
The Entrepreneurial Skills of the Rural Women Artisans of West Bengal

Surabhi Ganguly¹, Tarun Majumdar², Dr. Shonal Bose³

Research Scholar^{1,2}, Professor³

Department of Rural Management Studies

Haldia Institute of Management, Haldia, West Bengal

Corresponding Author's Email id: surabhiganguly2001@gmail.com

Abstract

A prominent role is played by women in promoting economic prosperity in our society. The opportunity brought about by globalization to achieve equal standing between men and women has not yet been realized. The fight for equal rights and the economic necessities that go along with it leads to more women financially supporting their families in order to share the load of their spouses and taking care of the family. In the present day, the increase in women's entrepreneurial education has a strong influence on a wide range of industrial and economic growth areas. Handicrafts are especially well-suited to a vast number of artists and craftspeople, with a huge potential market, as long as the majority of artisans possess the inherent talent of being a vocation. Women of West Bengal have featured prominently in "Needle and Thread" weaving, as have women in other regions. A strong and rising rural economy is vitally dependent on the ability of women to run their own businesses. Through the use of a Relative Important Index, this study sought to investigate the entrepreneurial capacity of rural women of West Bengal, particularly their leadership capabilities (RII). In addition to developing marketing infrastructure, the government should also aid in providing economic opportunities and sufficient finances for women entrepreneurs in order to foster entrepreneurship for women and to ensure their economic position is suitable.

Keyword: *Entrepreneurial Skills, Entrepreneur, Women Entrepreneur, Rural Women artisans*

INTRODUCTION

In India, the presence of women entrepreneurs can be seen, and their contributions to the national economy are evident. It was during a certain length of time that the number of female entrepreneurs began to expand. A sincere congratulations is due to women entrepreneurs for growing their use of current technology, establishing a place in the export market, creating important jobs for others, boosting investment, and succeeding in bringing other female businesswomen to the forefront (Pal, 2016). Incorporating a commercial component that improves a woman's financial power and social standing is indicative of an enterprise owned and operated by women, therefore increasing their economic and social power (JayasreeDatta, 2016). as a side effect, female entrepreneurs also have a profound desire to accomplish something beneficial to society, and who can work with their entire set of beliefs to improve their families and communities (JayasreeDatta, 2016).

This creative, artistic, and aesthetic heritage from West Bengal is referred to as West Bengal's handicrafts. Among the members of this industry, women occupy an especially vulnerable position since

they comprise nearly half of the industry's craftspeople and because they are members of several underprivileged groups (Paul, 2017). This study has taken the Birbhum district into consideration in order to gain an accurate view of the entrepreneurial abilities of the rural women. Research shows that both industrialisation and production of handicrafts have a reach that extends beyond the products themselves. It has been found in the past several years that Birbhum, a district in West Bengal, consistently seeks to coordinate well with the entrepreneurs and supports them by offering the extra help of assisting financial institutions with follow-up on the small and micro companies. The current theories of industrial innovation also contend that entrepreneurship and the establishment of small enterprises have a considerable impact on national economic growth and have a more important influence in globalised knowledge economies (Mitra and Paul 2017).

It is a recognized fact that the study region is full of beautiful and exquisite crafts, and it is thus essential to our country's social and cultural life. The delicate and exceptionally frequent Kantha stitch, Batik, Badhni, and Leather is a big pride for the town of Birbhum. Handicrafts

gained worldwide recognition, therefore improving their business position (AnindyaMitra, 2017). Although funding agencies from the district of Birbhum were generous, the greatest impediment for businesses in Birbhum was a lack of funding support. Funds are usually open during the early stages of a start-up. Due to this, small- and medium-sized enterprises face the worst time getting funding for operational capital. We need to broaden the understanding of the groups providing financial support and their methods. (Anindya Mitra, 2017). The information they have is outdated, and it contains inaccurate information about government programmes, schemes, and credit facilities (Amisha Shah, Rajiv Patel, 2017). Finally, both the middleman and the trader were utilising rural artisan occasionally. Another problem that holds their items back from being sold on worldwide marketplaces is a lack of customer understanding and market awareness. Handicrafts are mostly sold via the very disorganised and exploitative marketing structure that currently exists (Mitra, A. & Paul, S. K.) (2017).

