

THE CHANGING SCENARIO OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract-Delivering multiple roles effortlessly every single day women are undoubtedly the backbone of any society. Doting daughters, caring mothers, competent colleagues and a wide range of many other roles are played by women around the world. Women empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Easy financing of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is a strategic approach and an inevitable aspect for the overall development of women in this globalised and competitive business scenario. Worldwide, the micro and small enterprises play a leading role in boosting economic growth, sustaining livelihood and in enhancing equitable regional development. The present paper explores the vital opportunities existing in the entrepreneurial sector for women to be employment providers rather than job seekers, to be change agents rather than welfare recipients by starting their own micro, small or medium enterprises.

Key words: globalisation, women empowerment, women entrepreneur, MUDRA banks

Introduction

By definition women empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic political and legal strength of the women to ensure equal right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights such as

- freely live their life with a sense of self- worth, respect and dignity
- have complete control of their life both within and outside of their home and workplace
- to make their own choices and decisions
- have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities
- have equal social status in the society
- have equal rights for social and economic justice
- determine financial and economic choices
- get equal opportunity for education
- get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias and
- get safe and comfortable work environment

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has emerged as a highly vibrant and dynamic sector of the Indian economy over the last five decades. MSMEs not only play crucial role in providing large employment opportunities at comparatively lower

capital cost than large industries but also help in industrialization of rural & backward areas, thereby, reducing regional imbalances, assuring more equitable distribution of national income and wealth. MSMEs are complementary to large industries as ancillary units and this sector contributes enormously to the socioeconomic development of the country. They play an important role in the socio economic transformation as well as the sustainable growth of a country like India. Micro, Small and medium enterprises, a sector that best represents women entrepreneur's productive activities can play a key role in sustaining economic growth and equitable development in developing countries. They constitute a seed bed for entrepreneurship development and are having an important role for private sector-led growth. Therefore, this paper focuses on the level of growth of women MSMEs in Kerala and tries to explore the issues, strategies and recent developments related to women MSMEs of Kerala.

The Specific Objectives

- To probe the significance of MSMEs in providing an avenue for the economic upliftment of women
- To find out the level of growth of women MSMEs in Kerala after globalisation.
- To assess the emerging dimensions related to women MSMEs of Kerala.

Research Methodology

The study is based on secondary data mainly drawn from various records and publications of Directorate of Industries and commerce, State Planning Board and District Industries Centres. Reports, official records, books, journals, news papers and unpublished works were extensively used as secondary data for enriching the study.

Women's economic empowerment is an inevitable part of development discourse. Excluding women from the mainstream development program, institutionalization of a sustainable development process is just unthinkable. The Socio-economic development of a country is attained only when the society creates a large number of entrepreneurs from various strata of population. After introduction of economic reforms and the policies of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation, the scope of economic development, modernisation, diversification and expansion has enlarged the fields of economic and entrepreneurial

activities. In this context, encouragement of entrepreneurial activities by women is one area that needs high priority. The alarming size and fast growth of unemployed and educated, women in Kerala warrant accelerated expansion of diversified business activities.

MSMEs exist in large numbers and employ many people in the industrialised countries. This fact is considered as the major reason for MSMEs development in the developing countries, including India. In the case of India, the peculiar capability of MSMEs in bringing about faster development was acknowledged even during the early years of the plan era. It is estimated that small and micro enterprises contribute as high as 90 % of enterprises in most countries worldwide and are the driving force behind a large number of innovations and contribute to the growth of the national economy through employment creation, investments and exports (Govt. of India Report, 2007). Since the enactment of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006 in India, the small and medium sector are often referred to under common term 'Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with effect from October 2, 2006.

