

Women Entrepreneurs in India: Evolution, Current Challenges and Future Prospects

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Abstract

Women constitute essential part of our society in general but due to various discriminatory treatments they positioned behind men in the society, not because they lack capability but because of the patriarchal norms which have persisted in our culture across different time period. Society has created an image of women being dependent, sophisticated, work confine to managing house, which stands opposite to reality. Every living and nonliving thing on this planet maintains equilibrium for their survival. Women has played key role in defining and maintaining the equilibrium as well as progress of society as a whole. Despite the fact, issues like gender equality, non-discriminatory measures have always brought forward. Women are presenting themselves everywhere, like, Work front, education, entertainment industry, etc. there has been progressive growth in the status of women, but still, women have to battle for equal rights and treatment.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Development, Women, Indian Society.

INTRODUCTION

What is Women Entrepreneurship?

Patriarchy has created a misconception of women being professionally undriven and well set to do household chores. For ages, women haven't given with equal educational opportunities and their empowerment was just confined to participation in family responsibilities which resulted in being dependent on male counterparts for their basic needs. Financial dependence of women gives upper hand to male in every decision making. Domains like education, employment, training, entrepreneurship are far reaching due to various societal norms.

This article is aimed at tracking the evolution of women entrepreneurs and various challenges faced by them in India. This article further explores the growthy trajectory of women entrepreneurship and how it is empowering women of India.

There is need of well-built governmental machineries in order to accelerate progress of women and achieving the goal of gender equality which needs political commitment at the grassroot level. Improved policies to meet the needs of the changing world are pre requisite to ensure women equal participation in every sphere of life without any discrimination. Institutional changes are integral part in creating an environment for smooth implementation of policies and programmes for progress of women.

Women centric programmes and policies needs to play two important functions, that is, on one side policies focused at capacity building and empowerment of women and on other gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes.

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It is crucial to expand the arena of gender mainstreaming in order to meet the ongoing challenges of gender equality. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration all the challenges put forward in policy making. Various measures are required from bottom to top approach in order to fuse them into the development of all. Gender equality goals needs to be handled by the government by providing allocation in human development resources and financial sectors to ensure gender equality supported at all levels of government as well as greater international cooperation.

Identifying the increased load of poverty on female, particularly in developing nations, it is prerequisite to recheck, make modifications and execute socioeconomic policies and programmes to make sure equal access to services and development.

Tracing the History of Women Entrepreneurship in India:

The concept of women entrepreneurship is the ability in finding possibilities, strong enough to take risks, and one who creates employment opportunities for others through her company. Industrial Policy Resolution of 1978, for the very first time identified women entrepreneurs as a community in need of support and help. This resulted out from the Declaration of International Decade for Women taken place from 1976 to 1985 as well as the International Conference of Women Entrepreneurs taken place at New Delhi in 1984.

Since past three decades time, women entrepreneurs have captured large enterprises and successfully made their survival in this competitive surrounding. Some of the important policies regarding women entrepreneurs are Human Development Paradigm (UNDP’s Human Development Report of 1995) as well as the Women Empowerment Year of 2000 in India. Hurdles in women empowerment is not only handled by India alone, it’s universal problem. Various declarations accommodated by the UN General Assembly have enhanced in policy development of India.

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women came into existence in 2001, which consists of various number of plans for women empowerment. It consists of seventeen sections, and each section aimed at specific modification target. However, this policy was not that successful but it did bring some positive outcomes. Women empowerment demands positive change in socio-cultural environment. A famous quotation of Dr Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, “One can tell the state of the country just by looking at the status of women of that country”.

Distribution of workers by gender in rural and urban areas (2021-22)-

(Number in lakh)

Sector	Female	Male	Total	Share (%)
Rural	137.50	360.15	497.78	45

Urban	127.2	484.54	612.10	55
Total	264.92	844.68	1109.89	100
Share (%)	24	76	100	

Source- www.msme.gov.in

Progress of women is a cornerstone to overall growth of a country. Women entrepreneur is a one who accommodate herself with changing socioeconomic environment, financial independence and employment provider. A strong desire to do something is an inbuilt attitude of entrepreneurs, who are well fit for providing and giving quality in family as well as professional sphere. Women entrepreneur has a capability and ensures to establish, maintain and run their enterprise in smooth way.

