



**REVIEW ARTICLE**

**WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NORTH EASTERN STATES OF INDIA- A VISION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Entrepreneurship is one of the most important inputs in the economic development of a country or a region. Entrepreneurship development among women is considered as a possible approach economic empowerment of women. In India women entrepreneurship are considered as "necessity entrepreneurship" rather than "opportunity entrepreneurship" The main aim of livelihood promotion is to increase household income the initial stage is forming hamlet level Self-Help Groups with rural poor women to save women from financial exploitation. The present study focuses on access the present scenario to of women entrepreneurship in the North Eastern state of India and the prospective areas of entrepreneurship in the north east India along with the promotional policies relating to women entrepreneurship for the future In view of the ever increasing problems facing the women entrepreneurs; it appears that there is a long way to go in terms of social revolution and transformation of prevailing notions and attitudes. Training on professional competence and leadership skills should be extended to women entrepreneurs. Activities in which women are trained should focus on their marketability and profitability. Education has been instrumental in increasing the participation of women in entrepreneurial activities. Government should provide better educational facilities and schemes to women folk. A Women Entrepreneur's Guidance Cell should be set up to handle the various problems of women entrepreneurs all over the state.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Entrepreneurship is one of the most important inputs in the economic development of a country or a region. Entrepreneurship development and income generating activities are a feasible solution for empowering women. It generates income and also provides flexible working hours according to the needs of home makers. Economic independence is the need of the hour. Entrepreneurship development is closely connected with the development of human resources. Entrepreneurial development should not be left to chance, as is the practice now. Women are entering into entrepreneurship even while facing socio-cultural, economic, technical, financial and managerial difficulties. Women entrepreneurship movements have gained momentum by encouragement, appropriate awareness, training, environment and support. This has improved the socio-economic status, which is a pre-requisite of women's empowerment. The emergence of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to the national economy is quite visible in India. Women constitute half of humanity, even contributing two-thirds of world's work hours. She earns only one-third of the total income and owns less than one-tenth of the world's resources. This shows that the economic status of women is in pathetic condition and this is more so in a country like India.

Entrepreneurship development among women is considered as a possible approach to economic empowerment of women. In India women entrepreneurship are considered as "necessity entrepreneurship" rather than "opportunity entrepreneurship" Employment to self-employment has been a noticeable phenomenon in the emergence of new entrepreneurs. Like men, women too are equally endowed with physical and psychological qualities and managerial abilities that are essential for successful entrepreneurship.

The main aim of livelihood promotion is to increase household income. The initial stage is forming hamlet level Self-Help Groups with rural poor women to save women from financial exploitation. The stage is encouraging savings and credit practice. The third and final stage is to link the groups with banks to get larger loans for investment in economic activities. This means they get more income and lead a decent standard of living for the future. Self help groups (SHGs) have emerged as one of the major strategies for women's empowerment and various schemes of the Government of India have shown those strong women's groups. Experience with various programmes and projects have highlighted the benefits of formation of women's groups for building confidence and focusing on developmental tasks. Different groups in various states all over the country have focused on skill development and awareness generation, promoting economic development through income generating activities, inculcating thrift and credit management activities among poor women. Women cannot be ignored while

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devising various policies for rural and socio economic development. So, treating the women with equality of opportunities is very much required. Every region has its own problems and prospects for the development of entrepreneurship and the North Eastern Region is not an exception to that.

### Review of literature

The purpose of the literature review is to summarize perspectives that might have a direct or indirect bearing on the conceptual design dealt with in this study and to prepare to frame work through which one could have a better understanding of the problem. The components of the various frame works covered by the review and their analysis are subsequently used for supplementing the findings of the study. The role of entrepreneurship in economic development varies from economy to economy depending upon its material resources, industrial climate, and socio economic determinant to the entrepreneurial function. Viewed from the opportunity point of view, there is no denying in the fact that NER is rich in terms of natural endowment. Despite, due to lack of skilled labor, paucity of fund, strategic location, this region is less conducive to the emergence of innovative entrepreneurs in a study on women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh, Karim (2001) showed that financial problems were the most common problems faced by their women entrepreneurs. In a study on women entrepreneurs in Vietnam, Barwa (2003) found that women face additional handicaps due to the prevailing social and cultural gender based inequalities and biases. Self-employment and women entrepreneurship has also been growing in less developed economies, as a means for women to survive themselves and often to help support their families (Gordon). According to the study of Hir and Brush in 1984, majority of women entrepreneurs had professional spouses which ensured them a supportive and financially sound environment.

