



Women's Entrepreneurship in India with Special Reference to Maharashtra: A Secondary Data Review (2010–2025)

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Abstract:

Women's entrepreneurship has become a central theme in India's development narrative, especially during the period 2010–2025, which witnessed reforms in MSME policies, digitalisation, and expansion of credit-support programmes. This paper reviews secondary data from national sources to assess the scale and structure of women-owned enterprises, with a particular focus on Maharashtra. Using data from the Economic Census, the MSME Annual Reports, Udyam Registration records, and the Startup India Portal, the study highlights key growth patterns and structural constraints. Maharashtra's long-term progress is examined on the basis of state-level enterprise share reported in the Maharashtra Women Entrepreneurship Scorecard. Findings suggest that while women-owned enterprises have increased nationally—especially within formal MSME registrations—growth continues to be concentrated in micro and service-based sectors. Maharashtra shows a substantial rise in women's enterprise participation over time, yet regional disparities persist.

Keywords: *Women Entrepreneurs, MSMEs, Maharashtra, Udyam Registration, Startup India, Gender Inclusion.*

Introduction:

Women's entrepreneurship contributes significantly to employment generation, financial independence, and inclusive economic development (Tambunan, 2019). Despite this, women remain under-represented among Indian entrepreneurs. According to the latest Economic Census, only 13.76% of establishments in India are owned by women (MoSPI, Economic Census). However, more recent MSME statistics indicate substantial growth, with 20.5% of all Udyam-registered MSMEs being owned by women, amounting to 2.20 crore units (MSME Annual Report, 2024–25).

Maharashtra, known for its industrial base and urban entrepreneurial clusters, provides a relevant case for state-level analysis. According to the Maharashtra Women Entrepreneurship Scorecard, women-owned enterprises increased from 5.45% in 2005 to 10.82% in 2016 (Government of Maharashtra). These trends point toward gradual improvement but also highlight the need for deeper examination of sectoral patterns and institutional barriers.

Objectives:

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyse national trends in women-owned enterprises between 2010–2025 using secondary data.
2. To examine the sectoral and structural characteristics of women-led enterprises in India.
3. To assess Maharashtra's performance in women's entrepreneurship using available state-level data.

Research Methodology:

This research adopts a **secondary data analysis approach**, relying on publicly accessible data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (Economic Census), Ministry of MSME (Annual Reports and Udyam Registration records), the Startup India Portal, and the

Maharashtra Women Entrepreneurship Scorecard. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and industry publications were consulted for interpretive insights (Brush et al., 2018; Minniti & Naudé, 2010). The analysis is descriptive in nature, focusing on documented trends rather than causal relationships. No primary data collection was undertaken.

National Trends in Women's Entrepreneurship (2010–2025):

Women's participation in entrepreneurship has expanded notably during the last decade, largely due to institutional reforms, formalisation efforts, and digital platforms (Kabeer, 2020).

Table 1: National-Level Data on Women-Owned Enterprises (Authentic Public Sources)

Indicator	Value	Source
Share of women-owned establishments (all sectors)	13.76%	Economic Census (MoSPI)
Number of women-owned MSMEs	2.20 crore	MSME Annual Report 2024–25
Share of women-owned MSMEs	20.5%	Udyam Registration Data
Startups with at least one woman director	73,151	Startup India (DPIIT)

The significant increase in MSME registrations under Udyam reflects expanding awareness and accessibility of digital registration systems (Gupta & Sharma, 2022). Startup India's gender-disaggregated records also show improving participation of women in technology-oriented and service-sector startups.

Sectoral Characteristics of Women-Owned Enterprises:

The sectoral distribution of women-led enterprises in India continues to reflect a blend of traditional occupations and emerging modern sectors. Research shows

that women entrepreneurs predominantly establish businesses that align with locally available resources, household responsibilities, and limited mobility constraints. However, recent patterns indicate a gradual shift toward technology-enabled and service-based activities.

Women-owned enterprises are most commonly found in:

- Retail and petty trade, including garments, groceries, and small convenience stores
- Food processing, such as papad-making, pickles, bakery items, and homemade snacks

- Tailoring, embroidery, and apparel manufacturing
- Beauty, wellness, and personal care services
- Handicrafts, artisanal products, and household manufacturing activities

A nationwide study by Sarvamangala & Keshava (2023) highlights that 79% of women-led MSMEs continue to rely on self-financing, pointing to a significant structural challenge in accessing institutional credit. Although micro-enterprises dominate, women-led ventures are increasingly entering sectors such as e-commerce retail, EdTech, healthcare services, digital marketing, skill training, and specialized food innovation. This shift is supported by online marketplaces and reduced entry **barriers created by digital technologies (Brush et al., 2018)**.

Maharashtra's Position in Women's Entrepreneurship:

Maharashtra remains one of India's strongest entrepreneurial states, benefiting from a robust economic base, advanced urban centres, and expanding service and manufacturing sectors. Women's entrepreneurship in the state has shown substantial improvement over time, supported by initiatives such as the Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM), MAVIM, and district-level MSME support institutions.

The **Maharashtra Women Entrepreneurship Scorecard** provides the only continuous, gender-disaggregated dataset for enterprise ownership in the state.

Table 2: Women-Owned Enterprises in Maharashtra (Scorecard Data)

Year	Share of Women-Owned Enterprises
2005	5.45%
2016	10.82%

Source: Maharashtra Women Entrepreneurship Scorecard

These figures reflect **nearly a doubling in women-owned enterprises**, driven largely by growth in micro and household-based units. Women entrepreneurs in Maharashtra are most active in:

- Small food processing units (snacks, bakery, pickles)
- Tailoring, boutique work, and apparel-related services
- Small-scale retail shops
- Beauty and wellness enterprises
- Household manufacturing units such as agarbatti, candles, or handicrafts

Urban districts demonstrate higher enterprise density compared to rural regions, pointing to structural inequalities in market access, exposure, and institutional support (Government of Maharashtra, 2016).

Challenges Affecting Women Entrepreneurs:

Based on national reports and literature:

- 1. Financial Constraints:** Collateral requirements and low credit history limit women's access to formal finance (Kabeer, 2020).
- 2. Enterprise Scale:** Most women-owned units are micro-enterprises, restricting productivity, technology adoption, and formalization.

3. **Spatial Inequality:** Maharashtra exhibits concentration in metropolitan districts, with rural areas lagging behind in enterprise density.
4. **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Mobility constraints, time poverty, and limited professional networks continue to affect entrepreneurial progression (Minniti & Naudé, 2010).

Conclusion:

Women's entrepreneurship in India has progressed steadily during 2010–2025, supported by policy interventions and growing formalisation through Udyam Registration. Women now own **20.5% of all MSMEs**, a substantial improvement over earlier years. However, the broader entrepreneurial landscape still shows limited participation, with women owning only **13.76% of establishments nationwide**.

Maharashtra demonstrates a clear upward trajectory, with enterprise ownership increasing from **5.45% in 2005** to **10.82% in 2016**, though the growth remains uneven across regions. The dominance of micro-scale enterprises, financing challenges, and spatial disparities continue to restrict the full realisation of women's entrepreneurial potential.

Empirical studies and policy documents consistently highlight that women-led enterprises possess strong potential for innovation, resilience, and employment generation. Strengthening institutional support, expanding credit-access mechanisms, and improving district-level entrepreneurial ecosystems remain key requirements for future progress.

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