DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA: TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE

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ABSTRACT
Entrepreneurship as an area of discussion in academics has gained a lot of attention in the present time. Even though women constitute nearly half of the total population, their participation in entrepreneurial activities is still very limited. Since women are considered as an important catalyst for economic development of a country, encouraging more participation from them in entrepreneurship will prove to be a significant step for the development of the economy. Entrepreneurship is not merely an act of money making. For women, entrepreneurship is essentially a journey out of poverty and of self-realization towards equality. In the recent times, rural women entrepreneurship has drawn a lot of attention the government, various non-government organizations and researchers in the last few decades. Increasing number of women entrepreneurs in the rural areas has necessitated the active participation of women in the economy. Rural women entrepreneurs engaged in small scale enterprises have capacitated the process of empowerment in the rural areas and the all round socio-economic development of these women. Keeping in mind the increasing number of rural women entrepreneurs, this paper is an attempt to understand the prospect of women entrepreneurship in India in general and in rural areas in particular. Moreover, this paper also looks at the issues that the women entrepreneurs are facing in the rural areas and how the government has helped them in this process.

Key words: Women entrepreneurship, Rural women, Economic independence, Equality, Government initiatives

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1. INTRODUCTION
Entrepreneurship is a significant phenomenon in the present time. With increasing focus on the development of a better economy and society, there has been a growing tendency towards
entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurship is significantly correlated to economic development of any economy because it helps in accelerating growth and prosperity of the nation. (Schramm, 2006).

An entrepreneur is an individual who comes up with innovative ideas and builds an enterprise to make profit. Besides, they also create new wealth and employment opportunities for people thereby contributing to the economy. Thus higher the growth of entrepreneurship, higher will be the growth of the economy. In the developed countries, the high growth in entrepreneurial activities emanates from the active participation of both male and female, thus setting the example for developing and underdeveloped countries. In case of India, since a major part of the country is still rural in nature, a complete growth of an economy is possible only when there is an active participation of rural women in promoting entrepreneurship.

2. OBJECTIVES
The major objectives of the study are mentioned below:

- To understand the prospect of women entrepreneurship in rural India.
- To study the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in rural areas.
- To study the role of government in promoting women entrepreneurship in rural India.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE
The term ‘entrepreneur’ was first introduced by French economist Richard Cantillon (1755) to refer to a person who purchases the means of production to combine them into marketable products with the motive of making profit. As stated by Drucker (1964), an entrepreneur can be defined as someone who maximizes opportunities. In the words of Leibenstein, (1968), an entrepreneur tries to fill the gaps in the market due to increasing market imperfections. Also according to Schumpeter (1934), innovation is a crucial element while studying the concept of entrepreneurship.

Thus, it can be derived from various definitions given by different social thinkers that, entrepreneurship is the process of setting up a new business or an enterprise in order to make profit and enjoy new opportunities. An entrepreneur is a person who comes up with innovative ideas and starts an enterprise in the market.

Tuladhar (1996) stated that, socio-economic development of women is the key to emancipation of women. In this regard, women entrepreneurship has become a vital aspect of economic development. Entrepreneurship contributes to the economic independence of a woman and thereby provides her with the aspirations of a better living standard.

According to Nalawade and Ingale (2013), most of the women entrepreneurs have started their enterprises on their own. They found out in their research that most of these entrepreneurs were motivated by their families to start up the enterprises. Supporting their financial condition of their families, providing for the education of their children, economic independence and seeking a better standard of living are the major reasons behind setting up these enterprises.

Carter et al. (2004), while talking about women entrepreneurship stated that earning a good amount of money and achieving financial security are perhaps the most popular reasons for starting up a new enterprise.

As Habib et al. (2005) stated, the motivation for running an enterprise by a rural woman is an important element which includes a good source of income, a better standard of living, availability of credit, and general security of the household.
Robinson (2001) mentioned in his work that, the reasons behind setting up new businesses by women in rural areas are not always driven by positive factors. Some negative circumstances such as low family income, unemployment, dissatisfaction with a current job, etc. also influence the creation of new enterprises.

According to Sharma et al. (2012), promoting and developing entrepreneurship among rural women not only help them in earning money but it helps to enhance their personal capabilities, their decision making power, and their status in the family in particular and in society.

