

IMPACT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA

Dr. Masha Sandeep*

ABSTRACT

Women entrepreneurs drive global business environment with stability and strength. Unfortunately, their contribution to economic progress has been overlooked for long despite the fact that women work significantly more than men. Many reports have indicated that women work longer and harder with higher achievement rate as compared to men. But entrepreneurship has proved to be a challenge for women as they struggle lot more than their male colleagues to get recognition and position in the corporate world. among the opinions leading to the importance of women entrepreneurship for the better economic growth we have a counter set of opinions backed by stereotypes, societal and family bindings, existing success business models led by men, etc. as well which restrict the women to choose entrepreneurship as a career. The present paper is an attempt to understand the various social and cultural issues along with economic issues that support or restrict the women while making entrepreneurship as their career choice. It also analyses the opportunities available to women, access to these opportunities and problems faced by them. The study concluded that socio-cultural factors significantly affect women entrepreneurs and their contribution towards economy. Many of the socio-cultural factors are identified as highly influential on entrepreneurship.

Keywords: *Women Entrepreneurship, Socio-Cultural Factors, Societal Challenges.*

Introduction

India is a large country with vast economic and socio-cultural diversity in its varied regions with women constituting almost fifty percent of its population. The development issues related to women are still under discussed despite innumerable government initiatives of enforcing women specific legislations to safeguard the rights and interest of women against any biasness or discrimination. The emergence of women entrepreneurs in societies depends to great extent on the economic, social, religious, cultural and psychological factors prevailing in the society. The role of women in the Indian society has also been changing considerably and entrepreneurship can be seen as one of the key factors for such social and economic development. Involvement of women, whose presence was earlier considered to be insignificant and difficult in entrepreneurial activities, has been registered on an increase. But the hidden entrepreneurial potentials of women is yet to be tapped fully as indicated by the effective use of available potential resources with their socio-economic participation at the regional and national levels.

Women education is another reason for such social transformation. It has been observed that women opt for micro-enterprises than major enterprises because of certain unavoidable factors and issues like, limited capacity, low level of confidence, little access to technical information, poor local market conditions, less access to capital, etc. Women need to be properly guided and encouraged to enter into business. Therefore, more and more women are taking professional education and training to cope up with the entrepreneurial needs. They are willing to assume risk, introduce innovations, coordinate administration and control business by their skill and knowledge. So, With the changing socio-cultural environment and increasing educational opportunities, women have cognized their potential to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. Many women are already succeeding in their missions and emerging as successful entrepreneurs.

* Associate Professor, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.

Research Background

Ever since the sixteenth century, entrepreneurship has been considered as an economic activity highlighting the role of entrepreneurs in profit making and driving economic growth Poordariany (2002).

Razlighil (2001) highlighted factors such as job creation factors, factors of improving the life quality, exploiting the resources and activating them for national productivity, factor of fixing market and society gaps and limitations, factors of development, and national and local revitalization, completion stimulating factors, factors of wealth creation and income distribution as some of the crucial outcomes of entrepreneurship.

World entrepreneurship report in 2002 by the Kauffman Entrepreneurship Centre emphasized that women's entrepreneurship had a great impact on nation's economic health. With changing demographics in the developing nations, the role of women in entrepreneurship is being considered as great drivers in bringing stability and strength to the economy.

"Entrepreneur women are considered as those women who establish a business alone or in cooperation, or received it through inheritance. These women accept financial, social, moral and mental risk in order to produce new productions in their competitors market via creativity and innovation" Lavoie (1995).

"Encouraging entrepreneurship is one of the most impactful steps we can take in addressing some of the disparities we see today," said UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri, in her opening remarks at the launch of the Global Coalition of Young Women Entrepreneurs. "Empowering young women to become not only wage-earners but also job-creators is imperative for achieving the 2030 Agenda and for eradicating poverty," she added. Despite the growing evidence that investing in young women's economic empowerment spurs global growth, World Youth Report 2022, focusing on youth civic engagement, noted that globally young women are still less likely than young men to become entrepreneurs, in part due to cultural and societal barriers.

In India, the proportion of working women is contrasting low (24%) as compared to men (76%) when compared with the global figures. Some of the major reasons for this low percentage are the availability of entrepreneurial opportunities to them, dominant Indian societal traditions of resting the domestic responsibilities with women with the backdrop of predominant patriarchal system. In Indian social system women are expected to stay back at home to take care of their families. The responsibility of bringing up children and elder members of the families lies with them. so if they wish to go out and work, their decision is seen as informal and secondary.

