



Women Entrepreneurship: Opportunities and Challenges at a Glance in Indian Context

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Abstract:

Women entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth and social empowerment in India. This paper examines the opportunities and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, highlighting government schemes, financial support, and training programs as enabling factors. At the same time, barriers such as limited access to capital, lack of education and skills, socio-cultural constraints, and difficulties in balancing personal and professional responsibilities impede their growth. Based on a review of secondary sources, the study underscores the need for supportive policies and interventions to promote women-led enterprises. Creating an enabling ecosystem can enhance the sustainability and success of women entrepreneurship, contributing to inclusive economic development and gender equality in India.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, MSME, Financial Inclusion, Micro Finance, Socio-Cultural Barriers.

Introduction:

Women entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a critical factor in promoting economic growth, innovation, and social development in India. The participation of women in entrepreneurial activities not only contributes to employment generation but also enhances women's financial independence and socio-economic empowerment. In the Indian context, women entrepreneurs operate in a predominantly male-dominated society, where traditional gender norms and cultural expectations often limit their full economic participation. Various government policies, financial schemes, and institutional support

mechanisms have been implemented to promote women entrepreneurship, including training programs, access to credit, and market facilitation initiatives. These interventions create opportunities for women to engage in entrepreneurial ventures, develop managerial capabilities, and contribute to regional and national economic development.

However, women entrepreneurs face significant challenges that constrain their growth and sustainability. Structural barriers such as limited access to formal finance, inadequate educational and skill development opportunities, and restricted networking platforms hinder business expansion. Socio-cultural constraints,

including gender bias, familial responsibilities, and societal expectations, further exacerbate these challenges. A systematic understanding of these opportunities and constraints is essential to formulate effective strategies for supporting women entrepreneurs. This study aims to analyze the current status of women entrepreneurship in India, emphasizing both enabling factors and barriers, thereby contributing to evidence-based policy formulation and the promotion of inclusive economic development.

Concept of Women Entrepreneurship:

Women entrepreneurship refers to the process through which women identify business opportunities, mobilize resources, and manage enterprises to achieve economic independence and social empowerment. It highlights the role of women as job creators, innovators, and contributors to household and community development. This concept recognizes that women entrepreneurs operate within social, cultural, and economic constraints that often limit their access to finance, skills, markets, and support networks. At the same time, emerging opportunities such as government schemes, microfinance, digital platforms, and changing societal attitudes encourage women's entrepreneurial participation. The study examines how these opportunities and challenges shape women's entrepreneurial growth.

Review of Literature:

1. Hisrich & Peters (1998) research highlighted that women are motivated by economic independence, flexible work options, and personal satisfaction. However, they found that women entrepreneurs face

constraints like lack of training, low confidence, and limited exposure to formal markets. Balancing household duties with business demands remains a major challenge.

2. Maheshwari (2006) study focused on Indian women entrepreneurs and underscored cultural norms as major barriers. She observed that women struggle with limited family support, inadequate capital, and low financial literacy. However, self-help groups (SHGs) and microfinance initiatives have emerged as important tools in supporting rural women's enterprises.

3. Tambunan (2009) examined women entrepreneurship in developing countries and observed that most women operate micro and small enterprises due to limited education and lack of technological exposure. He argued that women's entrepreneurial participation is often driven by necessity rather than opportunity. Training and technology access significantly influence success.

4. Cohoon, Wadhwa and Mitchell (2010), in their study identified top five financial and psychological factors encouraging women to be entrepreneurs. These are desire to build the wealth, the wish to capitalize business ideas, the appeal of innovative culture, a long standing wish to own their own company and working with someone else did not appeal them.

5. Singh (2012) identified socio-cultural barriers patriarchal norms, household responsibilities, and restricted mobility as key constraints for women entrepreneurs in India. He also found that supportive ecosystems, such as family encouragement, mentoring, and training programs, enhance women's entrepreneurial performance and confidence.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand the concept and importance of women entrepreneurship.
2. To examine the key challenges faced by women entrepreneurs.
3. To identify the major opportunities available for women entrepreneurs.
4. To study the role of government schemes and support institutions in promoting women entrepreneurship.

Challenges Faced By Indian Women Entrepreneurs:

Recent studies clearly indicate that the journey of women entrepreneurs is challenging, both at home and in the workplace. In their business activities, they often encounter numerous difficulties and obstacles related to financial limitations, socio-cultural barriers, and various other constraints. The major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs are discussed below.