4. METHODOLOGY
The present study is primarily based on exploratory research framework as it tries to explore the issues and opportunities of women entrepreneurship in rural India. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been collected in order to justify the objectives of the study. These data have been collected from mainly secondary sources such as relevant articles published in journals, books, newspapers, magazines, and from relevant government reports. Moreover, observation of the existing scenario of women entrepreneurship in India plays a significant role in this study.

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY
The present study is very significant in view of the focus given by the government on women empowerment. In the present times, empowering women socially, financially and emotionally is a major aspect not only in the government initiatives but in general it has become a conscious effort in our society. Development of entrepreneurship, in this regard, gives a person a sense of empowerment and courage to stand on their own. Developing entrepreneurship qualities in women in general and in rural women in particular, will greatly contribute to the overall upliftment of their social and financial status. Since literacy is still a crucial issue in rural areas, developing entrepreneurship qualities in rural uneducated women will give them courage to open their enterprises which will surely empower them in the long run. Therefore, the present study is of great significance in India.

6. ANALYSIS
6.1. Prospects of Women Entrepreneurship in India
There has been a steady growth in the numbers of women entrepreneurs in India in the last few decades. There is a growing sense of acceptance among women in India of the fact that developing entrepreneurial qualities one can be independent financially. The increasing women’s participation in employment and entrepreneurial activities, it has the potential to grow India’s GDP by $0.7 trillion by 2025 (MGI, 2015). Also, by promoting entrepreneurship among women, it will enhance equality of genders and women empowerment as well. However, even though business sector in Indian economy is steadily developing, the rate of participation of women is still very low. There is a huge gender gap in entrepreneurial activities. Among the 58.5 million enterprises registered in India, almost 90% are owned by proprietors, and only 15.4% are women among them (MOSPI, 2016).

As stated by reports, the highest share of women entrepreneurship is centered in the Southern part of India because of the favorable environment for women entrepreneurs in the region. The data also suggests that, the North Eastern region of India also shows a favorable environment for women entrepreneurs but no large scale participation is seen as of now. Manipur also has a larger participation of women in entrepreneurship. (MOSPI, 2018)
An economic survey report states that India is currently at third position globally in the numbers of new firms created, however lies low at the rate of formal enterprises on a par-capita basis compared to other countries. According to the survey, there was drastic rise on the creation of new firms since 2014 at a growth rate of 3.8% from 2006 to 2014, the rate increased to 12.2% during 2014 to 2018. However, a large number of India’s enterprises operate in the informal economy which is not included in the data. (The Hindu, 2020)

Women entrepreneurship in India basically involves women from all the sections of society. Anyone who has the resources to start up a business and the skills to conduct a business can open up an enterprise. Because of this liberal environment of entrepreneurship, women are increasingly taking up new businesses and achieving economic independence. Even in the rural areas also women are starting small scale enterprises like handloom and handicrafts, food processing, animal husbandry, dairy farming, beauty parlours, and such other activities. These small scale enterprises are helping them to enhance their potential and skills, to earn money, and to uplift their status in the society. By providing them sustaining support and opportunities, these women can be made to fully utilize their potential and initiate businesses and other income generating projects. Hence, both the developed and developing countries are focusing more on groups like rural women so as to make them explore their skills and engage in income generation. (Chowdhury, 2002)

6.2. Prospects and Challenges of Rural Women Entrepreneurs in India

The rural areas in India are full of so much resource and potential. On the part of the women in these areas, even though there are a lot of uneducated women, but they are quite skilled in different trades. Starting from weaving, making handicrafts, animal farming to making different kinds of food, most of these women are capable of earning money on their own. To support the family income, a lot of women in the rural areas are opening up enterprises on a small scale in their locality. As observed, most of the rural women, they are very skillful weavers. Earlier they only weaved clothes for their own use, but now they are taking it up as a business opportunity. They weave and sell their clothes in the market. Some of them have opened up boutiques and take orders from customers and make clothes as per the requirements of customers. Handloom is an emerging area of entrepreneurship in rural areas which has also gained consideration in the global market. Currently in India, there are more female headed enterprises in rural areas compared to the urban areas (MOSPI, 2018).