Objectives of the Study

- To study socio-cultural factors and women entrepreneurs' perception regarding those factors.
- To understand socio-cultural elements supporting and preventing women entrepreneurs in India.
- To study the challenges and problems faced by women entrepreneurs.

Review of Literature

The degree to which the residents of a country have positive opinions toward entrepreneurship and to the creative and innovative thinking to create value is determined by culture, values, beliefs and norms of a country (George and Zahra, 2002; Hayton, George, & Zahra, 2002). The analysis of the influence of culture on entrepreneurship has received increasing attention in the literature (Mitchell *et al.*, 2000; Mueller & Thomas, 2001).

One of the models which have supported much of the research that try to analyze the influence of culture on the level of entrepreneurship in the country is developed by (Hofstede, 1983). He defined one of the key variables of female entrepreneurship that is related to the assignment of gender roles as the masculinity–femininity dimension and shows the distribution of emotional gender roles.

Working in a business environment is rated as more rational and less emotional. On the contrary, the home is considered the main emotional domain with a less rational component (Acker, 1990). While starting a business, access to finances and necessary resources are also different for men and women. Authors like (Godwin *et al.*, 2006) argue that women are discriminated when trying to access to the resources needed for their business. Usually, female entrepreneurship is stereotyped with features that are incompatible with those observed in entrepreneurs who have achieved success in their business activities. This means that, sometimes, entrepreneurial women receive fewer credits than men because of unfair prejudice such as women are not qualified to manage money.

The lowest rates of business creation in the female population may be due to the unequal competences between men and women that promote patriarchal society. Also, men would start a business activity with the main objective of maximizing their own economic benefit, while women feel more comfortable in service activities that in addition have social and environmental objectives, that is to say, more intangible motivations, leading them in this way to be outside the productive area (Brush, 1992; Bruni *et al.*, 2004).

(Kapoor, P.1974), in her study concluded that women's are getting into job's and continue to be employed even after marriage not only due to sheer economic necessity, but also out of various socio-psycho-situational factors and motivations. The reason of taking up jobs was to make use of their higher education. In her study 40 percent of the women had been found to have started working out of economic necessity and they continued to work when it was no more a "necessity" because they were "used to working" and used to outside life, a particular kind of life pattern giving the freedom to mix with the people and have human contact outside the home, as well as have and independent income and individual status which ultimately results in increasing their empowerment only few notable social scientists have taken an abiding interests in studying the course and pattern of change in the life and attitude of women in India.

(Hayton, George, &Zahara2002) regarded culture as one of the important variables in understanding entrepreneurial activities by suggesting that entrepreneurship is culturally bound.

Women work for various reasons including as (a) who work to support themselves and their families (b) who work while waiting to get married (c) who work to supplement husband's income and raise economic status of the family (d) who work because they want to feel more than breeders and caretakers (e) who work for realizing their vision (Aruna, S. 2007).

(Fry, 1999) suggested that entrepreneurship involves one or more elements described as follows: 1) Setting up a business 2) creativity and innovation 3) Taking risk for the business development 4) Controlling of the business with rapid and continuous growth.

(Razlighil, 2001) suggested that the most important effects of entrepreneurship could be considered as follows: Job creation factors, factors of improving the life quality, exploiting the resources and activating them for national productivity, factor of fixing market and society gaps and limitations, factors of development, and national and local revitalization, completion stimulating factors, factors of wealth creation and income distribution.

(Lavoie, 1995) suggested that entrepreneur women are considered as those women who establish a business alone or in cooperation, or received it through inheritance. He said" these women accept financial, social, moral and mental risk in order to produce new productions in their competitors market via creativity and innovation".

(Fisher, H. 2003) found that five characteristics make entrepreneur women unique in this field. these characteristics are seen as very critical to their success: 1. Communication skills: Many women express their feelings better than their male counterparts, and they can communicate more effectively; 2. Public skills: Many women read the emotions of others face and their gestures , and discover the secrets of others voice very skilfully; 3. Skills to use network thinking: the ability to collect data from the environment make connections between different pieces of data is different with women. Contrary, most men usually classify pieces of information and focus things that seem more important to them. 4. Skills to establish an agreement: successful entrepreneur women are often good at discussing. They try to provide conditions in order to enter discussion with the parties and establish harmonious relationships. It is ability to develop good relationships: maintenance of long-term relationships with business customers need to create amity and friendship, and using effective public relations.