Entrepreneurship offers tremendous opportunities for women across the world by opening doors to greater self-sufficiency, self-esteem and growth. Women in advanced countries own more than 25 % of all businesses. Women in business with their commitment and integrity will make a difference to the field of business as they give importance to economic and entrepreneurial development and innovation. As their numbers grow and as their businesses prosper, they will change how the world does business. There are 2.15 lakhs registered and 19.24 lakhs unregistered women entrepreneurs in India as per the IVth All India Census of MSME. As per the Business Report 2014 and the Survey conducted by IFC, women entrepreneurs in India contribute 3.09% of industrial output and employ more than 8 million people. This globalised environment expands the business prospects of women entrepreneurs with MNCs in other states. Therefore, the challenge for the government in developing the women entrepreneurs is to provide an environment that is conducive to encouragement to compete in the present competitive arena.

The Government of India has taken several efforts to enhance the spirit of entrepreneurship among women from the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards. The literacy status, sex ratio, health indicators, empowerment of women and all other indicators show that Kerala women are far ahead of their counterparts in other parts of the country. But, with regard to the productive activities, the same level of achievement is not found. The dearth of women in the business sector of Kerala, despite the improvement in education presents a paradox which needs great attention today. The realisation that women can make several contributions to the economy has led the Kerala government to formulate several policies and programs which focus on the development of entrepreneurial activities of women.

Existing Literature

Priya (2009) in the attempt to identify problems unique to women in setting up and running their enterprise has noted that women entrepreneur are reported to encounter more problems than their male counterparts. Family as well as the whole social and economic system discriminates against women. Nancy et.al (2007) in their study 'Female entrepreneurship-Implications for education, training and policy' discussed the role of female entrepreneurs in terms of economic activity and d new job creation. The book aims to advance understanding and effect real change in the field of female entrepreneurship in a number of strategic ways. It aims to promote the study of female entrepreneurship as an issue capable of strategic and detailed analysis. The study discusses the nature of women entrepreneurs, characteristics and their behavioural patterns, challenges they manoeuvre through the new venture creation process. Kuntala Lahiri (2006) has studied about the success of the group approach in rural microfinance among women which has inspired the tendency to look at all networking as essentially good and desirable in rural community development, without acknowledging the entrenched caste, ethnic and lead to diversities among women. Archana Jain (2006) in his study about micro credit micro enterprises linkage in generating self-employment says that micro credit can play a crucial role in canalizing potential through improving their access to credit and enabling women to launch micro enterprises. Shelina (2005) in her study about women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh found that most of the women entrepreneurs started business to innovate and handsome earnings encouraged them. They have an influence on family decisions and could improve their social position.

Subhaand Kirthika (2015) focussed on the motivating factors influencing women entrepreneurship and the identified factors were autonomy and adequate income, flexible working environment, opportunity to use and develop human capacity, inducement of empowerment and growth and promotion of societal responsiveness. Varinder Randhawa (2014) found that major problems of women entrepreneurs of Punjab were personal and socio-psychological in nature and suggested pre-requisites as education, skill training, infrastructural support and provision of credit. Juao Costa and Harshal Shah (2014) made a case study of a successful Goan Woman Entrepreneur who proved her abilities in providing authentic Goan dishes, popularly known as 'Martins Corner' by diversifying their products into different matters and with uniqueness and authenticity of Goan cuisine. Sujatha (2013) in the study of women entrepreneurs in Theni district of Tamilnadu found that the major problems are high rate of interest and red tapism in government agencies, there is scarcity of quality raw materials and indiscipline among labourers and most importantly there is high cost for power. Swetha (2013) in the study of women entrepreneurs of Andhra Pradesh, assessed their economic empowerment by taking four variables such as access to income, control over own income, access to savings and control over family resources and concluded that there is substantial improvement among freedom in income usage and more control over resources.

Table. 1
Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises on the Basis of Investment

Enterprises	Investment in plant and machinery excluding land and building	
	Manufacturing Enterprises	Service Enterprises
Micro	Up to Rs. 25 lakhs	Up to Rs.10 lakhs
Small	More than Rs. 25 lakhs and up to Rs. 5 crore	More than Rs. 10 lakhs and up to Rs. 2 crore
Medium	More than Rs. 5 crore and up to Rs. 10 crore	More than Rs. 2 crore and up to Rs. 5 crore