Indian Government has described the concept of women entrepreneurship as an enterprise headed and run by women having a minimum holder of 51% of the enterprise and providing at least 51% of the employment opportunities in the enterprise to female population.

The emergence of women entrepreneurs in India consists of both elements of success and possibilities. It can be seen that incalculable Indian women entrepreneurs have made remarkable contribution in country’s economy. While some have left everlasting effect at global platform and others are adding to the development of the country every year. According to Sixth Economic Census by Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation 2014, highlighted that woman constitutes 14 percent of entrepreneurs in country which comes to 9 million out of 59 million entrepreneurs in India. This comes as a small proportion of estimated 135 million women entrepreneurs all over the world, who have their own enterprise. Importantly, out of these 9 million women entrepreneurs, 4 million are employed in farming and rest 5 million are employed in non-farming industry.

According to International Monetary Fund, by giving equal opportunities in every field of development, India could generate nearly \$780 billion additionally, which is more than 20 percent to its GDP by 2025. Presently, women contribute nearly 19 percent of GDP of the country in comparison to global average comes to 45 percent.

Nirmala Sitharaman, first full time Indian woman Finance Minister tried to look after this problem through launching the joint venture of women self-help groups and government initiative of MUDRA as well as NABARD. Special benefits were also given during Covid 19 pandemic under the flagship programmes of Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

But in reality, before the positive outcomes of these programmes comes up, women entrepreneurs need to handle economic breakdown due to current situation of the pandemic which would aggravate gender disparity. It would be evident that in coming years, India will possess largest working age groups with a workforce around billion people. This

demography would change the socioeconomic status of women in our country.

Status Of women’s employment in India from 2011-12, 2018-19 and 2020-2021.

Status Of Women Employment	2011-2012		2018-2019		2020-2021	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Self Employed	48.7 %	55.6 %	49.3 %	52.9 %	50 %	54%
Own account workers and employer	37.3 %	19.6 %	41.3 %	22.2 %		78.6 %
Unpaid family helper	11.5 %	36%	8.1 %	30.8 %	37 %	41%
Regular wage/salaried employee	21.2 %	13.4 %	26.1 %	22.9 %	30 %	39%
Casual labour	30.3 %	31%	24.6 %	24.2 %	20 %	19%

Source- computed from NSS 68th round and PLFS (2018-19) unit level data on employment and unemployment.

The Changing Role of Women Entrepreneurs Through the Decades:

Entrepreneurship has been imbibed in our country since ages. We have witnessed businesses being transferred on from fathers to sons and businesses getting built from scratch to something big. Men have always had an upper hand in society and this obstructed women to understand their true capabilities. Patriarchal norms and various other societal rules played major hurdle in their growth from running the family business or to do something independently. The pre-assume notion of women confined them to only household work, taking care of children as well as elderly in the family. It is believed that both men and women of the family are held responsible for its accomplishment. If any one of them are running behind, family will not be able to make progress. Likewise, when we see development of a nation, women entrepreneurship plays crucial role in its socioeconomic progress and make remarkable contribution to the development of the country. The progress of the nation would be really low if women entrepreneurs are not taken into account. This situation persisted until 1960s and afterwards women put forward in development of their status and identity and emergence of women entrepreneurs in India.

Decade of 1960s

Indian society has always been under the dominance of male. Women have had no contribution in the decision-making process related to family matters or in their own lives. They have always considered as puppets under the hands of men in the family. Serious problems faced during this period are female feticide, malnutrition among others. According to United Nations Children’s Fund, nearly five million girls were missing. Deaths due to dowry were quite prevalent during this time, as a result, Dowry Prohibition Act came into force. This decade initiated the realization among women to make their independent identity and gain financial independence. Their status evolved from being a homemaker to bread earner of the family.