In the rural parts of India, the introduction of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has helped in the economic independence of women to a great extent. The SHGs promote micro-entrepreneurship by giving each group credit at subsidized rates which helps the members pursue various livelihood activities in the villages. Not only are they generating income from these activities, but also providing employment opportunities for fellow women in their locality. These microcredit programs help rural women to be more socially empowered (Zaman, 1999).

In India, women enterprises in rural areas are mostly concentrated in the micro segment and are informal in nature. Also they are only on a small scale basis. A huge gender gap is evident therein the rural enterprises which shows very small number of women entrepreneurs in comparison to the number of male entrepreneurs. Moreover, it has been found in studies that not all women owned enterprises are headed by women. There are instances where the enterprise is registered in the name of a woman only to avail the concessional loans and other benefits. The enterprise is actually run by her husband or other male family members (D’cruz, 2003).

Various researches have been carried out to study the status of women entrepreneurs in rural India. They have found out some challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs. In
practice, gender differences still play an important role also in entrepreneurial activities, which are of different dimensions and magnitudes emanating from different socio-cultural settings. There is still predominance of male over female in our society which does not let women enjoy equal status and opportunities as per men. And this issue is more severe in rural areas. Due to this discriminated outlook, most rural women lack the confidence and willpower to open up an enterprise on their own. This gender discrimination often has a cumulative effect of psychological, social, economic and educational factors which act as obstacles to rural women entrepreneurs entering the mainstream. Moreover, rural women do not get the proper exposure for entrepreneurial activities. Most of the time, they are busy bearing and rearing children, taking care of the family members and the household. This sense of duty towards her family creates some obstacles in setting up a business of her own (Prasad, 2016). Most of the times, their ideas are neglected by their husbands or family members. And lack of education, technical skills and trainings also create hurdles in this case. Lack of finance is one of the most common obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in rural areas. Most of them do not own property in their own name which makes it difficult to invest in an enterprise. Even though there are various microcredit agencies in the rural areas emerging rapidly, due to lack of knowledge and confidence, most women could not avail the facilities. It has been observed in most cases in the rural areas that, even though the wife is willing to start an enterprise and even possesses the knowledge, the husband does not allow her to do that. The issue of dependency of women on men is a serious issue in rural areas.

The rural Indian market shows great potential to develop a strong network of rural enterprises if the participation of women is boosted properly. There are several unique businesses which can be started at village levels. Initiatives on the development of production of good quality and high value products, from handlooms and handicrafts to food processing, as a step will go a long way in their economic emancipation. In general, promoting rural entrepreneurship is a key to economic development in many countries across the globe.

6.3. Government Initiatives in Promoting Women Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas

Boosting women entrepreneurship is a significant aspect in the development strategies of our government. The government of India has introduced different policy measures to promote the growth of women entrepreneurship in the country. Earlier to 1970s, the concept of women’s development was only limited to welfare activities. From the 1980s, there has been a shift in this approach to that of a multi-dimensional approach consisting of three important areas of health, education and employment. Since then the government has paid significant attention towards the economic development of women. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, the government has highlighted the promotion of women’s employment in women owned industries. In the Seventh Plan integration of women in development process has been given priority by providing them vocational trainings in accordance with their varied skills and potential.

The industrial policies of the government have given significant importance on the development of entrepreneurs in the rural areas. It has arranged for exclusive Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) for women so as to promote and enhance their entrepreneurial activities. The government has taken up a number of schemes both in the central and the state level to promote self employment among rural women. These schemes include providing assistance to these women in terms of finance, infrastructure, trainings, raw materials, technological assistance, and the market. There are various schemes such as Rural and Women Entrepreneurship Development (RWED), Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC), The Rural Small Business...
Development Centre (RSBDC), and Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI). All these schemes provided by the Indian government focus on promoting entrepreneurial activities among rural women and providing them opportunities and resources to set up the enterprise.