- 1. Financial Constraints:** Access to credit remains one of the biggest challenges for women entrepreneurs in India. Due to limited collateral, low family assets in their name, and biased lending practices, women struggle to obtain adequate loans for starting or expanding their businesses.
- 2. Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Deep-rooted patriarchal norms, gender stereotyping, and societal expectations often restrict women's mobility, decision-making power, and freedom to participate fully in entrepreneurial activities. Balancing family responsibilities with business demands becomes a significant hurdle.
- 3. Limited Education and Skill Development:** Many women

entrepreneurs lack access to advanced education, professional training, and managerial skills, which are essential for business growth. The skill gap affects their confidence and ability to compete in the market.

- 4. Lack of Support Networks:** Women often have limited access to business networks, mentorship, and professional associations. The absence of guidance, role models, and peer support restricts opportunities for collaboration and learning.
- 5. Marketing and Mobility Challenges:** Cultural restrictions on travel and limited exposure to markets hinder women's ability to identify opportunities, negotiate with suppliers, or expand their customer base. Lack of digital literacy further limits marketing efforts.
- 6. Legal and Administrative Hurdles:** Complex procedures for business registration, licensing, taxation, and compliance create administrative burdens. Women with limited institutional knowledge find it difficult to navigate bureaucratic systems.
- 7. Family Responsibilities and Work-Life Balance:** Women continue to bear the primary responsibility for household and caregiving activities. This dual burden reduces the time and energy available for managing their enterprises and affects business sustainability.
- 8. Gender Bias and Lack of Recognition:** Women entrepreneurs often face discrimination in business negotiations, market interactions, and professional environments. Their entrepreneurial capabilities are

underestimated, limiting their growth opportunities.

9. Technological and Digital Divide:

Although digital platforms offer new opportunities, many Indian women especially in rural areas lack digital literacy, access to smartphones, or internet connectivity, preventing them from using e-commerce and digital payments effectively.

10. Psychological Barriers: Low

Confidence and Risk Aversion: Due to social conditioning and limited exposure, many women exhibit lower self-confidence, fear of failure, and risk aversion compared to male entrepreneurs. These psychological constraints limit innovation and scaling potential.

Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs in India:

1. Government Initiatives and Support

Programs: The Indian government has launched multiple schemes to promote women entrepreneurship, including Stand-Up India, Mudra Yojana, and state-level financial assistance programs. These schemes provide access to credit, subsidies, training, and mentorship, enabling women to overcome financial and institutional barriers that traditionally limit their participation in business.

2. Microfinance and Self-Help Groups

(SHGs): Microfinance institutions and SHGs have created opportunities for rural and semi-urban women to access capital and start small enterprises. These groups not only provide financial resources but also foster collective decision-making, networking, and capacity building,

empowering women to manage sustainable businesses.

3. Growth of Digital Platforms and E-

Commerce: Digital technology and online marketplaces have opened new avenues for women entrepreneurs. Platforms such as social media, e-commerce portals, and mobile banking allow women to reach broader markets, promote their products, and conduct business from home. This reduces dependency on physical mobility and traditional business networks.

4. Skill Development and Training

Opportunities: Government agencies, NGOs, and private organizations provide skill development programs tailored for women. These programs focus on entrepreneurship, financial literacy, marketing, and managerial skills, enhancing women's competence and confidence to run successful enterprises.

5. Sector-Specific Business

Opportunities: Women have considerable potential in sectors such as handicrafts, textiles, food processing, health and wellness, education, and social services. These sectors often align with women's creativity, expertise, and local knowledge, offering opportunities for both income generation and social impact.

6. Networking and Mentorship:

Professional networks, women entrepreneur associations, and mentorship programs provide guidance, support, and collaboration opportunities. These platforms help women access resources, markets, and strategic insights essential for scaling and sustaining businesses.

7. Social Entrepreneurship

Opportunities: Women entrepreneurs increasingly explore ventures that combine economic goals with social impact,

addressing challenges such as education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. Social enterprises attract funding from government schemes, CSR initiatives, and NGOs, creating dual benefits of income and community development.

8. Changing Societal and Cultural Attitudes: Increasing awareness about gender equality and recognition of women-led businesses in India have created a more supportive environment. Positive societal perception encourages women to take entrepreneurial risks and pursue business opportunities that were previously limited.