Tiny firms in the district have only established their operations for less than 15 years. These small firms started within the last 15 years, as opposed to the more

established larger enterprises that have been in business for at least 20 to 25 years. Artisans labour on commissions for the local businesspeople, and then return home with clothing bearing their designs. In other communities, middle-women handle the heavy lifting in the job from the larger businessmen and assign smaller women artists to implement the job in their community. One interesting feature about Kantha stitching is that, among other things, it can be used to make a wide variety of products, such as blouses, bedsheets, sarees, chadors, and dupattas. A comprehensive study done in the craft groups in the research region has concluded that the males are totally uninterested in and unaffected by Kantha stitch. As the men are responsible for acquiring the raw materials from the market and for selling the final products, they are also liable for making the purchases. The vast majority of the women who reside in the communities studied are dependent on the Kantha stitch as their primary source of income. In addition to their livestock, they carry out domestic chores alongside their animals. Some women work in well-established households even as domestic servants, cooks, and construction workers, although many women work at adjacent building sites.

The Kantha Initiative is believed to be a representation of women in Birbhum according to the DRDC study. The basic concept of Kantha stitching is that of a narrative, a relationship, and a fight on the part of the craftsmen. From the survey, it was observed that craftswomen have a higher reliance on their master to provide raw materials, which lead to a volatile and less productive workflow. Often, the masters will not have the matching threads that were sent to them earlier, therefore stopping their work in the midst and necessitating the need for them to order more threads. Frequently, employees are unable to do their jobs in time, and this often leads to payments becoming delayed. It was mostly a collaborative effort among industry members in this trade. Because women do not receive enough training, they do not see the most recent variants and designs, and so they miss an essential aspect in choosing styles and fashions. It's also the case that, because there is no fixed fee, craftswomen are being misused. It is not uncommon for masters to set their salaries according to their experience. They are hardly getting enough money to support their own living circumstances, especially considering the long hours they have to work. Narrow-focused businesses (especially ones just starting out) have particularly tough time getting export

management requirements met by the magnitude of large-scale orders. As a result, this offers a dilemma for entrepreneurs in the production process.

METHODOLOGY

The current study was undertaken in the Birbhum area of West Bengal, where the number of Kantha stitch craftsmen is historically higher, and it is also part of the author's PhD research. The author conducted a pilot research in the study district, which served as the basis for the current study. Because Birbhum is one of West Bengal's most backward districts, it is critical to increase the number of entrepreneurial activity. This is a profession that is practised by the majority of SHG groups. SurulSuprity Trust, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works with NABARD to improve the lives of Kantha stitch workers in the areas, was chosen for the research at first.

They have 480 members enrolled and have established the Producer Organization Promoting Institute (POPI), which is only focused on this trade. The author did a brief research among the women members at the initial visit in February 2020. The target respondents are identified using a random sampling based on their SHG membership number. A systematic

questionnaire was created utilising a 5-point Likert type scale, with 1 indicating severe disagreement, 2 indicating agreement, 3 indicating neutrality, 4 indicating agreement, and 5 indicating strong agreement. The factors in the

questionnaire were chosen through informal discussions with members of the NGO and POPI. Their experience was taken into account. In order to analyse the data, the Relative Importance Index approach is used.

Table 1: List of Variables

SI No	Variables
1	Desire for profit
2	Prior Experience
3	Social ties and Network
4	Financial Support
5	Parental Work Background
6	Market Orientation

All these 6 variables are captured using the 5 point Likert Scale. A reliability study of the scale is conducted using Cronbach

alpha value and the result of the same is shown in the table below:

Table 2: Reliability Statistics:

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.739	6

An alpha value of more than 0.70, indicates that the variables are internally consistent. Since, the present value is 0.739 we can use the scale as a good

measure for this study. In total 65 respondents' information was collected for this purpose.

