



A Role Of NGO's To Promote Tribal Women Entrepreneurs In The Nilgiri District

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Abstract: Women entrepreneurs are playing a key role in the economic development of any developing country. They have been recognised as an important source of economic growth. Women entrepreneurs are creating new jobs not only for themselves but also for others. They contribute to the economic wellbeing of the family and communities, women empowerment and reduction of poverty and thus the role of women entrepreneurs in economic development is inevitable. Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. Their role is also being recognised by Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This paper highlights the significant initiatives from Non-Governmental Organisations to support women entrepreneurs, especially the Nilgiri tribal women.

Key Words: Women entrepreneur, The Nilgiris, Economic Development, Non-Government Organisation.

Introduction

Empowerment is a concept that is of equal importance to both men and women. The knowledgeable Indian women have to go a long way to achieve equal rights and position because customs are deeply rooted in Indian society where the socially setup has been a male dominated one. Since the turn of the century, the status of women in India has been changing due to growing industrialization, globalization and social legislation. Entrepreneurship is a state of mind, which many women have in her, but has not been capitalized in India in way it should be. Due to change in environment, now people are more comfortable to accept leading role of women in our society.¹ This entrepreneur development is being recognized as an important untapped source of economic growth since women entrepreneur create new jobs for themselves and others and by being different also provide society with different solutions to management, organizations and business problems. They see the world through a different lens and, in turn, do things differently. The role played by micro enterprises in India is immense, as they are effective tool for sustainable livelihood, employment generation and empowerment of women. Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. Their role is also being recognised by Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This paper highlights the significant initiatives from Non-Governmental Organisations to support women entrepreneurs, especially the Nilgiri tribal women.

Objectives

- To encourage women's business in tribal territories of the Nilgiri districts.
- Establish a virtual network of tribal women entrepreneurs aiming at creating jobs for tribal members in tribal areas.
- Recognizing the pivotal role of women in tribal societies, NGOs promote gender equality and women's empowerment. They create platforms for skill-building, education, and income-generating activities for tribal women.

Review of Literature

1. According to Ananda Kumar and Ramakrishna .G research on "*Women Entrepreneurs' Issues in Nilgiri Tribal Regions*," the primary challenges faced by tribal women entrepreneurs in the Nilgiri district include: limited education, lack of access to finance, societal constraints, poor infrastructure, low risk-taking capacity, family obligations, and a lack of awareness about business opportunities; essentially highlighting the significant barriers stemming from socio-economic conditions and cultural norms within the tribal communities
2. Jyoti Yadav and Harshvardhan Singh(2024) in his work, "*Challenges and Opportunities for Tribal Women Entrepreneurs in MSMEs*" Most women entrepreneurs participate in sectors requiring low technical education and start-up capital, such as traditional goods or services (creches, beauty parlours, dairy, handloom. Etc.). Women have low representation in sectors like metallurgy, electronics, minerals, pharmaceuticals, and aeronautics which require a higher level of technological sophistication and present significant barriers to entry. Women must be continually educated and encouraged to specialize in all practical fields of business administration as well as STEM to gain technical expertise and experience.
3. Rakesh Dashura (2003) discovered in their study "*Tribal Women Entrepreneurs*" that tribal women had gone a long way, breaking free from tribal communal restraints and engaging in activities other than agriculture. They have accepted entrepreneurship as a way of life. Through business, tribal women's economic conditions have improved. More indigenous women have become entrepreneurs and have improved their business skills. They achieve success if their challenges, which are unique to them, are resolved.
4. Agarwal ,Shalini (2009) mentioned in their research work, "*Women Empowerment Through entrepreneurship in Uttar Pradesh*,"The advantages which the women entrepreneurs had got from their business life is personal development, independence, status in society, recognition in the family and other descending order.

Methodology

In the present study, field research has been done. The personal interview has been planned to comprise both formal and informal discussions regarding the Nilgiri tribes on the way of daily life, customs, economic, employment. Methodology adopted in writing this is historical descriptive cum analytical method. These methods have been followed in the process of completing this research work.

Tribes in the Nilgiri District

Nilgiris district, also called as „The Nilgirs“, hills“, is one of the smallest District of Tamil Nadu. Etymologically the word Nilgiris“ means, Blue Mountains“. The district is a hill area of 2549.0 sq.kms. located between 11° 10' and 11°30' N latitude and between 76°25' and 77° 00'E longitude at the junction of the Eastern and the Western Ghats, the two prominent mountain ranges that run almost parallel to the coastline of peninsular India. With an average elevation of 6500 ft. the Nilgiris District is bound on the west by Kerala on the north by Karnataka, and on the Southeast by Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu.² It therefore occupies the highest and Western most part of Tamil Nadu.

