

# DALIT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CASE OF RAMANAGARA DISTRICT- KARNATAKA

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## Abstracts

*This paper is based on an empirical research conducted in Ramanagara district. Ramanagara constitute 19.44 percent as per 2011 census. The study reveals that 16.54 percent to the respondents have become entrepreneurs. However, their process of modernization has not broken the bond of caste–occupation, but certainly the modernization of their traditional hereditary occupations is taking place. The scheduled caste groups have found opportunities of mobility not only in their age old occupations but have also ventured into some other entrepreneurial activities which earlier were in the reserve of higher castes. Therefore, it is predominantly the better off amongst the scheduled castes who have become business and industrial entrepreneurs. The explorations into their background reveal that they are young, educated and largely the natives of the place. The study reveals that through entrepreneurship the scheduled castes have empowered themselves in the political and social spheres. The study explores the type, extent, nature and performance of their entrepreneurial activities and how through entrepreneurship they have empowered themselves economically, socially and politically.*

*Key words : Entrepreneurs, Occupations, Opportunities, Predominantly.*

## INTRODUCTION

Indian society has historically evolved on the principle of hereditary occupations where the choice of occupation was absent for the people. Occupations were not simply inherited in the family; rather a caste was identified with the hereditary occupation. Sometimes even the name of the caste corresponded with the occupation. As we move to the castes lower in the hierarchy, the restrictions on the choice of occupation were more severe. The restricted choice of occupations provided for limited or no social mobility.

The industrial development in India led to the emergence of new occupations. The new occupational composition acted as a catalyst in changing the rigid structure of the society. Linking occupation with the caste status definitely posed a problem in the case of new occupations. It also implies that such an occurrence could either take place through the intervention of some external power or the society itself experienced cataclysmic changes. In the case of India, both the events took place. The British colonial intervention was the major factor that transformed the Indian society in a definite way. The political economy of the colonial development though characterised by many limitations, but it certainly created two

interesting trends that broke the caste occupation linkages combined with power and privileges. First, some of the hitherto stigmatised occupations became lucrative due to the rise in the demand of certain commodities. Secondly, new occupations emerged that were to be performed by the people who were traditionally linked with their caste occupations. Could they come out and leave their traditional occupations behind? The experience of India shows that it happened like this. However, it involved both voluntary and involuntary compulsions. Economic development brought misery to the artisan production and the indigenous production system did not have the ability to compete. The destruction of artisan production turned the artisans into workers. The age-old correspondence with the caste and occupation was broken. Even then the opportunities for the lower caste to go for any occupation were limited. It remained confined to the cities that were not growing at a fast rate. So far as the upper castes and power holders in the society are concerned, they might have been unrestrained by power relations in the village to choose particular occupations though it is quite possible that their higher caste status might have limited their choices in opting for particular occupations even in the case of those individuals who were not economically well off.

In the light of the above, it becomes clear that breaking of the tradition tended to encompass all aspects of human life. What made it so all pervasive was the existence of caste system and its ideology that provided the justification to the system. The link between caste and occupation has been quite complex and there is a need to examine it in the context of scheduled castes. Since a lot has been written on caste and scheduled castes, there is not much need to repeat various views, however it may be pointed out that as a form of social inequality, it seems to be implicating all aspects of social relations and interactions. Caste status is determined by birth accompanied by hereditary occupation, endogamy, and restrictions on eating and interaction. To understand the process of sustenance, here is need for clear-cut identification of the agents who exercise power as well as articulate powerful ideology. The latter exists in the form of Dharma-karma principle that links the caste status with the deeds of the previous birth. In such a system, the choice of occupation is limited for a caste and it is enforced by power. The scheduled castes, ideally speaking, were performing the occupations that were degraded and polluting. Refusal of these castes to do that polluting work and an attempt to go for some non-polluting work implied the powerful response from the power holders, that is, ruling castes.

The major change came after the Independence when the pace of industrialisation picked up. In her study of transformation of smithy from an artisan production to the industrial production at different levels of technology, Bal (1995) has found that the moment technology entered the traditional artisan production the non-artisan castes also took up that enterprise. The trajectory of change in the caste-occupation correspondence gave rise to two kinds of dynamism. In the first case, the transformation of artisan production into modern enterprise led to the entry of new caste groups, particularly the upper castes into that activity. Secondly, new occupations opened up to accommodate all castes thus breaking the barrier of restriction on the choice of occupation.