Women during this decade initiated small businesses from the comfort of their home. They engaged in activities like pottery, bangle making, stitching garments etc. To earn money and establish independent identity. Families started sending their girl child to schools not only boy. This period also saw evolution of women entrepreneurs such as, Ritu Kumar, famous Indian designer established her brand in 1969, which marked some substantial changes in the field of women entrepreneurs. She has a faith, India being massive market for artistic talent, which could be transformed for the betterment of society and change the status of women in our society. She started her career in a very small village of Kolkata due to lack of financial support with block printing.

Decade of 1970s

This decade has witnessed transformation in the demands of women. In comparison with previous times, where majority of women looked up for finding nice groom, having Children’s, roof, etc. Now they are looking up for occupation, having something on their own. They were prepared to maintain balance between their professional and personal life, taking up household responsibilities and managing their occupation well. The decade of 1970s saw the emergence of second wave of feminism and feminist voices against problems of gender disparity, sexual assault, divorce laws, dowry, unequal political representation of women and domestic violence faced by women. This time period witnessed women demanding for their rights and the concept of women entrepreneurship came into being.

One of the remarkable events happened with the setting up of Biocon, which is Indian biopharmaceutical company headed by Kiran Mazumdar Shaw. This enterprise has covered nearly every country worldwide, it carries out the demands of nearly hundred and fifty countries globally. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw has faced various hurdles but she stood by it and had dedication to set up her own company. There was significant rise in women workforce, women entrepreneurs during this decade. Crime rate against women increased and this time period witnessed working women, balancing their personal and professional spheres well.

• Decade of 1980s

This decade witnessed new age technology and emphasis on professional education training. One of the most remarkable events of this decade was work done by Mary Roy, a women activist who championed a lawsuit demanding equal rights to a girl child in her parent’s property as a male counterpart.

Despite competition in marketplace, Vandana Luthra Curly and Curves (VLCC), which is one of the largest wellness enterprises headed by Vandana Luthra, currently spread across fifteen countries. She was determined to do something on her own and uplift other women’s, therefore with a small loan from bank, she captured her own identity. This period saw the rise of female child in school arena, they no longer confined to house and taking up of professional education.

• Decade of 1990s

This decade has seen nearly two lakhs’ women entrepreneurs evolving and giving tough competition to men in country. Women in this decade has gain confidence and became more goal driven. Foreign aids to support the establishment of women entrepreneurs has increased. Previously women were looked upon as puppets, workers under assistance, industrial policy of 1991-initiated number of opportunities for both men and women in society. This policy aimed at globalization, Liberalization, as well as privatization. With the progress of the country, women role in development increased.

As the development of the country started, women can be seen capturing every industry, trading or service industry. Some women entered as entrepreneurs to expand their family business while others wanted to do something on their own, to create their own niche, and some started to finish their family debts.

The planning commission of India and Indian government acknowledged contribution made by women entrepreneurs during this decade. Formulation of policies which served as an aid to women in order to reduce poverty. In this time period, government launched schemes like Prime Minister Rozgar Yojana and Entrepreneurship Development Programmes were established to enhance and support entrepreneurial attributes among women. Scheme of “Women in Agriculture” initiated started to impart training among rural women having small piece of land. Khadi and Village Industries Commission initiated measures in order to generate employment opportunities among rural women. Scheme of Women Cooperatives introduced to lend support to women involved in agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture etc. with the financial aid from the Government.

• 21st Century

Various hardships pointed towards women entrepreneurs; they have now acknowledged as equal partners as their male counterparts in the development of the country. Women were captivated to enter into economy is for being financially independent, being support system and not

burden.

Major Start-ups run by women-

Brand	Founder/ Co-founder	Date of Establishment	Total Funds Raised	Market Valuation
BYJU’S	Divya Gokul Nath	2011	US\$ 8.5 billion	US\$ 18 billion
NYKAA	Falguni Nayar	2012	US\$ 148.5 million	US\$ 12.5 billion
MOBIKWIK	Upsana Taku	2009	US\$ 380 million	US\$ 750 million
ZOLO	Isha Choudhary	2015	US\$ 90 million	US\$ 100 million
THRILLOP HILIA	Chitra Gurnani Daga	2009	US\$ 1.24 million	US\$ 4.48 million

Source- ibef.org

Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs-

Three Categories of Women Entrepreneurs:

- The first category of women entrepreneur’s areas those who have educational qualification and professional training, who take up the ownership of enterprise and manage it well.
- The second category of women entrepreneurs are those who do not have educational and professional training in management but have acquired practical experience.
- The third category of women entrepreneurs are those who are in large numbers with low income and hardly any

educational qualification and training. They need government and non-government aids and helping hand in order to encourage their enterprise.