In 1882 Nilgiri District was created a new District of the Presidency. Richard Wellesley Barlow who was the first collector Nilgiri District. At the administrative purpose the Nilgiri is divided into Six Taluks viz.,Udhagamandalam, Gudalur, Pandalur, Coonoor, Kotagiri and Kundah. The Udhagamandalam town, also

called as Ooty or Udhagai or Ootacamund is the Headquarters of the Nilgiri District Administration.³ The Tamil Nadu state government in India has traditionally placed a high priority on tribal development. Five primitive tribal groups-the Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas and Paniyas, - call the Nilgiris home. These five primitive tribes are not equally divided in the district. Each tribe follow their own tradition and culture by the surrounding environment.

Tabel -1
Population of the Tribes in the Nilgiri District

S.No	Name of the PTGs	Tribal population	Male Population	Female Population
1.	Todas	1608	798	810
2	Kotas	2024	991	1033
3	Kurumbas	6552	3179	3373
4	Irulas	6020	2974	3043
5	Paniyas	7882	3881	4001
Total Tribal Population		24086	11823	12260

Sources : Report of Tribal Research Centre & Censes Report of 2011

Table-1 states that the counts of women in tribal communities of Nilgiris are comparatively more when compared to male in tribal community.

Role of NGO's in tribal development

Tribal communities have been historically marginalized and faced numerous challenges in terms of development. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in tribal development by implementing various programs and initiatives to uplift and empower tribal communities. Tribal communities, often residing in remote and marginalized regions, face numerous challenges such as poverty, lack of access to basic amenities, educational disparities, health issues, and social exclusion. In this context, NGOs serve as crucial agents of change, working in close collaboration with tribal populations, governments, and other stakeholders to uplift their socio-economic status, protect their cultural heritage, and ensure their overall well-being.⁴

One of the primary roles of NGOs in tribal development is advocacy and representation. These organizations act as the voice of tribal communities on various platforms, advocating for their rights, social justice, and equitable opportunities. By bringing their concerns to the attention of policymakers and the wider society, NGOs help address systemic issues that hinder tribal development and work towards creating a more inclusive and empathetic society. NGOs actively engage in community mobilization and capacity-building efforts. They empower tribal communities by organizing workshops, training sessions, and skill development programs to enhance their knowledge and capabilities in various fields like agriculture, healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship. Through these initiatives, NGOs equip tribal individuals with the necessary tools to become self-reliant and economically independent.

NGO's and Tribal Women Development

Women-owned enterprises are growing rapidly in practically every country's economy. Women in advanced countries are recognized and prominent in business. However, Tamil Nadu women entrepreneurs face significant challenges in areas such as socio-personal, marketing, finance, and manufacturing. Furthermore, the issues of tribal women entrepreneurs become worse as time passes. These additional issues include a lack of information and experience, insufficient mobility, and liquidity and financial issues. Low education, lack of risk-taking capacity, shyness, lack of ambition, family involvements, financial constraints, and so on.

A number of projects and programmes have been created to encourage women to work for themselves. In this scenario, marketing of women business among educated or illiterate women is a severe lack of time. A number of national and central government organisations, as well as non-governmental organisations, are working to promote female entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial development programmes organised by governmental organisations, as well as the actions of various grassroots organisations, have provided a tremendous boost to women's entrepreneurial development.⁵

Recognizing the pivotal role of women in tribal societies, NGOs promote gender equality and women's empowerment. They create platforms for skill-building, education, and income-generating activities for tribal women. There are some noteworthy Non-Governmental agencies in Nilgiris working for overall development of these tribes. Their activities include medical and health care through hospitals, dispensaries and a mobile medical unit. Nutritional, educational and socio-economical development programmes are being taken by these agencies.⁶ Among the non-Governmental agencies, Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA), Todas Nalavazhu Sangam (TNS), and UPASI krishi Vignayan Kendra are to be mentioned.