In another study (Rajesh Kumar Shastri & Avanika Sinha, 2009) about affecting women entrepreneurship in India, it was found that women over 39 were turned to entrepreneurship, many of whom were willing to do the service activities than product activities. In this study, it was evident that social factors had greatest influence on women entrepreneurship in India. (Glas & Drnovsek, 1999) in their study indicated that 71% of female respondents believed that they have homemakers problems because of business activities that influences their private life. Therefore, most entrepreneur and manager women ask help from their families and parents to do the housework.

Role of Women in Society

According to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "When women moves forward, the family moves, the village moves, and the nation moves." Women entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important,

untapped source of economic growth during the last decade. With the spread of education and awareness, Indian women have shifted from the extended kitchen, handicrafts, and traditional cottage industries to non-traditional, higher level of activities. Following discussed are some of the avenues in which they have contributed to the society along with their own upliftment:

- **Employment Generation:** Women entrepreneurship is about women's position (individual level) in the society and their role as entrepreneurs (number of firms owned by women and their economic impact) in the same society. They have not only established their own enterprise, but provided job to others also making important impact on the economy of the society.
- **Economic Development:** Women entrepreneurs contribute to the gross domestic product of the country by establishing enterprises and producing goods and services. Due to their entrepreneurial activity, women entrepreneurs bring dynamism in market. Leading to increase in the national income of the country.
- **Better Utilization of Resources:** The involvement of women in industrial development ensure the effective utilization of all available resources (labour, raw materials, capital, etc.). The issue of women in the industrialization process has been emphasized only since 1975, when the equality of womanhood and their contribution to individual development became the centre of attention.
- **Improved Quality of Life:** Women entrepreneurs are now economically independent and take decisions independently. They are now capable of upbringing their children according to their wish. They are providing quality education to their children and a better living standard to their family members. They not only improve their living standards, but also the living standards of others by providing them the means of earning.

Factors Influencing Women Entrepreneurs in India

It is imperative to discuss here several factors that are considered responsible for increasing the level of female entrepreneurship in India:

- Women enter into entrepreneurial activity because regular employment does not provide them with the flexibility, control or challenge offered by business ownership.
- Indian women are becoming more empowered now-a-days with the progressively drafted legislations to offer them more opportunities at various levels.
- Social conditions for women are changing. Their high involvement in necessary entrepreneurship indicates that they use self-employment as a way to circumvent institutional and cultural constraints. with respect to female employment.
- 4.Increased levels of education have played a crucial role in initiating the process of entrepreneurship. It is not only the illiterate that are starting the businesses but those with education and skills are also exploiting profit opportunities.
- Women are known for juggling many tasks at the same time and still producing excellent results as compared to men. A woman can attend a phone call, open and read her email and schedule what else she needs to finish for the rest of the day all at the same time.
- Women are known to be patient with the processes. they know naturally that you must wait in order to receive positive outcomes. This is an extremely important attribute for entrepreneurs to have. Too often we hear of visionary entrepreneurs who gave up on their dreams too soon. They became impatient with the process and lost the battle.
- Women are natural marketers. They are so passionate and enthusiastic about what they choose to do that they just do not stop talking about it. They don't forget to emphasize the benefits of their services to their potential customers. They understand how to emphasize the positive.
- Women entrepreneurs are becoming more and more successful because they are natural collaborators and love doing project together. When they find likeminded women whom they like and think they can accomplish something with by combining their talents they do it.
- One of the primary drivers is a structural shift. There are more women in the workforce. They are resourceful, leaving the workforce to stay home and raise a family, re-entering when the kids are grown or working a flex schedule when their kids go to school.

- One of the biggest reasons women entrepreneurs are now in the forefront is their desire to blend career and life ambitions. They put their passions into practice and it shines through in entrepreneurial endeavours. For them it's not just a job, it's a significant part of who they are.
- One of the biggest reasons women entrepreneurs are so successful is they are more conscious of their customers' needs. For them it's not only the right price but what is just as important is the buying experience.
- Women's ability to nurture the whole relationship is what makes them great as entrepreneurs. Their want of making a wide and deep relationship is one of many things that makes them great entrepreneurs.
- Women are known for their resourcefulness. It is evident from the growing number of work-at-home moms starting a business from their homes while taking care of their families. The reasons may be different such as to augment the income of their families, without leaving their homes or to do something economically and financially productive with their time but the intention behind is to grab an opportunity while it can be done.
- Women are Social: Entrepreneurs now have to be engaged in social media to be successful and women are social by nature. They can engage customers via social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Blogs, etc. in ways that can help jumpstart new businesses quickly and cheaply.