Extensive research Roy and Clark, 1994, Roy and Tisdell, 1996, Rao, 1991) on women's socio-economic status in rural India has found that these women have reached the end of their carrying capacity and that the empowerment is a fundamental requirement for sustainable development. Amartya Sen (2000), called development as freedom where development is the way to provide capabilities to women to bring out her fullest self. Mali and Bondopadhyay opined that the economic backwardness of the North East might be attributed largely to inadequacy of the supply of entrepreneurship in the region. If this deficiency can be removed by developing entrepreneurship, the region will be able to compete with the rest of the country. Medha Dubhashi Vinnze notes that "The role of women in productive activities has been increasing over the years, but the total number enterprises run by them are insignificantly small. After having a minute detail of the available literatures and also after going through the types of analyses it is found that no such in depth study had been made in this region. This study has been designed mainly to focus on extent of empowerment of rural women through income generating activities and constraints that are experienced by rural women in their empowerment. Rural Entrepreneurship (RE) is that entrepreneurship which ensures value addition to rural resources in rural areas engaging largely rural human

resources. Rural women increasingly run their own enterprises, yet their socio-economic contributions and entrepreneurial potential remain largely unrecognized and untapped. They are concentrated in informal, micro-size, low productivity and low-return activities. Enabling the gender responsive policies, services and business environments are crucial to stimulate the startup and upgrading of women's businesses and the generate decent and productive work, achieving gender equality, reducing poverty and ensuring stronger economies and societies. Skill building and a supportive policy environment are essential for women in rural areas to become successful entrepreneurs and contribute to a dynamic rural economy. The participants noted that harnessing the entrepreneurial talents of women was an effective strategy to fight unemployment and poverty in rural areas.

### Genesis of the study

The modern concept of women entrepreneurship took shape in this region of the country on from the eighties. Contrary to the popular notion that women from the north east are still backward, they have come a long way now and have established themselves as successful and thriving entrepreneurs not only in the region but also beyond the boundaries of the nation. Like most women entrepreneurs in India, these women from the NE region have also embarked on their entrepreneurial journey in a relatively smaller scale, mostly based out of their homes. They began with traditionally women-oriented business like beauty and well-being, garments, fashion, handloom and handicrafts etc, mostly without any formal training or a rigid business framework. Women of the North East are now playing a proactive role in all walks of life but in the field of business, it has not been a very easy journey for them to enter the threshold of a man's arena Today, North Eastern women have also move beyond the known and have ventured into the less traversed sectors in entrepreneurship One of the most eco-friendly sites in the map of India, North East is perhaps the most untapped minefield of potential resources. This isolated and mysterious land of natural abundance, have a host wonders to offer for entrepreneurs.

In Assam, industries like tea, cane and bamboo, terracotta, pottery, metal works of brass and bell, wood carvings, weaving and toys have immense prospects. The work of making Japi is also popular in Assam. Furniture pieces of cane and bamboo are exclusive to Assam and are exported. The skill of Terracotta makes everything including idols of Gods and mythological creatures and the pottery tradition in Assam results in wonderful items like earthen pot and pitchers, plates, incense stick holders and earthen lamps. Assam also fashions many types of toys like clay toys, pith, wooden and bamboo toys, cloth toys, cloth-and-mud toys. Besides, Cotton, 'Eri', 'Pat' and 'Muga' Silk are the weaving heritages of the region. Likewise, Arunachal is the land of Orchids and medicinal plant. There is little entrepreneurial activity here but there is potential to develop it, based on the natural resources available locally. For instance, medicinal plants that grow here can be made into products. Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland are known for bamboo work, wood carving, pottery, handicrafts, traditional jewellery, artificial flowers from various natural things, blacksmithy etc and also for

