



A Study On Scheduled Caste Women Entrepreneurship In Chirang District, Assam: Challenges In The Present Technological Era

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ABSTRACT: An entrepreneur is someone who has an entrepreneurial quality with an eye on prospects and an uncanny vision, someone who is prepared to take risks because of the adventurous skill within, and the same is true for women. A woman entrepreneur is an adult who owns and operates a business, particularly one that is commercial, frequently at personal financial risk. Due to their caste, members of scheduled castes have historically faced discrimination and inequitable treatment in society. Scheduled caste women entrepreneur have a number of challenges from the outset till the business is operating. The objective of the current research is to study the scheduled caste women entrepreneur and challenges faced by them in Chirang District, Assam. The researcher of this study analysed various research and articles in order to identify the concerns; it is based on primary and secondary data. The results of this study show that major obstacles to the growth of women's entrepreneurship include the inability to balance family and career, socio-cultural barriers, a male-dominated society, illiteracy or low levels of education, a lack of financial assistance, a lack of technical expertise, marketing and entrepreneurial skills, a lack of self-confidence, and mobility restrictions. There have been some recommendations made to address these issues. Also with the increase in the number of women getting educated, there is considerable awareness among women to be self-employed and gradually the role of women is changing in the society.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurs, empowerment, Scheduled Caste, challenges for women entrepreneurs, overcoming challenges.

INTRODUCTION-

The act of starting a new business or revitalizing an old one in order to seize fresh chances is referred to as entrepreneurship. A woman entrepreneur is an adult who owns and operates a business, particularly one that is commercial, frequently at personal financial risk. Women entrepreneur have a number of challenges from the outset till the business is operating. For them to be better able to plan their lives or have more control over the factors that affect them, free from shocks imposed on them by custom, belief, and practise, it entails having greater access to knowledge and resources and more autonomy in decision-making. In the context of women, empowerment essentially refers to an awareness of one's own situation supported by the knowledge, skills, and awareness that could help women increase their sense of self-worth and facilitate their ability to play a decision-making role in the current patriarchal society where women have always been subordinate to men. Increasing a person's or a community's spiritual, political, social, or economic strength is referred to as empowerment. It frequently entails the empowered person growing self-assured. For a woman entrepreneur, just being female presents a number of challenges. In order to enable people to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined manner, acting on their own authority, empowerment refers to policies and initiatives meant to raise the degree of autonomy and self-determination in the lives of individuals and communities. Women are the embodiment of power, love, selflessness, and bravery. The 21st century has given women fresh hope and given them positive empowerment. If women were well-informed and educated, empowering them would become more important. Women's roles have significantly evolved and they can now influence society for the better. Their opportunities and optimism have grown as a result of modernization and, consequently, the introduction of advanced technology. In practically every field, they have made a name for themselves socially, politically, and monetarily. For the military and other armed forces, women are no longer seen as weak or unsuitable. Despite numerous government initiatives, women in India still have a limited amount of influence and a somewhat lesser status than men. The aim of this study is to identify the issues and difficulties faced by Indian women.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE-

Manjunatha, K. (2013) conducted study on the rural women entrepreneurial problems. Findings revealed that there has been significant advancement in the field of economics in the current era of globalization. Women's engagement in this advancement is more crucial. These self-help organisations have generally given these female business owners potential. In fact, these SGHs are empowering women to become financially sound, if not economically independent. In all areas, including the field of economics, they are liberating their voice. In a broader sense, women entrepreneurs are therefore women who take on demanding responsibilities in order to fulfill their own needs and achieve financial independence. Reaching her family's needs presents a woman with several challenges. After overcoming obstacles, a woman entrepreneur eventually achieves financial independence. She shines in both the social and familial facets of her life by identifying as a successful entrepreneur.

Gnaneswari, P. and Sravani Women, M. (2021) conducted study on women empowerment in India: challenges and remedies. This study attempts to know the problems and challenges faced by women in India. Women's roles have significantly evolved, and they can now influence society for the better. The move from stay-at-home moms to CEOs is frequently observed to be speeding up. Their opportunities and optimism have grown as a result of modernization and, consequently, the introduction of cutting-edge technology. In practically every field, they have made a name for themselves socially, politically, and monetarily. For the military and other armed forces, women are no longer seen as weak or unsuitable. Despite numerous government initiatives, women in India still have a limited amount of influence and a somewhat lesser status than men.

