

Women Literacy and Entrepreneurship Through Vocational Training Programme

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Abstract

Social and economic development of women is necessary for overall economic development of any society or a country. The term "Women Entrepreneurship" refers to an act of business ownership and business creation that empowers women economically increases their economic strength & position in society. The role of Women entrepreneur in economic development is also being recognized and steps are being taken to promote women entrepreneurship. Resurgence of entrepreneurship is the need of the hour emphasizing on educating women strata of population, spreading awareness and consciousness amongst women to outshine in the enterprise field, making them realize their strengths, and important position in the society and the great contribution they can make for their industry as well as the entire economy. The Saakshar Bharat Mission, a National Female Literacy Mission, is taking a great role in the development of women entrepreneurship through its vocational and skill development programmes. The present study would like to make an attempt to generate awareness and to understand the components of the Saakshar Bharat Mission in connection with entrepreneurship for poor rural women in the State. The paper also describes the present status of women literacy in the State which is the most important component of women entrepreneurship development. The present study adopted a survey method. The problems and constraints experienced by the women in Vocational training programme under Saakshar Bharat have resulted in restricting the expansion of women entrepreneurship. The major barriers encountered by the women entrepreneurs are highlighted in the paper.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Women entrepreneur, Saakshar Bharat, Women Literacy, Vocational and skill development Programme.*

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been recognised as an important source of economic growth. Entrepreneurship is an important engine of growth in the economy. Entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others and also provide society with different solutions to management, organisation and business problems. The government of India has defined women entrepreneurs as an enterprise owned and controlled by women having a minimum financial interest of 51 per cent of the capital and giving at least 51 per cent of the employment generated in the enterprise to women. Women entrepreneurs engaged in business due to push and pull factors which encourage women to have an independent occupation and stand on their own legs. A sense towards independent decision-making on their life and career is the motivational factor behind this urge. Saddled with household chores and domestic responsibilities women want to get independence. Under the influence of these factors the women entrepreneurs choose a profession as a challenge and as an urge to do something new.

The status of women in Manipur is in no way different from the rest of India. Women lag behind in many areas not because they are not capable but because they are denied the opportunities. They become victims of unhealthy social practices like female infanticide, illiteracy and other social evils. These are the main conditions which hampered their progress in the field of education and consequently in public life also. In the late nineteenth century, a number of social reform programmes especially for women was organised in Manipur to give them awareness about their rights in the society. As a result there is upward movement of women in the society which has made them to enter into all walks of public life. Families have started to send their children to schools. In spite of all these, the rate of female literacy appears to be quite low and miserable in Manipur.

Women entrepreneurs may be defined as the women or a group of women who initiate, organise and operate a business enterprise. The entry of Manipuri women in organised business is a fairly recent phenomenon. In reality, Manipuri women have been associated with economic activity since ages. They have all along participated in outdoor occupations. Manipur is still industrially very backward in the context of the backward North-Eastern region of India with a per capita income far below the all-India average. There are not enough industries to keep pace with the rapid growth of population and to deal with the growing problems of unemployment, poverty, lack of housing, medical care, etc. Added to this, there is the problem of comparative neglect of industrialisation in the planning. As a result, the growth of entrepreneurship

among women is very low. Though there is no popular industries in Manipur, women of this state have played an important part in the production process by working in cottage industries such as handloom, pottery, handicrafts, food procession etc.(1)

Women literacy and vocational training programme

Women literacy is very important and plays an essential role for the progress of the society. Though literacy, women can improve and enhance their personalities and contribute towards the progress of the society. Literacy is the basic need and condition for improving the capabilities and empowering an individual to be efficient in various fields. It is a potential instrument of individual well-being as well as social development.

Despite the fact that the Indian economy has witnessed a considerable growth in the last two decades, this growth rate has not been uniform. Underemployment, low educational levels, a high rate of dropouts and lack of proper vocational training which can provide better employment opportunities, are still prevalent. The shortage of skilled workforce is evident from the discrepancies of demand and supply in the market. According to the reports of a Boston Consulting Group, India will have a surplus of 56 million working people while the global shortage of skilled working people will be 47 million by 2020. With a demographic dividend of more than 50 per cent of the population within the age bracket of 25, the 11th Five Year Plan identified the potential of India emerging as an important global entity in skill development. Currently only 10 per cent of the youth population has proper vocational training. Realising the importance of proper vocational training and skill development programs, the 11th Five Year Plan established the PM's National Council for Skill Development (for framing policies), the National Skill Development Coordination Board (for coordinating the various skill development programs), and finally the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA- a catalyst to enhance the skill development programs).