traditional weaving, dying and spinning. Sikkim offers opportunities of entrepreneurship in Woven Woolen Carpets and Blankets, Thangkas – traditional paintings on cotton canvas with silk frames, Choksee or small wooden tables, Sweaters and Jackets, Wall Hanging and Antiques with Buddhist motifs, Wooden and Bamboo Artifacts, Jewelleries, Sikkim Tea ('Solja' and Khangchendzonga) Cardamom or Elaichi, Yak's cheese (chhurpi), Lepcha Weave bags and many more.

Agro and food processing industry is another area for entrepreneurship in the NE region, especially mushroom cultivation which is flourishing in the area. Moreover, entrepreneurs can venture into areas like agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, poultry, animal husbandry and forest which would improve value addition in the agricultural produce, employment generation in the region. Entrepreneurship is all about innovation and risk - taking and with abundant opportunities offered by the land, North East India can be a haven for entrepreneurs. No doubt, women entrepreneurs are taking great advantage of the plethora of resources and opportunities available and glass ceilings are being shattered by women entrepreneurs today. But it is not a uniform process in the NE Region. It is confined to only a particular section of women who either had some kind of financial resources in hand or the fortitude to pave their own way to success.

### Objectives

The present study has been undertaken with the following specific objectives

- To examine the present scenario of women entrepreneurship in the North Eastern states of India
- To explore the prospective areas of entrepreneurship in the North East India
- To examine the nature of business of women entrepreneurs in the study area.
- To highlight the problems and challenges of women entrepreneurship.
- Finally, to suggest future Prospects for development of women entrepreneurs and recommended action.

### Rationale of the study

Keeping these objectives in view, the present study further focuses on the constraints faced by the entrepreneurs of the region in general and women entrepreneurs in particular. The study also tries to explore the possibilities of development of the small enterprises sector in the region. Published and unpublished statistical profiles have been used for the purpose. The study concluded with some valuable suggestions for the planners and policy makers of the region to gear up all round development of entrepreneurship in the region.

### METHODOLOGY

A systematic study in any branch needs a pre-determined and well thought out methodology to find out the truth. There are in fact, a number of methods that may be applied for the

purpose of a research work. Of these methods the library work method, the observation method, the interview method, are the important ones. The present study adopts qualitative research methods, such as case study and in-depth interviews, to analyze possible factors that promote sustainable outcomes among rural women entrepreneurs.

### Data source

Both the primary and the secondary data have been used. The primary data have been collected by direct interview method using a predesigned interview: To carry out the research in addition to the primary data, sources like DIC, Circle Offices, BDO offices, offices of Extra Assistant Commissioners and different institutions of the district has been explored to collect secondary data schedule. For the secondary data text books, research articles, government policies and strategies regarding women entrepreneurship development have been used in order to present the fact and findings in the logical format. Primary data had been collected through structured questionnaires.

### Limitations of the study

Lack of proper data and information on the activities of women at different level, it become difficult to make an in depth study on actual status of woman entrepreneurs in the region. The study will not include a survey of all the beneficiaries due to time constraints.

### Study area

North Eastern Region (NER) of India eight comprising Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim covering an area of 2.62lakh square kilometer and with a total population of 39 million (2001) has been chosen as the kingpin of our study area. The economy of the NER of India is different from other regions because of its peculiar physical, economic and social characteristics. In comparison with other states and regions of India, the NER is economically backward. The number of economic activities is less in this region than in other regions of the country.. Entrepreneurship culture is still in the bud in this region. But the entire region with its rich natural resources, wonderful scenic beauty, fertile soil, wide rivers and blue hills, pollution free environment and many other peculiar features has got high potentials to develop the entrepreneurship culture particularly in the rural areas