Mallik, D. K. (2021) conducted study on women empowerment and gender equality: A study of Indian Constitution. In both society and the economy, women play an important strategic role. In India, women's status is not always equal. They had the same status as men in the prehistoric era, but by the middle ages, Indian women's standing had declined. Numerous initiatives were made to raise the status of women in India both during and after the country's independence from the British. The Indian government is working to empower and strengthen women by enacting necessary laws and putting laws into effect. There is no doubt that the Indian government has a variety of tools at its disposal to fight for women's empowerment, and their rapid and stringent application is very important. The principle of women's empowerment would not be realised until the acts, policies, laws, regulations, etc. are carefully followed. Hence, the efforts of the government are still inadequate, and the process of empowering women in India is long way to go.

Kate, K. R. (2022) conducted study on an analysis of empowerment of scheduled caste women through Self Help Group (SHGs) with reference to Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh. Self-help organisations are proving to be a powerful tool for empowering women. Self-Help Groups are rural poverty organisation made up mostly of women that offer microcredit to enable members to engage in self-employment and income-generating activities. It is possible to empower women through self-employment or other sources of income. The primary conclusions of the study support the SHGs' greater contribution to boosting women's empowerment through their ability to become financially independent and save money for future growth. The study's conclusions show that self-help groups are effective at empowering rural women through activities that generate revenue. Scheduled Caste As a result of SHG operations in Prakasam District, women's skills in the areas of income, expenditure, savings, decision-making, and external relations are improving.

Objectives of the study:

1. To study the challenges of scheduled caste women entrepreneurship.
2. To offer suggestions to overcome the challenges of scheduled caste women entrepreneurship.

METHODOLOGY-

100 scheduled caste women samples from Chirang District were chosen for the current study. This paper is based on primary and secondary data for the identification of these issues the authors have reviewed different research articles and reports. Simple random sampling was used to choose most of the sample responses. In this study primary data were collected from directly respondents by pre-designed interview scheduled and observation.

MAJOR ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

1. Balance between family and career- Indian women have strong emotional ties to their families and homes. They are expected to take care of all the household chores, as well as to watch over the kids and other members of the family. They spend a lot of time and effort caring for their spouses, kids, and in-laws because they are overburdened with household duties. It is quite challenging to focus and manage a business properly and efficiently in such a setting.

2. Socio-cultural obstacles- The traditions and conventions that are prevalent in Indian civilizations can sometimes act as hurdles for scheduled caste women, preventing their growth and prosperity. Our society is dominated by castes and religions, which also disadvantage female entrepreneurs. Since no one in their family supports them, scheduled caste women eventually become afraid to take chances in their entrepreneurship.

3. Male-dominated society- Despite the fact that our constitution calls for gender equality, male superiority nevertheless rules the day. Men and women are not treated equally. Their decision to go into business needs to be approved by the family head, who is typically a male member. Entrepreneurship has historically been associated with men. All of factors prevent more women from becoming business owners. It's difficult for scheduled caste women to break free of their social ties because of the patriarchal culture that predominates there. As a result, helping women start their own businesses is insufficient. Giving mental support in order to overcome gender bias is crucial for success.

4. Illiteracy or low level of Education- In terms of education, scheduled caste women in chirang district remain far behind. Many scheduled caste women still lack literacy skills even more than 70 years after gaining their independence. Because of early marriage, domestic duties, and poverty, those who are educated receive either a lesser or inadequate education than their male counterparts. Most scheduled caste female business owners lack the proper education necessary to know about new developments in technology, production techniques, marketing, networking, and other government initiatives that will help them advance in the management ranks.

5. Lack of financial support-Because all problems are interconnected, the issue of financial support is also interconnected with all other difficulties. It is the fundamental issue that prevents a woman from starting a business, and as a result, she retreats or ignores the possibility of becoming a prosperous entrepreneur. It is true that women face a variety of financial issues and fewer opportunities. This is solely a result of the market's lack of adequate physical security and credit. Additionally, they are careless with the procedure for getting bank financing.

6. Insufficient market knowledge- It's a significant problem for a scheduled caste entrepreneur to have control over the field of marketing after acquiring all the advantages. They are unable to possess sufficient or sound knowledge of the marketing field. An entrepreneur should always be aware of a good marketing environment to sell her goods and of marketing value because we live in a computerised world.

7. Lack of entrepreneurship ability- For scheduled caste female entrepreneurs, a problem is a lack of entrepreneurial ability. They have limited entrepreneurial abilities. Women entrepreneurs fail to overcome the risks and troubles that can arise in an organisational environment.