In this dynamic world, women entrepreneurs are an important part of the global quest for sustained economic development and social progress. In India, though women have played a key role in the society, their entrepreneurial ability has not been properly tapped due to the lower status of women in the society. It is only from the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards that their role has been explicitly recognized with a marked shift in the approach from women welfare to women development and empowerment. The development of women entrepreneurship has become an important aspect of our plan priorities. Several policies and programmes are being implemented for the development of women entrepreneurship in India.

The main **objective** of the paper is to map the nature and extent of entrepreneurship among the scheduled castes as well as to see whether it has brought about change in their social and political world. Entrepreneurship is innovative, creative and risk prone activity where they have ventured in, which requires capital, decision- making ability and leadership traits. Thus taking to entrepreneurship points towards change in social and economic conditions of the people.

## METHODOLOGY

The study presents a case of a caste that has excelled in entrepreneurship. The focus of examination of empowerment of women. From these entrepreneurs, 100 were selected for the study based on their co-operation and willingness to respond. The interview schedule and case study method have been used for the collection of information that is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. A large number of small scale & cottage (House based) industries have been identified where rural women entrepreneurs played an important role. A list of financial and social constraints encountered by rural women entrepreneurs is identified. The sample women respondents who run micro enterprises are referred to as entrepreneurs in this study.

The women entrepreneurs have been found more open to new experiences and exposures, learning new skills, venturing into the industry by restricting their consumption and ploughing the savings back for expansion. Through their entrepreneurial skills they have moved up in the social and political hierarchy. They could occupy many positions of political and social importance. Many of them improved their life style and also ventured into the wholesale business. These castes attribute their social mobility to education, occupational mobility and the personal performance. The ruler personally practiced and monitored the policies and programmes to uplift the ex-untouchables by giving them education and sending them to cities to learn new skills. They were also financed to start new ventures. At the social and interpersonal level, he took exemplary personal lead by employing these people in his kitchen and palace. The women were encouraged inter-dinning and inter-caste marriages. The case study of empowerment of dalit women entrepreneurs depicts their own initiative, motivation and hard work to make their traditional skills changed scenario of industrialisation and modernisation.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

### A. General Information: Table I

<b>a</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
	<b>25 – 35</b>	<b>39</b>
	<b>35 – 45</b>	<b>26</b>
	<b>45 – 55</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>Above 55</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>b</b>	<b>Education</b>	
	<b>Illiterate</b>	<b>42</b>
	<b>Primary</b>	<b>35</b>
	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>Collegiate</b>	
<b>c</b>	<b>Monthly Family Income</b>	
	<b>Below 5000</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>5000 – 10000</b>	<b>38</b>
	<b>10000 – 15000</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>d</b>	<b>Type of family</b>	
	<b>Joint</b>	<b>57</b>
	<b>Nuclear</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>e</b>	<b>Size of family</b>	
	<b>Small</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>Medium</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>Large</b>	<b>24</b>
	<b>Caste</b>	
	<b>Harijans</b>	<b>44</b>

Source: Survey Analysis

In this study all the respondents were females. From Table I, majority of the respondents (39 percent) were in the age group of 25 – 45 years. Minority of the respondents (10 percent) were in the age group of above 55. Besides their entrepreneurial skills, for most of them, acquiring education has remained a significant facilitating factor. In the selected area 42 percent of the respondents were illiterates. 35 percent have obtained primary level and 23 percent of the respondents have obtained secondary level education. 38 percent of the respondents were getting their family income as 5000-10000 per month.

In this study 57 percent of the respondents were belonging to joint family and 43 percent were belonging to nuclear family. Majority of the respondents (36 percent) have medium size of family having only two children. 44 percent of the respondents were Harijans, 47 percent

**B. Entrepreneurial activities of dalit women entrepreneurs Table II****Activities undertaken by dalit women entrepreneurs**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Number of entrepreneurs</b>
<b>Tailoring</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Running grocery shops</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Poultry</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Gardening</b>	<b>22</b>

**Source: Survey analysis**

In most of the cases, women entrepreneurs usually pursue economic activities which are linked to their household activities and in some cases indistinguishable. From Table II it has been found that tailoring (54 percent) is the most popular activities amongst women entrepreneurs followed by gardening (22 percent). The traditional occupations of these people were sweeping/ scavenging. These people, by abandoning their traditional menial jobs, have taken to entrepreneurial activities, which requires innovations, use of technology, leadership quality, decision-making ability and, by doing so, they have come out of the stigmatized social life which earlier had restricted their mobility.