These factors can also be explained as:

- Pressure Factors: (i) Death of bread winner, (ii) Permanent inadequacy in income of the family, and (iii) Sudden fall in family income
- Appealing Factors: (i) Need and perception of Women's Liberation, Equity, (ii) To gain recognition, importance and social status, (iii) To get economic independence, (iv) To utilize their free time or education, and (v) Women's desire to evaluate their talent.

To further understand the impact of various socio-cultural factors and women entrepreneurs' perception regarding those factors and also to understand various socio-cultural elements supporting and preventing women entrepreneurs in India, few studies have been conducted.

A better understanding of these factors and women entrepreneurs' perception towards them can be derived from the recent study of (Kumar, D. 2014) who conducted a study on women entrepreneurs to study the impact of socio-cultural factors on them in Uttarakhand. In this study the data was collected using twenty statements. The following table represents some of the selected statements including six statements that indicated significant influence and six statements showing least influence on women entrepreneurs selected for study.

In another study by (Pradeepika, 2017) in three districts of Haryana state, similar results were recorded of the influence of various socio-cultural factors on the women entrepreneurs in the study. The following table represents a collection of twelve statements that are perceived to have maximum and least influence on women entrepreneurship development.

Table 1: Analysing influence of socio-cultural factors on women entrepreneurship development.

Sr. No.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unable to Decide	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Do you think socio-cultural diversity affect entrepreneurial activities and growth of business?	48.21	13.57	9.28	11.07	18.50
2.	An entrepreneur should be familiar to the values, customs, culture, beliefs and local language of the socialization has positive affect in the business promotion.	39.64	16.00	14.28	8.57	22.14
3.	Socio-cultural support is necessary for establishment and success of any enterprise.	41.42	20.71	6.78	9.01	23.57
4.	Socially acceptable choices should be considered while establishing an enterprise.	45.35	4.28	8.92	17.14	25.00

5.	Women gets less advantage and publicity due to lack of intermediaries, for promoting and selling of their products in the market.	41.66	13.57	14.64	11.56	18.57
6.	An entrepreneur should be familiar to the values, customs, culture, beliefs and local language of the socialization has positive affect in the business promotion.	39.64	16.00	14.28	8.57	22.14
7.	There is a lack of female role model who owns their own business to set an example.	16.07	16.42	13.00	13.21	41.30
8.	An obstructive traditional norm limits the choice of enterprise for females.	18.57	16.07	14.64	11.00	40.35
9.	I do not give importance to prejudice or class biases.	17.14	13.21	15.71	11.44	42.50
10.	Society in general encourages women to start their business.	23.87	12.00	14.50	10.50	39.00
11.	Women entrepreneurs have lack of mobility due to socio- cultural norms and family restrictions.	24.64	12.50	11.00	10.44	41.40
12.	Lack of acceptance as entrepreneur affects the operations of your enterprise.	24.64	11.14	12.72	11.50	40.00

Some of the highlights of the findings of his study include:

- Women entrepreneurs with high socio-cultural status and urban background had significant different in their views, opinions and behaviour than their counterparts from with low socio cultural status and rural background.
- So all the variables had significant impact on women entrepreneurship.
- Research found that socio cultural factors significantly affect women entrepreneurs and their contribution towards the economy.
- In research results socio-cultural factors like Socio-cultural diversity, Socially acceptable choice of enterprise, Lack of intermediaries, Socio-cultural support, Values & beliefs, Socio- cultural stereotypes, Exposure, Socio- cultural environment, Socialization, Public relation, Family responsibilities & pressure, Customer attitude and Society's attitude were identified as most influential factors having major influence on women entrepreneurs. Whereas, Entrepreneurs' role in the economy, Mobility, Acceptance, Traditional norms, Prejudice and Lack of women role model were the factors that did not have considerable impact on sample women entrepreneurs of Uttarakhand.

Challenges and Problems

According to Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs report out of 100 entrepreneurs in India, only 7 are female. This is further supported by Google-Bain report indicating that only 20% of businesses in the country are owned by women, while the World Economic Forum 2021 report also shows a massive gender gap of 72% in India's labour market.

Women entrepreneurs face not only general problems but also need to surmount problems and challenges specific to the women entrepreneurship. Some of these are as follows:

- **Less Women friendly sectors:** The male-centric nature of many industries forces women entrepreneurs to operate in sectors such as education, apparel, and beauty care, among others that are generally associated with women and so called as women-friendly. This male-dominating nature of such industries limits their opportunities and capabilities and restricts them to work freely.
- **Lack of Social and Institutional Support:** it is difficult for women entrepreneurs to secure social support from family and friends. They have to search hard for right mentorship from the business community posing as one of the main challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.