## MATERIALS AND DISCUSSION

### Entrepreneurship potential in north-eastern region (A Glance)

The resource abundant North East India has a tremendous scope for agro-based industries, agro forestry, horticulture, mushroom farming, herbal, medicinal and aromatic plants, organic fruits and vegetables processing, handlooms and handicrafts, bee keeping, meat and poultry products, cereal based products, consumer industry, milk and milk based products, food processing, paper products, jute and mestas products, cattle rearing, fishery, edible oil, processing of oils

and fragrances, gas based intermediary products, floriculture, spices production and processing wood based products etc. The region of North East India in particular will have to realize how confidently it can rely upon the rural enterprises but for that the Society will have to walk extra miles with innovation, dedication and determination. The concept of Village Industries (VI) stands on it. The perception is to promote entrepreneurs who would take to Rural Entrepreneurship (RE) in utmost earnestness and sincerity to ensure rural development. Such enterprising people who prefer RE may or may not themselves belong to rural areas. Entrepreneurs taking RE should not only set up enterprises in rural areas but should be also using rural produce as raw material and employing rural people in their production processes. Young people with perspective to think positively, creatively, purposefully and with the help of rightly channelized efforts would usher in an era of RE.

### **Women entrepreneurs in NE region (A look)**

Women possess sufficient talents with all the qualities and abilities required for successful entrepreneurs. A favourable environment is to be created which can motivate, encourage and provide required facilities to women to be successful entrepreneurs. There should be an incessant attempt to motivate, give confidence, inspire and assist women entrepreneurs. The participation of women in MSME sector has been identified in three different roles. Some women are owners of enterprise, some are managers of enterprise and some are employees. According to third census of MSEs (2001-2002), the number of women enterprises was 1, 37, 534 and number of enterprises actually managed by women was 1, 14,361 accounted for 10.11% and 9.46% of the total units respectively as shown in table I.

About 13% of the women enterprises were in the registered MSE sector and the remaining 87% were in the unregistered MSE sector. With regard to the enterprises managed by women, 11.5% were in the registered MSE sector and 88.5% were in the unregistered MSE sector. The share of units managed by women in terms of employment was 7.14%. The total number of female employees in the MSE sector is estimated at 33, 17,496. Entrepreneurship among women of the Northeastern states has been gradually gaining popularity during recent years. In 2001-02, total numbers of women enterprises in the region was 31,072 and enterprises managed by women were 28,090 accounted for 9.8% and 8.9% of total MSEs of region.

### **Entrepreneurship prospects in north-eastern region**

North Eastern region's economy is an agrarian economy with abundant natural resources, still it remains underdeveloped mainly because lack of entrepreneurship. The environment of an underdeveloped region is also not conducive for the emergence of entrepreneurship. In the North East India there is tremendous scope for agro-based industries, agro forestry, horticulture, mushroom farming, herbal, medicinal and aromatic plants, organic fruits and vegetables processing, handlooms and handicrafts, bee keeping, meat and poultry products, cereal based products, consumer industry, milk and

milk based products, food processing, paper products, jute and mestas products, cattle rearing, fishery, edible oil, processing of oils and fragrances, gas based intermediary products, floriculture, spices production and processing wood based products etc. The region of North East India in particular will have to realize how confidently it can rely upon the rural enterprises but for that the Society will have to walk extra-miles with innovation, dedication and determination. The concept of Village Industries (VI) stands on it. The perception is to promote entrepreneurs who would take to Rural Entrepreneurship (RE) in utmost earnestness and sincerity to ensure rural development. Such enterprising people who prefer RE may or may not themselves belong to rural areas. Entrepreneurs taking RE should not only set up enterprises in rural areas but should be also using rural produce as raw material and employing rural people in their production processes. Young people with perspective to think positively, creatively, purposefully and with the help of rightly channelized efforts would usher in an era of RE.