According to population census 2011 in India, women form nearly 50 percent of the total population of the country. Women go through various drawbacks as well as discrimination at every level in comparison to men in field of education, workplace, income level etc. In 2001, government of India established The National Policy for Empowerment of Women with aim of providing women their rightful status in society through socioeconomic empowerment.

Firstly, women being controlled by men for so long in the name of patriarchy, women felt the urge to do something in order to establish their personal identity as well as for personal growth. Secondly, women are determined enough to take chances and challenges to establish their position in society. Their will power and dedication has supported them in every aspect. Lastly, governmental support and special benefits assisted them in setting up of their company.

Since ages women confined to houses doing daily chores. With passing time, women able to create her identity and destroyed those confined zone of house but are still residing in walls of society, where she fights the stereotype beliefs of the people. Some of the challenges they face are-

- **Societal Belief-** Society plays significant part in forming the status and identity of women. Women get crushed between societal norms and their aspirations. They are not free enough to decide what they really want to do. They lack support system as society believed that taking care of house is the primary objective of women’s life. Working women are not acknowledged as much as homemaker as society consider it as their primary goal.
- **Education-** Since past education was limited to men in society and women were not being part of it due to gender roles assigned to them by society which was limited to the housework. These are the reasons behind low literacy of women as women denied education and married off at very early age. This led to disregard of their rights and obstructing their opportunity to develop.
- **Poverty-** This plays crucial role in limiting the development of women on the road to being entrepreneurs. It has been seen that majority of women are subordinated by their male counterparts as they are financially dependent on them. Unequal pay scale between men and women has severely affected women entrepreneurs. Due to these, women were highly controlled and live according to their wants by men.

Percentage of men and women proprietors (2020-2021)-

Number of Workers	Percentage of men proprietor 2011-12	Percentage of men proprietor 2020-21	Percentage of women proprietors 2011-12	Percentage of women proprietors 2020-21
Less than 6 workers	71	72.5	95	95
6 and above but less than 10	12.7	13.2	2.1	1.9
10 and above but less than 20	6.4	5.1	0.8	0.7
20 and above	6.8	5	0.9	0.7
Not known	3.1	4.2	1.2	1.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Source- Computed from 68th round and PLFS (2018-19) unit level data on employment and unemployment.

Government Policies and Programmes Supporting and Encouraging Women Entrepreneurs-

Women life is full of difficulties whether they take up jobs or not. It is persistent fight to mark their own identity in this male-controlled society. There are some governmental policies and programmes to serve the needs of women entrepreneurs.

- **Establishment of Self-Help Groups-** A Self Help Group is an association of individuals coming together voluntarily to bring out result of common problem. Preferably individuals from common socioeconomic backdrop. In rural India, there is huge load on women as they perform numerous functions like collection of woods for cooking purpose, taking care of children, running family, and fetching water. In labour force, they manage to earn around Rs 50 whereas their male counterparts earn Rs 70 per day. The concept of self-help groups proves to be helping hand in getting benefits of better credit facility, better education training, and knowledge development.
- **Coming of women in progress of country-** Women need to be equally involved in all developmental activities of the country. Government has successfully set up machineries for assisting women in transmitting vocational training, providing assistance to showcase their products in marketplace as well as their contribution in decision making process.
- **Women Entrepreneurship Platform-** The Women Entrepreneurship Platform was coming into existence by National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) in

association with Small Industrial Development Bank of India (SIDBI) to give a platform to promising women entrepreneurs in India. Three pillars of Women Entrepreneurship Platform are:

Firstly, Ichha Shakti: This showcase confidence and determination of women to work as entrepreneurs.