Later the PM's Council and the Coordination Board had been absorbed in NSDA, which is now empowered to serve as the flagship for countrywide skill development programme undertaken by the Government. The 12th Five Year Plan outlines strategies for further improving the vocational training programs at both the centre and state levels. Some important vocational training programs undertaken by the government:

- Craftsmen Training Scheme: under the Ministry of Labour and employment, the CTS aim at providing vocational training to the school leavers and educated youth. They are separate reservations for the SC/STs. Physically handicapped and women.
- Modular Employable Skill Based Training Programs: under the Ministry of labour and employment, MES has been designed specially through consultation with the

industries and backed by the opinions of the experts in the field of vocational training. MES aims at providing a minimum skill set that is just sufficient to gain entry in the employment sector. MES is an extremely flexible program with the objective of providing vocational training to the school leavers, ITI graduates etc., to increase their chances of employment through optimal utilization of the existence infrastructures of the Government, private sector and the industries.

- National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) / AAJEEVIKA: the objective of this scheme is to harness the capacities of the rural poor population by supplementing them with knowledge, skill sets, tools and finance so that they can have proper livelihood options. The primary target of this scheme is to deliver market driven skill training to the rural BPL youth in the age bracket of 18 to 35 years and provide placement in suitable sectors.

- National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) : an integral part of the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SISRY) under the Ministry of Housing and urban poverty alleviation, NULM's objective is to provide the urban poor with proper vocational training so that they can undertake self-employment and increase their chances of employment in different sectors. The primary target of this project is the urban poor population below poverty line with special reservations for the SC/ST and women. A special 3% reservation is also there for the physically challenged.

- Support to Training and Employment Program (STEP): Under the Ministry of women and Child Development, STEP aims at upgrading skills of women converting them into viable assets for employment. This program also provides placements for women and access to credit facilities. Other than that this program has a complete package of support services, awareness generation, gender sensitization, educational programs, nutrition and nutrition oriented awareness program, legal literacy including day care facilities for dependent children.(7)

It may also be said that, in spite of the expansion that has taken place in the formal educational system, a vast majority of women in Manipur remained beyond the reach of education and their rate of literacy requires to be improved. In the late nineteenth century, a number of social reform programs especially for women were organized in Manipur to give them awareness about their rights in the society. As a result there is upward movement of women in the society which has made them to enter into all walks of public life. In spite of all these, the rate of female literacy appears to be quite low and miserable in Manipur.

With the increase in the size of population, the number of literate persons also has increased. The literacy rate amongst the females has gradually increased

over the decades. For instance, in 1951 only 6962 females were literate which has increased to 808166 in 2011 which is not a small achievement. This shows the speed in which the women progressed in the field of education. There has always been a wide gap between the rate of literacy among males and females in Manipur.

The adult females' literacy rate in 2001 was 57.59 per cent which was lower by about 2.53 per cent than the overall female literacy rate of 60.53 per cent. In 2011, however adult literacy at 67.69 per cent is lower by 2.57 percent points than the overall females literacy rate of 70.26 per cent and in case of adult illiterate, the number of adult illiterate in 2001 in the state was 0.44 million including 0.31 million females (70%), 0.01 million SCs (2.27%) and 0.17 million (38.64%) STs. In 2011, number of adult illiterates in the state is 0.48 million including 0.32 million females (67%), 0.02 million SCs (4%) and 0.2 million (47%) STs. In Manipur out of 9 Districts (2001), four Districts of the state had adult female literacy rate below 50 per cent in 2001. (2) Hence, it is clear that the adult literacy rate in the state (Manipur) was low in four Districts of the State as compared to other district and needed to be improved as soon as possible. That is the reason why Saakshar Bharat Mission (Literate India) is implemented in the four Districts of the State (Chandel, Senapati, Tamenglong and Thoubal) as per the guideline of Government of India to increase especially female literacy rate since January, 2010. By implementing Saakshar Bharat, 73,361 adult females are certified out of 1,01,947 (target) up to March, 2015 in the state under "Basic Literacy" which is the first objective of Saakshar Bharat Programme. (4) On the other hand, basic literacy needs to be linked with the third objective of Saakshar Bharat "skill development/vocational education which provide more motivation and interest among the adult learners to join the literacy programme because of various skill development trainings provided to them which may enable the learners to improve their living and earning conditions and may help them to become entrepreneur.