### **Women entrepreneurs and promotional supports**

Women from the region have realized the potential resources of the region and have initiated various entrepreneurial activities in order to tap the natural wealth of the region. Handloom and Handicrafts have been playing an important role in the economies of the NE states. According to a study sponsored by NEDFI (2002), NE contributes 19.18% of total number of handicrafts units in India, 21.71% in terms of artisans and 79.58% in terms of value of production. Every state in the region has some unique items of production that have been highly appreciated within the country and also abroad. Handloom and handicrafts products from the NE have excellent brand value. For instance, as a special step in this direction, NEDFI, one of the premier financial organizations in the region has launched this scheme called the SNEHH (Scheme for NE Handloom and Handicrafts). All Assam Jana Jagaran Society is another NGO that is working towards helping small Entrepreneurs of N.E. region who are working on handloom, handicraft, sericulture etc.

There are also several other organizations that are supporting initiative for promotion of new entrepreneurs and creation of awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities in the North East. Among them are the offices of the Development Commissioner (SSI) under the Union Ministry of SSI and Agro and Rural Industries, Department of Science and Technology with focus on promoting science and technology entrepreneurs, Union Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources for promoting entrepreneurship in non-conventional energy sector, NABARD for promoting rural and women entrepreneurship, Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technologies (CAPART) under the Union Ministry of Rural Development, for involving voluntary organizations in entrepreneurship development effort.

Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs of India (CWEI), a registered civil society and a voluntary organization that works for the economic empowerment of women in the country, has also focused on developmental activities in the NE region.

Table 1.

Sl.No	Name of State	Total Enterprises	No. of women Enterprises			No. of Enterprises managed by women			No. of female employees in the MSE sector
			Regd.	Un-Regd.	Total	Regd.	Un-Regd.	Total	
1	Sikkim	368	45	53	98	30	0	30	221
2	Arunachal	1252	63	87	150	51	80	131	446
3	Nagaland	13861	57	122	179	77	130	207	3211
4	Manipur	47999	765	9980	10745	734	8434	9168	23338
5	Mizoram	11116	693	3007	3700	730	2346	3076	6824
6	Tripura	24352	79	784	863	53	578	631	7619
7	Meghalaya	22520	651	2929	3580	640	3018	3658	8803
8	Assam	194379	2041	9716	11757	1948	9241	11189	26065
	NER	315847	4394	26678	31072	4263	23827	28090	76527
	All India (in Lakhs)	10521190	137534	926187	1063721	114361	880780	995141	3317496

Sources: Third Census of small Scale Industries 2001-02

Recognizing the importance of entrepreneurship development for industrial development of the region on the one hand and at the same time lack of entrepreneurship development on the other, the Central Government, North Eastern Council and States Government through various agencies such as Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), Small Industries Service Institute (SISI), Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE), North Eastern Development Financial Corporation (NEDFI), Directorate of Commerce And Industries and NGOs have been organizing various entrepreneurship development programmes over the last few decades, Such programmes have facilitates direct and indirect training and education to the potential entrepreneurs specially in the area of project preparation, managerial, technical, marketing, financial and accounting to small and medium enterprises.

### Women welfare programmes

Under the scheme Directorate endeavors to create awareness amongst the women beneficiaries about various programs of the state government and ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Human Resource Development. The training programs should include identification and selection of potential entrepreneurs and their motivation in to entrepreneurial career through provision of training and other inputs necessary to set up entrepreneurial units. It is necessary to recruit the right persons for the right places and arrange for training to develop their capabilities.

### Enterprise development

Enterprise Development Programs aims at building and nurturing a reservoir of entrepreneurs and promotion of self-employed ventures capable of generating employment opportunities especially in rural areas with the coverage of women.

### Problems and challenges

The highlights of problems and challenges of women preoccupied with household chores and domestic responsibilities entrepreneurship may be summed up as follows:

1. Lack of awareness and dynamism
2. Insignificant entrepreneurial zeal and motivation

3. Lack of managerial and marketing skills
4. Problem of unemployment and jobseekers
5. Inadequate finance and infrastructure support system.
6. Lack of education and practical training amongst women entrepreneurs
7. Non participation in the decision making process
8. Socio-religious-political barriers
9. lack of self-confidence and optimistic attitude
10. Introvert, dependent and shy by nature
11. Inappropriate social security
12. Mostly preoccupied with household activities and responsibilities