**C. Motivational Factors of Dalit women Entrepreneurs: Table III****Motivational factors**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Number of entrepreneurs</b>
<b>Profit/Making money</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Economic survival</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Self-realization/Awakening</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Desire to be independent</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Hereditary occupation</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Govt policy/initiatives</b>	<b>6</b>

**Source: Survey analysis**

The present study tries to find out the motivational factors of dalit women entrepreneurs. It can be noted from Table III Profit and making money was one of the main reasons for starting an enterprise. On the whole, profit making, economic survival, self realization, freedom were the main reasons for starting an enterprise.

**D. Economic Factors of Dalit Women Entrepreneurs Table IV****Economic Factors**

<b>Profit Earned</b>	<b>Number of entrepreneurs</b>
<b>Below 5000</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>5000 – 10000</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Above 10000</b>	<b>17</b>

**Source: Survey analysis**

In this study majority of the respondents (48 percent) were earned a profit of Rs.5000-10000 per month. 17 percent of the respondents earned a profit of above Rs.10000 per month.

**E. Problems Faced by Dalit Women Entrepreneurs:**

The major problems encountered by women entrepreneurs are financial problems, getting support from family members and social constraints.

**Table V****Constraints faced by the women entrepreneurs**

<b>Constraints</b>	<b>Number of entrepreneurs</b>
<b>Dual role of women</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Male domination</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Lack of economic freedom</b>	<b>44</b>

<b>Lack of exposure</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Lack of self confidence</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Absence of family encouragement</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Lack of knowledge of finance</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Not having own money</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Tight repayment schedule</b>	<b>26</b>

**Source: Survey analysis**

From table V it can be noted that the main constraint faced by the dalit women entrepreneurs was male domination (57 percent), dual role of women (54 percent), lack of self confidence (37 percent) and not having own money (35 percent).

Dalit women entrepreneur in Ramanagara not only struggle at the time of establishment of enterprises but at operation stage also, they have lots to overcome with different functional difficulties. Usually women faced two fold operational problems. One she has to overcome with problems of production process like, scarcity of raw material, lack of technical skills, lack of utilities and infrastructure facility.

### **CONSTRAINTS OF DALIT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS**

1. Men have negative attitude towards women, therefore gender discrimination is prevailing. Due to family responsibilities rural women entrepreneurs have less time compared to men they have to look after both their family and business activity.
2. Women entrepreneurs in rural areas have to face not only resistance from men but also from elderly women who are imprisoned in the attitude of inequality.
3. The ability and different types of skills posed by the rural women entrepreneurs is not recognized by the society, because of the society's lack of confidence in women's ability.



4. The family's reluctance to finance and to take risks on business set up by women entrepreneurs in rural areas is the main reason for the lack of growth in their venture. Even the financial management practices leads to improper planning and development in their business.

5. The respondents expressed that women entrepreneurs do not enjoy economic freedom to the fullest extent. It is also interesting to note that women entrepreneurs are at the mercy of husbands in order to dispose even their personal property to invest in their venture.

6 It is also ascertained from the study that the family members do not encourage women when they start an enterprise. At a time, the entire family stands as one side against the women member. Even when she becomes a successful entrepreneur, the family fails to encourage her to go further and further to achieve greater targets.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the social upliftment through entrepreneurship following policies are recommended:

1. Education policy should be designed so as to expand the economic opportunities for women.
2. Poverty eradication program will specially address the needs and the problems of women at extreme level.
3. To encourage women entrepreneurship all banks and financial institutions should be asked to provide one fifth of their investment for women owned enterprises.
4. Special training course should be offered for women entrepreneurs to improve skills.
5. Interest free consumption credit for vulnerable women should be provided by the Government, Banks and financial institutions and wealthy individuals.
6. Special assistance is to be provided to specially disadvantaged groups like women in extreme poverty, destitute women, women in conflict situations, women affected by natural calamities, women in less developed regions, the disabled widows, elderly women, single women in difficult circumstances, women heading households, those displaced from employment, migrants, women who are victim of material violence, deserted women and prostitutes etc. Entrepreneurship among women, no doubt improves the wealth of the nation in general and of the family in particular. Women today are more willing to take up activities that were once considered the preserve of men, and have proved that they are second to no one with respect to contribution to the growth of the economy. Women entrepreneurship must be moulded

properly with entrepreneurial traits and skills to meet the changes in trends, challenges global markets and also be competent enough to sustain and strive for excellence in the entrepreneurial arena.

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