The National Rural Livelihood Mission in India has been monitoring all self-help group activities in the rural areas since 2011. Under this mission, rural women are encouraged to form self-help groups consisting of ten to twenty members and provide them subsidized loans to pursue various livelihood activities. Empowering these rural women by providing them trainings on capacity building and skill development, there is increasing participation of women in livelihood generation activities in rural areas. Under this mission, various projects are going on such as weaving, dairy farming, bamboo crafts, mushroom cultivation, incense stick making, piggery, poultry, etc. which are playing significant roles in transforming the socio-economic scenario of the rural women in India. Trained in entrepreneurship among these rural women is another important project going on under this mission. By availing these trainings, women in rural areas are opening up small enterprises like handloom and craft, beauty parlours, and food processing. In this case, the rising microfinance agencies are also playing an important role. By providing small credits to these women, microcredit agencies are helping to develop small enterprises in rural areas.

Along with the efforts of the government, various non-government organizations (NGOs) are also working in favour of promoting entrepreneurship among rural women. Time and again, various awareness campaigns, workshops and trainings are being organized in the rural areas by these NGOs. Also with the increasing access of women in education has also created a liberal environment for rural women which is helping them to take up new ventures and thereby empowering them in the process. However, there is still a very low rate of women entrepreneurs in rural areas. This whole process of promoting women empowerment and making them aware about the opportunities they can take up needs to revitalize so as to develop entrepreneurship in the grass root level. Also proper trainings and workshops are very necessary to develop rural entrepreneurship. Besides providing schemes for entrepreneurship development, an intensive training should be provided to the youths in rural India as well (Bahl, 2012).

7. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
Following are some of the major findings of the study:

- Developing entrepreneurship is a very significant aspect for the development of our economy. It helps in the creation of new opportunities of employment for the people while contributing in wealth generation of the economy.

- Promoting entrepreneurship among women is very much important for the faster and overall growth of an economy. Encouraging women to take up business as a source of income not only contributes in earning money but also gives them a sense of empowerment in society.

- Since there is huge gap in the participation rate of women in the workforce between rural and urban areas, rural women should be provided with opportunities and be encouraged to engage in entrepreneurial activities. They should be provided with proper trainings so that they can explore their potential and open up enterprises on their own which will not only suffice their family needs but also give them a better standard of living.

- It has been observed that most of the rural women are skilled in different works such as weaving, farming, handicrafts, and such other activities. Promoting
entrepreneurship among them has given these women confidence and proper knowledge on how to operate an enterprise. They are opening up small scale businesses in their localities and thereby getting financial independence.

- However, this process is not as smooth as it looks on the outside. There are many obstacles in the path of entrepreneurship for these rural women. Lack of family support, finance, proper knowledge and guidance, and some existing social limitations, entrepreneurship has not flourished in the rural areas as it should have been.

- Government initiative in this regard is also significant. There are several schemes in India to develop entrepreneurship among rural women. Entrepreneurship development trainings are also provided to women in rural areas along with resources to start up the enterprises. Government efforts in promoting entrepreneurship among rural women have helped the rural women to open up small scale enterprises and earn a good amount of money. However, full participation of rural women in entrepreneurship is still a much anticipated aspect for a more developed economy.

8. CONCLUSION

In the last few decades there is an increasing growth of woman entrepreneurs both in developed and developing economies. It is evident that they are contribute immensely in the overall development of the economy; in improving the state of poverty in the country, increasing the per capita income and generating employment opportunities for fellow members of society. However, the question of gender gap in entrepreneurship is still a pervasive issue in India and across countries. In almost all the countries there is a wide gap between entrepreneurial activities across both the genders (GEM 2015-16 Global Report). Thus more efforts have to be made on the part of the government and in general to promote and make the women aware of their potential in the business sector. Because making a woman stand on her own will not only give her economic independence, but also it will empower her socially and emotionally. In a country like India, the role of a woman entrepreneur is quite challenging. The pressure of both personal and professional life can be quite overwhelming at times. Right from fulfilling responsibilities and duties of the household to managing an enterprise, it needs a very strategic and well planned working schedule. Also in a society where women are still struggling for equality as per men in particular, and as an individual in general, there is a long way to go to achieve full participation of women in entrepreneurial activities. However, women are an inevitable aspect of an economy. Boosting the participation rate of women from all the sections of society will prove to be very fruitful for a better economic growth and a better society. These women are bringing in positive changes in the male dominated social setting by taking up responsibilities of both their families and their enterprises.

REFERENCES


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