unemployment, disguised employment, under employment and poverty. The rural women entrepreneurship can be the only possible answer to all these problems, as it not only provides employment and source of income to this neglected sector but also integrates them to become associated with business concern.

Government Initiatives

The Government of India has been encouraging self-employment and has started several schemes to promote entrepreneurship among women. Various income generating schemes like Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), Swavalambana Socio-Economic Programme, Pradhan Mantri Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Shahri Swarozgar Yojana, Jana Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) etc. have been launched for facilitating women. The women are encouraged to organize and form Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Cooperatives which undertake activities to generate income for the most vulnerable groups of women. In addition to this, Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) was set up to provide loans to these women who could then become self employed by establishing their own business or small scale enterprises. Women's Development Corporations, operating in a few States in India are promoting entrepreneurship among women at the grass root level. In this way, women at the

grassroots and other levels, who are managing small-scale industries and enterprises, are becoming economically empowered. Moreover, National Skill Development Program (NSDP) has been established under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship to foster micro, small and medium enterprises, which focuses on promoting women entrepreneurship development in rural areas. In furtherance, schemes like MUDRA Yojana Scheme for Women and Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) – ‘SABLA’ has been into existence to facilitate women. The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by NGOs that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite, these efforts of governments and NGOs the growth of women entrepreneurship has not yet achieved at a considerate level with regard to their massive population in a country like India. This is basically due to the constraints and difficulties in availing these schemes and benefits along with its reach towards target beneficiaries in general and women in particular.

Women Entrepreneurs – Constraints & Difficulties

Women are subjected to various constraints that inhibit them from fully realizing their potential for development towards contribution to socio-economic development, which are indicated below:

- Rural women are unaware of the legal provisions and legislative systems that help them to take initiative and avail opportunities to become entrepreneurs. Their understandings as well as their capacity to identify unjustified application of the regulation are weak.
- Increase in the crime rate and lack of security to women is also not permitting them to come out and participate in the business activities at par with men.
- Complex regulatory requirements and lengthy licensing process and costly operations often discourage rural women to start a business.
- Reproductive role in family and the community puts women in a disadvantaged position to engage in entrepreneurial activities.
- Cultural values and social norms hinder the equal participation of women in the society.
- Constrains for Women in unequal access to productive resources and services, including finance and skill upgrading opportunities.

Problems of Rural Women Entrepreneurs

- Small investment
- Tough competition
- Lack of awareness of marketing techniques
- Lack of women entrepreneur role models in rural areas
- Business not in the area of interest
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of motivation

- Lack of family support
- Inability to dream
- Negative self perception
- Lack of computer knowledge and access to internet

Remedial Measures

- Women human resource should be developed in such a way to increase their competitive entrepreneurship, technology absorbing capacities and control over asset management.
- Designing programmes with mainstream strategy to enhance their economic potential through schemes and subsidies thereby improving their standard of living.
- Adequate measures have to be devised to integrate women as decision-makers, participants and beneficiaries in all relevant development activities, irrespective of the sector or type of activity.
- Address the totality of problems rural woman face as entrepreneurs, due to wide spectrum of elements effecting the equal participation in development.
- A bottom-up growth strategy has to be planned, which focuses on transformation and diversification of micro and small scale enterprises run by rural women to growth-oriented activities and on increasing the productive capacity in order to enable them to participate in the main stream economy of nation.
- A holistic structured plan must be designed and implemented in close collaboration with various development partners in different specialized areas, notably education, health, human rights as well as environment and energy.
- Formation of associations and forums for rural women entrepreneurs to voice their specific concerns and advocate change through formal policy making process. This entrepreneurial association may facilitate them to plan and implement common projects. Also, it enhances their entrepreneurial motivation. The association can address and establish the following common projects:
 - Collective marketing
 - Bulk purchasing
 - Group lending and group oriented enterprises
 - Common facilities like sharing machines and equipment, a warehouse or a vehicle or office furniture
- Top level and successful women entrepreneurs in urban areas and country wide should help, involve and encourage rural women entrepreneurs in mainstreaming their activities at national level. For example; women involved in textile and garments business in urban areas and well developed areas can give orders in bulk to rural women entrepreneurs involved in crochet lace business and saree embroidery works.
- Strong rules and measures should be taken and implementation of severe punishments should be made to bring down crime rate and to eradicate sexual harassments on women.

Suggestions

The impact of entrepreneurship development among women with micro-enterprise has displayed a positive impact on family for attaining several promotional agencies and institutions have been set up at national and state levels. It has been found from the conceptual overview that growth of rural women entrepreneurship signifies the economic development of a developing nation. The government policies, reservations and opportunities are being exploited in the implementation process, which directly or indirectly affects the promulgation of women entrepreneurship in India. There should be effective tracking strategies in implementing the schemes focusing on women. It is suggested the online traction for application should be user friendly in regional languages with regard to schemes and benefits associated with such schemes. Also, the security systems for monitoring and enabling access exclusively for women has to be introduced to foster women's participation in entrepreneurship development programmes. This in turn may reduce urban and rural inequalities in general and gender inequalities in particular, which is essential for rural women entrepreneurship development towards nation building.

Conclusion

The overall literacy and gender equality are the pre-requisites for rural women entrepreneurship development. The reason being contribution of women shall enhance the economic progression. Also, it accounts for their role in the society with regard to empowerment and economic well-being of a family and nation. The rural women of India are the integral part of development not only as beneficiaries but also as decision-makers and agents of change. However, the change should come from within to be iconic in case of women than external factors inducing them. The fundamental task of India is to garner these rural women to become successful entrepreneurs so as to meet its future socio-economic challenges.

References

1. Ganesan, R, Kaur, D & Maheshwari, R. C. (2002) "Women Entrepreneurs - Problems and Prospects", The Journal of Entrepreneurship, SAGE Publication, United Kingdom, Vol. 11, No.1, pp. 75-93.
2. Meenu, G. (2011) "Women Entrepreneurship In India: Problems and Prospects", International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, pp.195-207.
3. Murugesan, G. (2014) "Problems & Prospects of Women Entrepreneurs in India", Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research, pp.12-15.
4. Parimaladevi, B. (2014) "Problems and Prospects of Women Entrepreneurship in India", International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), pp.1277-1280.

5. Pirakatheeswari, P. (2015) “Problems and Prospects of Women Entrepreneurs in India in the Era of Globalization”, Pacific Business Review International, pp.128-134.
6. Ramanigopal, C. S. (2012) “A Study on Problems and Prospects of Women Entrepreneurs with Special Reference to Erode District”, International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences, pp.219-230.
7. Smitha, S. S. & Ramakrishna, G. (2015) “Women Entrepreneurship in the Rural Environment”, International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies, pp. 138-143.
8. Vasantha, S. (2012) “Role of Women Entrepreneurs In Perambalur District, Tamil Nadu, Asian Academic Research Journal of Multidisciplinary, pp.12-27.

Bibliography

1. Ramya, N. “Problems of Women entrepreneurs”, Third concept, August 2006, p39.
2. Sugura, B. “Planning for Economic Empowerment of Women” Social Welfare, 2001.