Source: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act, 2006

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSMED) Act was notified in 2006 to address policy issues affecting MSMEs as well as the coverage and investment ceiling of the sector. The Act seeks to facilitate the development of these enterprises as also enhance their competitiveness. It provides the first-ever legal framework for recognition of the concept of “enterprise” which comprises both manufacturing and service entities. It defines medium enterprises for the first time and seeks to integrate the three tiers of these enterprises, namely, micro, small and medium. The Act also provides for a statutory consultative mechanism at the national level with balanced representation of all sections of stakeholders, particularly the three classes of enterprises; and with a wide range of advisory functions. Establishment of specific funds for the promotion, development and enhancing competitiveness of these enterprises, notification of schemes/ programs for this purpose, progressive credit policies and practices, preference in Government procurements to products and services of the micro and small enterprises, more effective mechanisms for mitigating the problems of delayed payments to micro and small enterprises. MSMED Act, 2006 classifies MSMEs into three types as given in Table.1. Of these three types of MSMEs, micro enterprises require the lowest investment and hence the most affordable for new entrepreneurs, especially for women. They have huge potential for equitable and balanced development for women in a nation like India. In order to promote MSMEs in the country, the Govt of India has created Micro Units Development Refinance Agency (MUDRA) Bank, which will refinance Micro Finance Institutions through a Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. It will enhance credit facility to MSME sector. The MSME sector registered a steady growth for the period of 1992-2006 in the number of units, investment, production, employment and exports. The number of MSMEs in India rose from 73.5 lakhs in 1992-93 to 123.2 lakhs in 2005-06 with an average growth rate of 4.07 per cent over the previous years. As per MUDRA bank regulations, majority of the women MSMEs will be benefitted in the near future. As per the latest reports, around 66 lakhs enterprises, including 24 lakhs women MSMEs have been benefitted through MUDRA loans. A total of 42000 crores have already been disbursed among various micro, small and medium enterprises as per MUDRA funding system. The MUDRA loans are made available through various commercial banks under three ways such as Shishu (Availability of loans upto Rs.50000), Kishore (Availability of loans ranging between Rs.50000 and Rs. 5 lakhs) and Tharun (Availability of loans between Rs.5 lakhs and Rs. 10 lakhs). Women MSME units can effectively utilise these loans carrying less formalities and low rate of interest. Normally the rate of interest varies from 7 percent to 12 percent.

Women entrepreneurship in Kerala

Kerala is the only state in India where women outnumber men not only in population, but also in unemployment among educated, but the number of female headed households (excluding men in gulf countries) in Kerala is greater than the national average. (National average-8%, Kerala-22%). In Kerala, the unemployment rate is higher in urban areas as compared to rural areas under all approaches of measurement. While comparing the unemployment rate of male and female labour it is seen that Unemployment Rate is much higher among females as compared to males, the female UR is estimated to be 26.2 per cent whereas for males, the UR is 3.4 per cent. In urban areas, the female UR is estimated to be 37.5 per cent; whereas the same in rural area is 21.4 per cent. It is high time that the developing state like Kerala utilise their women force to the optimum level. It is imperative to note that men alone cannot break the shackles of poverty, unemployment, inequality and development. Active and equal participation of women in the accomplishment of this herculean task is dispensable. With the qualities of dedication, hard work, perseverance and honesty, women are capable of producing much better results than men to accelerate the overall growth and prosperity of the state, it is very important to create opportunities for socio-economic development of women. Growth of women entrepreneurship would be supplementary and complementary for women in particular and country in general. Their enthusiasm and skill in constructive performance is met and simultaneously they can earn enough for proper maintenance and improvement of their socio-economic status. The devotion of duty and her dedication are two apartment forces which will help her to play the dual role as house wife and as entrepreneur without any conflict. Above all, the Entrepreneurship Act as a ladder by which she achieved a prestigious status in the society. In the past, women were engaged in Kitchen, doing Knitting and nursing Kids (3Ks), and now they are slightly changing from the 3Ps (Powder, Pickle and Papad making) to the emerging fields of Electronics, Engineering and Energy (3Es).