Vocational training programmes under Saakshar Bharat in Manipur

Some of the main objectives of the SBM is to equip the neo-literate with vocational skills to improve their living and earning conditions and to establish a learning society by providing opportunities to neo-literates for lifelong learning and continuing education. In the Saakshar Bharat, the Vocational Education/skill Development programmes are implemented through Jan Shiksha Sansthan (JSS) as per the guidelines of Government of India. In the State like Manipur where two Saakshar Bharat Districts (Thoubal & Senapati) has JSS of its own which restricted to its implementation. The remaining two Saakshar Bharat Districts (Chandel & Tamenglong) left untouched by the skill Development programmes since

these two districts does not have JSS of its own in the District. Further, the funding pattern of Government of India through JSS for skill Development programmes were not clear at the beginning. There is no separate fund provided to implementing agency such as Department of Adult Education (State Literacy Mission Authority), Manipur/ District LokShikshaSamiti/ Jan ShikshaSansthan (JSS) for skill development under Saakshar Bharat. Jan ShikshaSansthan (JSS) have managed from the budget allocated to it out of their normal budget of the year. Later, JSS are instructed to cover 80% of their Target trainees from adult learners of Saakshar Bharat Programme. It is also found that alternative arrangement has not been made by Government of India so far for two Districts (Chandel&Tamenglong) though the Department of Adult Education (DAE)/ State Literacy Mission Authority (SLMA), Manipur has suggested reputed NGOs for the task. However, DAE/SLMA, Manipur took up certain initiatives to bridge the gaps by collaborating other stake holders such as Department of Home Science of G.P Women's College, S. Kula Women's College, D.M Community College, Imphal, Food and Nutrition, Ministry of Food and Nutrition, GOI, etc. On the other hand, SRC, NEHU also extended some skill development programmes under convergence theme with District Lok Shiksha Samiti, Thoubal and Senapati. It is observed that the scopes of Vocational Education / skill development programmes, its trades, beneficiaries under Saakshar Bharat are very limited at present stage though the JSSs (Thoubal & Senapati), Adult Education Department (SLMA) Manipur, SRC, NEHU and other stake holders had initiated skill development programmes in the State. (3) In fact, Vocational Education/skill Development programmes under Saakshar Bharat can be the ways and means which certainly helps the adult learners to become Entrepreneurs beyond the improvement of their living and earning conditions. But at the present trend, the question of Entrepreneurship under Saakshar Bharat in Manipur State is gloomy and still doubtful. It is because no clear pictures of follow up activities after going through skill development trainings can be properly seen even though wide option is being left open for the adult women learners to become entrepreneurs in the future. There are so many reasons for the slow progress of women entrepreneur in Manipur.

Some of the major problems encountered by women entrepreneurs are:

- Women in Manipur lead a protected life. They are even less educated, economically not stable nor self-dependent which reduce their ability to bear risks and uncertainties involved in a business unit,
- Manipuri women give more emphasis to family ties and relationships. Married women have to make a fine balance between business and family. The business

success also depends on the support the family members extended to women in the business process and management.