- **Lack of an Entrepreneurial Environment:** Many women often suffer from the lack of a productive and supportive environment that is crucial for a person to become a successful business owner. Women are forced to manage their businesses from home due to household responsibilities resulting in loss of opportunities to go out, interact with the business community, and build their market access. It also slows down their learning opportunities, and access to different resources.
- **Lack of Education:** Unfortunately in India, many budding female entrepreneurs fail to start their businesses due to lack of the education required for running a successful business. As women are getting access to higher education and professional training, they are levelling the playing field.
- **Bound by Traditional Gender Roles:** One of the main challenges faced by women entrepreneurs is to work within the framework of their defined gender roles such as to cook, do domestic chores, raise kids, care for the elderly, and others. Career oriented women are not easily accepted and even looked down upon by the society. Often, they are asked to give up entrepreneurship and take up an easy profession that helps them focus more on family and kids.
- **Restricted Mobility and Safety Concerns:** The poor state of law and order, hostile and risky environment poses serious challenges for women entrepreneurs who need mobility to manage their business ventures. Restricted mobility is also one of the basic problems of women entrepreneurs in India. They cannot travel alone or stay at hotels for business purposes or drive alone without worrying about safety. All these factors come together to restrict the mobility of female business owners.
- **Low Risk-Bearing Ability:** Women often do not have financial freedom and do not have practice in making independent decisions. They also lack confidence in their own decisions, which makes them risk-averse. Though this is gradually changing and women are taking charge of their finances.
- **Poor Funding Opportunities:** Women-led businesses in the country lack access to capital due to the prejudices of investors and other factors. According to a report by Innoven Capital, of all the companies that received funding in 2019, only 12% had at least one female founder. Further adding to it are the instances of many VC firms, angel investors, banks and financial institutions who are reluctant to invest in women-led businesses.
- **Lack of Access to Professional Networks:** According to the Google-Bain survey, female business owners are less integrated with formal and informal networks and so miss out on opportunities to run business. The survey further indicates that over 45% of urban small business owners suffer due to insufficient avenues of network development.
- **Social Construct:** Although the long-standing patriarchal tradition of women being confined to a supportive role and not taking a lead in the business and professional world is changing. Although this view is changing but it is still not free from negative stereotypical thinking for working women.
- **Stiff Competition:** Women still need to prove their worthiness every step of the way to their colleagues and investors to gain their confidence. With changing economic environment and volatile market conditions they face challenges from their competitors as well as competition within their business for leadership.
- **Balancing between Household & Business Responsibilities:** Running a business is a demanding task that often puts women in conflict with their family commitments and even makes them feel guilty about prioritizing their business. It is also expected that women shall take a break from their careers and prioritize their families whenever required.
- **Missing Role Models:** One of the big challenges that budding women entrepreneurs face is having difficulty in finding women mentors and coaches who can groom them and provide meaningful feedback. They also feel the dearth of insightful literature that can provide insights into their professional and personal challenges.
- **Legal Formalities:** Women entrepreneurs find it hard to concentrate on the smooth working of the enterprise as they have to fulfil various the legal formalities required for running an enterprise. Further, the prevalence of corrupt practices in government offices and procedural delays for various licenses, electricity, water and shed allotments pose major challenges for them.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship is a challenge, and even more so if you are a woman. Despite their efforts and expertise, female entrepreneurs often struggle a lot more than their male counterparts to make it big and get recognized within the business community. India is a male dominated society and women are assumed to be economically as well as socially dependent on male members. Therefore, promoting young women's economic empowerment and skills development is a key pillar. While there are enough arguments to support the importance of women entrepreneurship for economic growth and employability, there is a wider context which needs to be taken into account. Stereotypes, family and peer perceptions, as well as the prevalence of male entrepreneurial models continue to have a strong, often limiting, impact on female career choices and their lack of efficacy to engage in business activities. Women entrepreneurs face lots of problems like lack of education, social barriers, legal formalities, low risk bearing ability, male dominated society, missing role models, poor funding opportunities, restricted mobility and safety concerns, etc. Various factors classified as pressure and appealing factors also influence women entrepreneurs. Research also discloses that socio-cultural factors like Socio-cultural diversity, Socially acceptable choice of enterprise, Lack of intermediaries, Socio-cultural support, Values and beliefs, Socio-cultural stereotypes, Exposure, Socio-cultural environment, Socialization, Public relation, Family responsibilities and pressure, Customer attitude and Society's attitude are identified most influential factors major influencing the development of women entrepreneurs.

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