NGO's Initiatives to Women Entrepreneur

- **Financial Assistance:** Government grants, subsidies, and microfinancing alternatives can give artisans and cooperatives with much-needed financial assistance for skill development, infrastructure renovation, and marketing activities. With funding from the C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation and help from the Indian government's Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the Kotas have been able to revive their finely wrought terracotta necklaces and transform their ceramic traditions into an art form.⁷ Toda Nalavazhu Sangam are the most significant ones as it has reached out to various Toda settlements and helped them to develop both materially and culturally. Several Todas were helped to procure subsidized loans to purchase buffaloes. A Toda woman was also helped to obtain embroidery loans to encourage traditional embroidery.
- **Skill Development Initiatives:** NGOs and government agencies can organise training programmes, workshops, and skill development initiatives to help local craftspeople improve their skills. This keeps them competitive in the market and allows them to continue honing their skill. Tribal life in the Nilgiris has been affected by external influences. Initially, it was the colonial western culture. Later in the post-independence period, India's developmental programmes have excluded tribal arts and crafts. In order to preserve the art forms of the tribals, the C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation felt that it is necessary to ensure the continuity of their art. Hence the foundation has been training Kota, Kurumba and Irula women to revive their traditional arts of pottery making, vegetable dye painting and bamboo craft. The Foundation has trained several Kota women in pottery. Their creative endeavour has been channelized during the training to bring out a viable product, to fetch a commercial return. Hiring terracotta artists from Chennai to assist them in improving their abilities and teaching them design innovations with market demands.⁸ Toda Nalayazhu Sangam promoting carving skill development walking sticks by the Todas which is a unique feature.
- **Market Links:** Facilitating access to wider markets, both local and international, can open up new options for the growth and development of Kota pottery. Collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and artisans can aid in the establishment of these critical market links. The encouragement given to traditional Toda embroidery work by the Servants of India Society in conjunction with the All Indian Handicrafts Board has been more successful through which most of the Toda women market their embroidery clothes.

Researcher interviews with Toda Women, said that Sheela Powell, the creator of the social enterprise Shalom Ooty, is an admirer of Toda women and their distinctive Toda embroidery. She picked the name 'Shalom' because it means peace in Hebrew, which is exactly what Sheela hoped to empower oppressed Toda women with via financial independence. Shalom Ooty is assisting in the

preservation of the rare and traditional Toda embroidery, which got the Geographical Indication marking in 2013. Sheela launched a business in Ooty in 1992, originally selling exclusively domestic products produced by local Ooty women. However, ladies from the Toda hamlet started contacting Sheela to offer their hand-embroidered shawls for sale.⁹

Today, Shalom Ooty works with over 250 Toda women who are unable to sell their items independently owing to a language barrier and a lack of commercial knowledge. According to Sheela, "previously, they embroidered shawls that only wealthy tourists would buy." We taught them how to manufacture little items like clutches, penny wallets, and phone covers. Those were an instant success, and Toda women began earning money to pay for their children's education or purchase gifts for them. Shalom Ooty has been teaching the ladies how to make Toda embroidered utility objects since there is a growing need for them. She further adds, "We're also including more recent items in our collection, such as skirts. Additionally, we recently began selling online, and that is gradually building up. Shalom Ooty also conducts business online and through trade shows and fairs."¹⁰

- **Employment Creation:** Given the growing potential and ceramics market scenario, the clay pottery industry in Thiruchigadi, Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, has the potential to become a significant employer in the area. The rise of this industry has the potential to offer a considerable number of jobs, particularly in local areas, as evidenced by the extensive regional study of the global pottery ceramics market, covering the business growth of numerous sectors at the regional and country levels.¹¹

The increasing presence of women as entrepreneurs has led to significant business and economic growth in the country. Women-owned business enterprises are playing a prominent role in society by generating employment opportunities in the country, bringing in demographic shifts and inspiring the next generation of women founders.

Suggestion

- At present both Government and Non-Government are giving incentives, concessions and subsidies to entrepreneurs to start their own enterprise, particularly in industrially backward areas. Tribal Women Suggest these incentives and subsidies giving for every year.
- Interest free consumption credit for vulnerable women should be provided by the Government, Banks, financial institutions.
- NGO should be continuously given to increase skill development, entrepreneurial training programme, boosting with microfinance activities enable Kurumba women.
- The NGO's has established a number of projects focused at increasing women's digital literacy and entrepreneurial skills.
- Facilitating market linkages and export opportunities for women entrepreneurs is essential
- Proper roads have to be laid for the tribal settlements. Alienation seems to be a barrier for constructing roads and electricity facilities for the settlements.

Conclusion

Empowering women is important for economic growth and development as their leadership, resilience and creativity play a crucial role in shaping societies and nations. Women make up a big part of the workforce and contribute to innovation and growth across industries. In India, female entrepreneurs are leading the way in making the country a strong global economy. In general, tribal women look for opportunities and they were ready to utilise it. Tribal women were well prepared to cultural changes. They were eager to be a part of the modern society even though they wish to be in their homelands. All the things they need is the proper guidance for their empowerment. So it is the duty of government and voluntary organisation to guide them in proper manner by which they could really achieve the women empowerment not only in tribal community but also in nationwide, because a nation's development starts from its traditional group.

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