- Women's family and personal obligations are sometimes a great barrier for succeeding in her career. Only few women are able to manage both home and career efficiently, devoting enough time to perform all their responsibilities in priority.
- Absence of proper support, cooperation and back-up for women by their own family members and the outside world people force them to drop the idea of excelling in the enterprise field. They are always making many pessimistic feelings to be aroused in their minds and making them feel that family and not business is a place meant for them.
- Lack of awareness about the financial assistance in the form of incentives, loans, schemes etc. by the institutions in the financial sector. So the sincere efforts taken towards women entrepreneurs may not reach the entrepreneurs in rural and backward areas.(1)

Apart from the above discussed problems there may occur other series of serious problems faced by women entrepreneurs as improper infrastructural facilities, high cost of production, and attitude of people of society towards the women, modern business outlook, and low needs of enterprise. Women also tend to start business about ten years later than men, on average. Motherhood, lack of management experience, and traditional socialization has all been cited as reasons for delayed entry into entrepreneurial careers. Entrepreneurship basically implies being in control of one's life and activities and women entrepreneurs need to be given confidence, independence, and mobility to come out of their paradoxes. To empower the women some measure are suggested below:

- There should be a continuous attempt to inspire, encourage, motivate and co-operate women entrepreneurs.
- An Awareness programme should be conducted on a mass scale with the intention of creating awareness among women about the various areas to conduct business.
- Organize training programmes to develop professional competencies in managerial, leadership, marketing, financial, production process, profit planning, maintaining books of accounts and other skills. This will encourage women to undertake business.
- Skill development to be done in Adult Education Centres (AECs), women's polytechnics and industrial training institutes. Skills are put to work in training-cum-production workshops.
- Educational institutes should tie up with various government and non-government agencies to assist in entrepreneurship development mainly to plan business projects.

(1)

- International, National, Local trade fairs, Industrial exhibitions, seminars and conferences should be organized to help women to facilitate interaction with other women entrepreneurs.
- Women in business should be offered soft loans & subsidies for encouraging them into industrial activities. The financial institutions should provide more working capital assistance both for small scale venture and large scale ventures.
- Self-help groups of women entrepreneurs to mobilize resources and pooling capital funds, in order to help the women in the field of industry, trade and commerce can also play a positive role to solve this problem.
- State forums of women like Women Commission of Manipur should discuss the problems, grievances, issues, and filing complaints against constraints or shortcomings towards the economic progress path of women entrepreneurs and giving suitable decisions in the favour of women entrepreneurs and taking strict stand against the policies or strategies that obstruct the path of economic development of such group of women entrepreneurs. (5)

Conclusion

Women are increasingly entering the workforce-particularly women professionals and are creating change, but there remains a large number of invisible women workers in unorganized and volatile sectors. Implementation of state and national level policies lags behind in ensuring that women workers have equal pay and are free from exploitation. Entrepreneurs play a key role in our economy. These are the people who have the skills and initiative necessary to take good new ideas to market and to make the right decisions that lead to profitability. The reward for taking the risk is the potential economicIt can be said that today we are in a better position wherein women participation in the field of entrepreneurship is increasing at a considerable rate. Efforts are being made at the economy as brought promise of equality of opportunity in all spheres to the Manipuri women and laws guaranteed equal rights of participation in political process and equal opportunities and rights in education and employment were enacted. But unfortunately, the government sponsored development activities have benefited only a small section of women i.e. the urban middle class women. Adult learners / Neo-literates are usually poor and live in rural areas on hills as well as in valleys. The improvement of their economic conditions is a band and important need. They need to learn new skills/upgrade their old skills and be acquainted with ways and means of utilizing the provisions made in different schemes and projects, informing them of procedures for getting assistance

from credit institutions and cooperatives. They also need to learn skills of entrepreneurship and marketing, self-employment and how to start business with neighbouring Districts / States. These needs are related to women who undergo Adult Literacy programme in the State. They also need to know how women may earn additional income, form self-help groups, become entrepreneur to improve the economic status of family. As such, more efforts needed to uplift women of all walks of life especially rural areas, weaker sections and minorities because until and unless all are counted there may not be collective development in the Society. At this juncture, Literacy plays important role and it is indeed very much necessary in empowerment of women and can help in better participation in skill development programmes interns enable women to venture in the different areas of entrepreneurship. In this direction, more effective steps are needed to provide entrepreneurial awareness, various orientations and skill development programmes to women through the adult education centres of Saakshar Bharat Programme so that adult women learners can also have equal opportunity to venture Entrepreneurship beyond their improvement in living and earning conditions.

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