In view of the ever increasing problems facing the women entrepreneurs, it appears that since there is a long way to go in terms of social revolution and transformation of prevailing notions and attitudes. The study reveals that if women gets opportunities they can come out from kitchen and take active part in economy of the state and contribute for the well-being of their families. It is observed from the study that the emerging trend of women entrepreneurial development in small and tiny business and industry is not up to the mark. Developing entrepreneurship among women is very important for the all-round economic development of NER of India. It is a herculean task for a woman to make a fine balance between her entrepreneurial journey and home activities. Besides, the patriarchal social order makes it difficult for women to move out of her home and start an enterprise of her own, primarily because she is considered an outsider and her entrepreneurial abilities are doubted at every step by the society.

Our study shows that most of the women entrepreneurs have been self-motivated or motivated by their family members where they have come from business families. Encouragement from the personnel associated with EDP course also motivated the women to start a business. Story of successful women entrepreneurs also motivates the women to come in this line. It is depicted from our analysis of sample women entrepreneurs that women entrepreneurs not only absorb themselves in their units but also create job opportunities for outsiders and/ family members in their entrepreneurship. In addition to that successful women entrepreneurs creates at least one job opportunity in their home to look after their home affairs. Even the financial institutions are skeptical to fund women in new ventures. It has also been observed that most have to face tremendous difficulty in getting timely and adequate finance at a reasonable rate. Positively speaking, the current scenario is

improving and the prospects seems to be gradually increasing with governmental and non-governmental institutes are extending helping hands to the women entrepreneurs of the region

### Suggestions and recommended actions

We may put forward the following suggestions:

- Promoting entrepreneurship among women is especially important to tackle the problems of under employment and unemployment in the society.
- Education has been instrumental in increasing the participation of women in entrepreneurial activities. Government should provide better educational facilities and schemes to women folk.
- Establishment of proper training institutes for enhancing their level of work-knowledge, skills, risk-taking abilities, enhancing their capabilities. Training Centers should provide training to prospective women entrepreneurs free of. Inculcation of self-confidence amongst women that they can also run a business should be one of the prime motives of these programmes. Potential women entrepreneurs should be exposed to different types of emerging opportunities. Housewives should be motivated to learn additional income.
- A women entrepreneur should herself set up an example by being successful and should act as a role model.
- The SHG linked-Banking system has not been able to deal with barriers that hinder women from using or gaining access to credit. Adequate arrangements must be made for the supply of credit facility at concession rate for the women entrepreneurs in view of their growing needs.
- Creating provision of micro credit system and enterprise credit system linked with SHGs to the women entrepreneurs at local level with low rate of interest.
- A Women Entrepreneur's Guidance Cell should be set up to handle the various problems of women entrepreneurs all over the state.
- Positive attitude in the society recognizing the role of women as entrepreneur may lead to the development of appropriate environment in which women will be able to exploit their entrepreneurial talents.

### Conclusion

It is the need of the hour to help Women to scale new heights in their entrepreneurial journey. The right kind of assistance from family, society and Government can make these Women Entrepreneurs a part of the mainstream of national economy. Remembering the quotation "Woman is the full circle, within her is the power to create, nurture and transform." therefore, empowering women entrepreneurs is truly essential for achieving the goals of sustainable development of the nation.

Both the central as well as state Government has to introduce women-friendly economic policies that can enhance both social and economic position and make them self-reliant. All our efforts should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of women of NER as well as of India by giving them their due share. Economic growth will be inclusive, sustainable if wealth creation and poverty reduction occur at a faster pace in rural India, more specifically in the State. Right efforts from all areas are required in the development of women entrepreneurs and their greater participation in the entrepreneurial activities. Government should extend better educational facilities, suitable financial schemes, training on technical and management skills and professional competence to women folk and on the part of the society, incessant support and recognition is equally essential. Though the current situation in NE regions extraordinarily brilliant, the paradigm shift is visible and we can definitely expect the best in the near future. The outcome of this paper shall be useful for the government, funding agencies, and non-government organizations to formulate an inclusive and sustainable policy that enables women to become successful entrepreneurs.

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