Emerging Dimensions

An important development emerged in Kerala is the initialisation of a new brand for marketing various products produced by Women MSME SHG units. Food items and Fast Moving Consumer Goods produced by Women SHG lead MSMEs of Kerala will be available with a new brand name ‘Indian Woman’ under the leadership of Mosons Group. They are planning to provide raw materials at cheap rates to at least one women MSME unit from every village of Kerala. Mosons Group is focussing on marketing quality products produced by women MSME units of Kerala under the new brand name. Indian women have increasing opportunities, but in the globalised arena, they would succeed only when they would be able to stimulate innovations for new products and new services and develop new ways of doing business. IT has changed dramatically and providing greater opportunities for personal growth and business success. There are a lot of business opportunities available for women in this current globalised scenario like Virtual Restaurants-There are ample opportunities in the field of start-up of edibles supply through websites and mobile apps; Cloud Based Softwares- Today’s available softwares such as HR payroll, CRM accounting can be transformed into cloud softwares. Those entrepreneurs who will be able to develop cloud based softwares and applications can capture the market early; Online Shopping Stores-There is ample scope for multi-branded, multi-category and multi product online stores. Stores which are dealing with exclusives like new born baby products, special toys, art work furniture etc. will be able to get maximum gain; Personalised Gift Portals-people often like to possess personalised gifts like photo-printed T-shirts, Coffee mugs, pens, key chains, visiting cards, boxes, mobile cases, valets, diaries, pen drives etc; Content Writing-In order to attract more consumers, companies often adopts the services of content writing units which mean they will prepare attractive

contents through social media sites and various websites and blogs; Cosmetics, Beauty Parlour and Fabric Painting- These were considered to be the most promising business for potential women entrepreneurs to venture into. This includes beauty therapy, health care services and slimming business. The advanced technology and modern gadgets used in parlours will increase credibility in the eyes of modern customers; Green Business-Green entrepreneurship can be tapped by the women folk by adopting waste minimisation strategies and eco-friendly fresh products; IT Enabled Services-Customer Interaction Centres, Tour operation, medical transcription, financial services etc. with the help of technology can be made use as an opportunity for women entrepreneurs; Event Management-There are ample opportunities in the fields like Event organising, equipment handling, sound and light services, stall management, flower decoration and even souvenir making; Business Process Outsourcing-When large companies outsource some of their activities to small enterprises, it can be utilised by women entrepreneurs; Knowledge Process Outsourcing-When large firms outsource their high end knowledge work to small firms, women entrepreneurs with necessary expertise can succeed in areas of design, animation, data analysis and interpretation, mail order business, consultancy service and network marketing; Educational Service Outsourcing-Women entrepreneurs can impart tuition notes through online and tutoring for competitive exams, curriculum design, course materials preparation and delivery.

Growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), especially F-Commerce(Face book Commerce- the flash sales through social media).has become an important part of everyday life for consumers during 21st century. The 21st century has become a knowledgeable society and women are taking part in every field including IT. It is realised that there is an increased need for understanding the recent developments in ICT and its effect on women's empowerment. ICT allow women's increased participation in political, social and economic arenas and supports empowerment for themselves, their families, and their communities. So E- commerce and F-commerce are tomorrow's tools which will facilitate the empowerment of women.

Conclusion

Developing entrepreneurship among women is important for the all round development of the country. If efforts are made to develop women entrepreneurship it will not only make them economically independent and empowered but it will also help in adding to the national income. The present study examined the level of growth of women MSMEs in Kerala after globalisation and the various issues and recent strategies related to women MSMEs of Kerala. The foregoing analysis based on the views of selected officials revealed some important facts. Training on managerial inputs and interaction with successful entrepreneurs are the two important aspects which are needed for the growth of women entrepreneurs in Kerala. Officials have opined that non-cooperation of financial institutions and women entrepreneurs' 'initial excitement without actually studying market and lagging later on' are the reasons for their slow growth. Even though the mission and publicity related to women entrepreneurship in Kerala is quite good, product planning and creation of brand image from the part of women entrepreneurs was not up to mark. Emergence of development providers and new marketing agencies will be able to do a lot for the promotion of women MSMEs in this global competitive arena.

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