Schemes Launched By Government Of India For Women Entrepreneurs:

1. **Stand-Up India Scheme (2016):** Provides loans for women and SC/ST entrepreneurs to start greenfield enterprises.
2. **Mahila Coir Yojana:** Supports rural women in setting up coir-based micro-enterprises.
3. **Annapurna Scheme** – Loans for women to start small food catering or production businesses.
4. **Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) Scheme:** Offers training, counseling, and financial assistance.
5. **Mudra Yojana (Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency, 2015):** Microfinance support for women-led small businesses.
6. **Mahila Udyam Nidhi (MUN) Scheme:** Concessional loans for starting or expanding small businesses.

7. **Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP):** Skill development and self-employment support for women.
8. **Digital MSME & E-Commerce Support:** Integration of women-owned MSMEs into digital platforms and online marketplaces.
9. **Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY):** Encourages employment and entrepreneurship among women by subsidizing employee contributions to social security.
10. **Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP):** A single-window platform providing mentoring, networking, and funding support.
11. **Stree Shakti Package / Dena Shakti Scheme:** Concessional loan interest rates for women entrepreneurs in sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and micro business.
12. **Udyam Shakti Portal:** MSME initiative to support social entrepreneurship, business planning, incubation, training & mentorship for women.

There are various institutions operating at different levels that create awareness about entrepreneurship, provide information on training programs, and offer vocational training to enhance entrepreneurial skills. They also provide motivational support to help individuals gain the confidence to start and manage their own businesses. These institutions include the following:

1. **Central Level Infrastructure Development Organisations:**
 - a. Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC)

- b. National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC)

2. Central Finance Institutions

- a. Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)
- b. Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency (MUDRA Bank)
- c. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)

3. National Level Training Institutions

- a. National Institute for Entrepreneurship & Small Business Development (NIESBUD), Noida
- b. Entrepreneurship Development Institute Of India (EDII), Ahmedabad
- c. National Institute for Micro , Small & Medium Enterprises (NIMSME), Hyderabad

4. State Level Entrepreneurship Training Institutions

- a. Maharashtra Centre for Entrepreneurship Development (MCED), Mumbai, Maharashtra.

Research Methodology:

The data for this research were collected from various secondary sources. Statistical information was obtained from websites, working papers, periodicals, journals, books, and other publications. The study is primarily descriptive in nature.

Some Cases Of Successful Indian Women Entrepreneurs:

1. **Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw** – Founder of Biocon, a leading biotech company; pioneer in India's healthcare and pharmaceutical sector.

2. **Falguni Nayar** – Founder of Nykaa, a major beauty and cosmetics e-commerce platform in India.
3. **Vandana Luthra** – Founder of VLCC, a wellness and beauty services brand operating in India and abroad.
4. **Shahnaz Husain** – Founder of Shahnaz Husain Herbal Beauty Products, a global herbal cosmetics brand.
5. **Upasana Taku** – Co-founder of MobiKwik, a digital payments and financial services company.

Suggestions for the Development of Women Entrepreneurship in India

The government should provide easy access to finance and credit facilities specifically for women entrepreneurs.

- a. Skill development and entrepreneurship training programs should be organized to enhance women's managerial and technical abilities.
- b. Awareness about government schemes, subsidies, and business support initiatives should be promoted among women.
- c. Mentorship programs and networking opportunities should be established to connect experienced entrepreneurs with new women business owners.
- d. Women entrepreneurs should be encouraged to adopt digital technologies, e-commerce, and online business platforms.
- e. Policies and incentives should be strengthened to support the growth and sustainability of women-led businesses.
- f. Socio-cultural barriers that restrict women's participation in

entrepreneurship should be addressed through awareness and education.

- g. Entrepreneurship education should be promoted from school and college levels to develop a business mindset among women.

Conclusion:

India is a society dominated by males, where women are perceived as weaker and reliant on male counterparts, both economically and socially. This prevailing mindset has led to numerous challenges for women in our society, such as insufficient financial stability, limited access to education, socio-cultural obstacles, and a lack of confidence. These factors hinder the success of women entrepreneurs. A fundamental shift in societal attitudes is necessary, as various studies indicate that women entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in the economic development of the country. Therefore, it is essential to encourage entrepreneurship among women to enhance the overall economic condition of the nation. This can be achieved by providing adequate education and training for rural women entrepreneurs, as well as establishing training institutes that can improve their understanding, work knowledge, capabilities, and risk-taking skills. Consequently, both the Central and State Governments should train and support these women to engage in workshops, seminars, exhibitions, and trade fairs by creating various training institutes where ongoing monitoring is essential to elevate the quality of women entrepreneurs. Thus, appropriate monitoring and support are urgently needed

from families, society, and the government to ensure that women entrepreneurs become a vital component of the economy's wealth and progress in this era of globalization.

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