



WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS: PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women's entrepreneurship has emerged as a key engine of inclusive economic growth, social transformation, and sustainable development. Women entrepreneurs in India have traditionally played a significant part in commerce, crafts, agriculture, and domestic industries and their contributions are firmly established in Indian Knowledge Systems. Indian Knowledge Systems include centuries-old indigenous customs, traditional wisdom, ethical frameworks, and community-based economic structures. The paper explores the relationship between female entrepreneurship and Indian Knowledge Systems, emphasizing how traditional knowledge, skills, and values promote women economically and socially. The study focuses on how IKS-based firms contribute to women's empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and cultural preservation. The study is conceptual in nature, with ideas drawn from secondary sources, policy papers, and illustrative case studies.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, Indian Knowledge Systems, Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Indigenous Knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to its potential to generate employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and promote gender equality, women's entrepreneurship has drawn more attention in recent decades. In India, women have historically worked in a variety of economic fields, including traditional medicine, Ayurveda, weaving, ceramics, food processing, and handicrafts. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which are a wealth of indigenous knowledge, customs, and abilities that have been passed down through the generations, are fundamentally connected to these activities.

Indian knowledge systems are comprehensive, combining business with morality, sustainability, and the well-being of the community. There is an increase of interest in recovering IKS and combining it with modern entrepreneurial techniques as India transitions to a knowledge-driven and innovation-driven economy. Women entrepreneurs are in a unique position to use IKS for enterprise development and empowerment, especially in rural and semi-urban settings.

This study looks at how women's entrepreneurship based on Indian knowledge systems might lead to empowerment by improving their standing in society, economic independence, ability to make decisions, and sense of cultural identity.

2. CONCEPT OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The process by which women start, plan, and run businesses in order to provide jobs and revenue is known as women entrepreneurship. It comprises social empowerment, leadership development, and innovation in addition to supporting the economy.

2.1 Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs

- High involvement in micro and small enterprises
- Strong connections with personal and social events
- Preference for socially responsible and sustainable business models
- A focus on knowledge-driven and skill-based businesses

2.2 Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

- Limited credit and financial access
- Inadequate exposure to the market and formal training
- Gender biases and socio cultural barriers
- Inadequate infrastructure and technology access

Despite these challenges, women entrepreneurs still make substantial economic contributions, particularly through traditional and informal businesses based on IKS.

3. INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (IKS): AN OVERVIEW

The collective knowledge created in India over thousands of years in a variety of fields, including agriculture, medicine, architecture, metallurgy, textiles, ecology, ethics, and governance, is referred to as Indian Knowledge Systems.

3.1 Features of IKS

- Harmony with nature and sustainability
- An inclusive and community-focused approach
- Moral and ethical business practices
- A focus on skill-based and experiential learning

3.2 IKS and Economic Activities

Through village industries, guild structures, barter commerce, and cooperative behaviours, IKS has historically supported local economies. Through family-based and community-based businesses, women were crucial in maintaining and spreading this knowledge.

Indian knowledge systems and women's entrepreneurship are closely related. Traditional knowledge, indigenous skills, and cultural heritage constitute the foundation of many women-led businesses.

4. IKS-BASED WOMEN ENTERPRISES

1. Handicrafts and handlooms
2. Traditional food processing and products made from millet
3. Herbal products, Ayurveda, and Siddha
4. Natural beauty products, colours, and wellness items
5. Traditional agriculture and seed preservation

5. PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT THROUGH IKS-BASED ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Women entrepreneurship rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems contributes to empowerment through multiple pathways:

5.1 Economic Empowerment

IKS-based businesses enable women to make money with traditional skills and locally accessible resources. This improves financial independence and reduces dependence on external employment.

5.2 Social Empowerment

Women are more likely to participate in leadership positions, collective organizations like cooperatives and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and social decision-making when they engage in entrepreneurial activities.

5.3 Educational and Skill Empowerment

Traditional knowledge transmission promotes intergenerational information sharing, skill development, and practical training.

5.4 Cultural Empowerment

Women entrepreneurs are essential to the preservation of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage because they revitalize traditional crafts and practices.

5.5 Sustainable Development

IKS connects women-led businesses with sustainable development objectives by prioritizing ethical manufacturing and ecological balance.

6. POLICY SUPPORT AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Government of India has recognized the importance of women entrepreneurship and Indian Knowledge Systems through various initiatives:

- National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strong emphasizing IKS integration
- Support for Self-Help Groups under NRLM and DAY schemes
- Promotion of MSMEs, handloom, and handicraft sectors
- Skill development programs and women-centric startup schemes

These initiatives provide opportunities to formalize and scale IKS-based women enterprises.

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING IKS-BASED WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- ✚ Utilizing IKS in training and education for entrepreneurs
- ✚ Improving financial access with cooperative banks and microcredit
- ✚ Creating digital and market connections for conventional goods
- ✚ Promoting IKS research, documentation, and innovation
- ✚ Establishing incubation facilities for IKS businesses run by women

8. CONCLUSION

In the framework of Indian knowledge systems, women's entrepreneurship offers an effective route to comprehensive empowerment. Women can attain economic independence, social respect, and sustainable lifestyles by fusing traditional knowledge with modern business techniques. In addition to empowering women, revitalizing IKS through women-led businesses promotes inclusive growth, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. To increase this synergy and unlock the full potential of women entrepreneurs rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems, policymakers, academic institutions, and industry stakeholders need to work together.

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