Secondly, Gyaan Shakti: This showcase the strength of knowledge that can be given to women entrepreneurs to expand much faster.

Lastly, Karma Shakti: This showcases the assistance given to women entrepreneurs in expanding their enterprise. This programme aims at building women entrepreneurs as well as speed up the journey.

- Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development Scheme (TREAD): This program focuses on economic development of women by providing required support system to build entrepreneurial expertise, training, personality development with the help of NGOs as well as counselling facilities. Indian Government aims at building skill as well as providing financial aid by providing 30% of the total amount of project and remaining 70% needs to be taken care by a loan.

- Udyogini Scheme- This program focuses on women who are employed in the agricultural activities and have income equal to or less than 45,000 with special emphasis to disable, widow as well as backward category women.

- Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)- this scheme provides subsidy to women beneficiaries. Nearly, 2,22457 projects have been incorporated to women beneficiaries for last 5 years.

Women Beneficiaries under PMEGP Scheme-

Micro Enterprises/ Projects: In Year	Women Entrepreneurs (Beneficiaries) under PMEGP
2016-17	14768
2017-18	15669
2018-19	25434
2019-20	24720
2020-21	27285
2021-22 (Upto 31.12.2021)	20598
Total	222457

Source-www.msme.gov.in

- Annapurna Scheme- This program came into existence by Government of India for women who are

willing to set up a business of food catering. Indian Government offers a loan of 50,000.

Percentage Distribution of Enterprises by Owned by Male/Female Entrepreneurs (2021-2022):

Category	Male	Female
Micro	79.56	20.44
Small	94.74	5.26
Medium	97.33	2.67
All	79.63	20.37

Source- Annual Report, 2021-22 Ministry of Medium and Small Enterprises.

Concluding Observation-

Patriarchy in society has critically affected women entrepreneurs across globe. It is prerequisite to understand the consequences of patriarchal society. In order to facilitate growth for both men and women it is crucial to have policies and programmes equally balanced. Government policies should accommodate needs such as- building self-confidence and creating awareness in females about the importance of women Entrepreneurship and financial independence. Providing technical assistance and social security.

The number of women-led and founded startups in India has increased multi-folds. Out of 136 unicorn startups in India, five are women-led, and this number is only going to go up. “Startup founders like Falguni Nayar, Divya Gokul Nath, Ruchi Kalra, Vandana Luthra, Kiran Majumdar Shaw, and many more have proved their mettle as excellent entrepreneurs and inspire millions of people every day. People are slowly realizing and appreciating the value that women entrepreneurs and women, in general, bring to the table.

As indicated by the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2021, India has slipped 28 spots to be positioned 140th out of 156 nations, among the lowest in South Asia. The gender gap in India has extended to 62.5 per cent, generally because of women’s insufficient portrayal in legislative issues, technical and influential positions, a decline in women’s workforce support rate, helpless medical services, a slacking female-to-male proficiency proportion and pay disparity.

In an era of women breaking barriers and paving their way into the business field in a largely male-dominated world, there is no reason to restrict the entry of younger minds and explore their entrepreneurial ideas to become successful businesswomen. Women- led startups are paving the way to disintegrating the great gender divide that has played a predominant role for decades now. “It is quite refreshing to witness the change in the arena of entrepreneurship when it comes to women arising as successful business leaders. The purview of opportunities has definitely augmented, providing the necessary support and empowerment that budding women entrepreneurs require. A rise in the number of government schemes for women entrepreneurs like the Annapurna scheme, Mudra Yojana Scheme, etc. is reflective of the same

thought process. Women's entrepreneurship will rise in the next few years. Several women forayed into entrepreneurship in the middle of the lockdown and the pandemic, forming their own empires.

Previously woman having personal bank account in India was considered sign of achievement. Regardless, currently there are 16 million women owned enterprises, with women leading the start-up initiative. This demarcation simply puts forward potential power of women of India and their conviction. In coming times, it could be seen that women dominating the workforce and enhancing the future of Indian economy.

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