8. Lack of Self Confidence-Women entrepreneurs lack self-confidence by nature, which is primarily a motivating aspect in effectively operating an enterprise. Striking a balance between running their family and their business takes a lot of effort. Support on a mental and moral level is crucial for everyone. To establish a balance between the two, people occasionally have to compromise their entrepreneurial impulse, which results in the loss of a potential entrepreneur.

9. Mobility Restrictions- Due to traditional beliefs scheduled caste women's mobility is severely constrained and has become a concern. Moving alone and asking for a room so that you can work late at night are still viewed with suspicion. Inexperienced women can find it awkward to interact with male person who seem particularly interested in them outside of the workplace.

10. Failure of skill training- The fundamental factor on which any entrepreneur's success depends is skill. Women entrepreneurs have the least amount of or limited technological awareness about technology. In fact, they may not have any kind of technological knowledge, which will be lacking among rural women. If at all they have then the knowledge of technology less than the rural men.

11. Lack of social network- Regardless of gender bias, an entrepreneur needs to have contacts or social relationships in order to have a strong market and value. An entrepreneur's ability to build strong social networks is constrained by the restrictive societal limits. Many entrepreneurs start small-scale businesses based on their conventional employment because most rural women entrepreneurs run small-scale businesses. As a result, creating effective social networks is virtually difficult. In the meantime, the majority of highly professional organisations are led by men, and frequently, these men do not want to support female entrepreneurs. It could even be argued that men business owners are afraid of the complete emancipation of women business owners. Therefore, a lack of social networks prevents female entrepreneurs from making their highest profit levels. Therefore, it may even be claimed that a lack of social networks inhibits both the careers of women entrepreneurs and progressive business. At the same time,

building a highly professional organisation is a really difficult undertaking. In other words, a lack of network limits the scope of business to their hometown level.

12. Interactions with male employees in an entrepreneurial world- Even though she is skilled and knowledgeable, a woman generally feels awkward working with a man of the opposite sex. However, in today's business environment, an entrepreneur must dispel or get rid of gender-biased ideas. Male employees are required for an entrepreneur to work with, regardless of caste or religion.

Suggestions to Overcome the Challenges

1. Women entrepreneurs should receive exclusive financial assistance from the government so they do not experience any obstacles when establishing their businesses.

2. Special infrastructure facilities should be made available to assist women in starting their businesses swiftly and easily.

3. Women entrepreneurs should receive specialised training to improve their entrepreneurial skills and competencies, which aid them in running their businesses on a daily basis.

4. Celebrating successful female entrepreneurs will inspire and drive other women to seek similar careers.

5. Better educational facilities should be made available beginning in school and extending through higher education as well as many vocational studies.

6. Every city should establish a women entrepreneurs' advisory cell to address issues with day-to-day operations like production, marketing, and distribution.

7. To assist female entrepreneurs in starting their firms and obtaining quick permission for various legal formalities, it is necessary to simplify a number of legal laws and regulations for the establishment of an enterprise.

8. Most essential, family support is necessary for women to feel comfortable leaving their homes. When they are aware that their family is supporting their decisions, they can produce more effectively.

9. Fairs, exhibitions, and workshops for female entrepreneurs that would enable them to interact and discuss solutions and challenges. Additionally, it will offer direction to emerging female entrepreneurs who may learn from and benefit from their more seasoned peers.

10. Making provisions for marketing and sales help to prevent middlemen from taking advantage of female entrepreneurs.

11. The education of women should be given top importance because it is the cause of the issue. Women's education must therefore receive special consideration.

12. It is necessary to arrange awareness campaigns to educate women about their rights, especially those from disadvantaged groups.

13. Women should be able to work and should be given the necessary protection and assistance to do so. In order to raise their status in society, they should be paid fairly and given the same opportunities to work as men.

CONCLUSION- The different research studies examined have brought to light a number of issues that women entrepreneurs encounter. These include juggling a family and a profession, sociocultural hurdles, a male-dominated society, illiteracy or poor levels of education, a lack of financial aid, a lack of technical expertise, a lack of marketing and business abilities, a lack of self-confidence, and movement restrictions. Despite today's greater workplace gender equity, few women hold senior management roles in significant organisations. Instead of pursuing financial success, their main objectives are success and personal fulfilment. The moment has arrived for women to relinquish their responsibility for household duties. The moment has come for women to free themselves from the responsibility of housework and allow their creativity to flourish. The position of women in a developing society in India has also been determined by social and political developments. Women entrepreneurs have been encouraged and supported by government programmes, incentives, and subsidies. There has been a change in the position of women in society as a result of the rise in the number of educated women and their awareness of working for themselves.

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