ANALYSIS

The survey data is divided into two categories, viz. demographic profile of the

respondents and the analysis of the research variables.

i. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 3: Age wise Distribution of the Respondents

Age		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Upto 30 Years	54	83.1	83.1	83.1
	30 Years - 50 Years	3	4.6	4.6	87.7
	More than 50 Years	8	12.3	12.3	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data

The age of the respondents is categorized into three segments, viz. up to 30 years, 30 years to 50 years and more than 50 years. Out of the total 65 respondents, around

83% belong to the first age group and this indicates most of the SHG members engaged in this profession are from lower age bracket.

Table 4: Level of Education wise Distribution of the Respondents

Level of Education		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Upto Class 12	51	78.5	78.5	78.5
	Upto Graduation	2	3.1	3.1	81.5
	Others	12	18.5	18.5	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data

The table shows most of the respondents are belong to first group which indicates

most of them are educated but their level of education is up to class 12. This may

create a problem in terms of skill acquisition or business understanding.

Table 5: Household Size wise Distribution of the Respondents

Family Size		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 3	44	67.7	67.7	67.7
	3 to 4	6	9.2	9.2	76.9
	More than 4	15	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data

The result shows that most of the respondents are belong to a family where household size is less than 3. A smaller number of family sizes also create the needs of earning more and staying close to the family members.

ii. Analysis of Research Variables

Data for each of the variables are captured using a 5-point Likert scale and the ranking is done using ‘Relative Importance Index’ (RII). The calculation of index is done using the below mentioned formula:

$$RII = \text{Sum of weights } (W1 + W2 + W3 + \dots + Wn) / A * N$$

Where,

W = weights for each factor given by the respondents. It is in this case varies from 1 to 5.

A = Highest weight on the Likert Scale and it is ‘5’ in this case

N = Total sample size, which stands as 65, in this case.

Table 6: Calculation

Variable	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	DA (2)	SDA (1)	TS	N	A*N	RII	Rank	RII Category
Desire for Profit	100	156	12	4	0	272	65	325	0.84	1	High Importance
Prior Experience	65	188	6	6	0	265	65	325	0.82	2	High Importance

Social Ties and Network	60	176	24	2	0	262	65	325	0.81	3	High Importance
Financial Support	85	172	15	0	0	272	65	325	0.84	1	High Importance
Parental Work Background	65	140	27	14	1	247	65	325	0.76	4	High Medium Importance
Market Orientation	55	148	18	22	0	243	65	325	0.75	5	High Medium Importance

Source: Survey Data

The above calculation is based on the survey data. Each value in the cell is calculated using the formula for RII. The RII index gives us the ranking. A close look at the ranking shows, among the target respondents, desire to profit and financial support are going to play an important factor to participate in Kantha stitch trade. This is followed by prior experience, social ties and network, parental background and market orientation respectively.

According to Akadiri (2011), we can extract 5 important levels from Relative Importance Index. The values are classified as:

- High ($0.80 \leq RII \leq 1$)
- High Medium ($0.60 \leq RII \leq 0.80$)
- Medium ($0.40 \leq RII \leq 0.60$)
- Medium Low ($0.20 \leq RII \leq 0.40$)
- Low ($0.00 \leq RII \leq 0.20$)

As a consequence of the findings, it can be inferred that the first four elements are of

considerable relevance to the respondents, whereas the latter two elements are not. The outcome demonstrates the importance of having incentive for bigger profits, which motivates people to work more. They can acquire the skill in a short amount of time since they have prior job experience. It will also assist them in increasing the efficiency of their current work.

According to the study, social links and networks are given more weight. This will most likely assist them in attracting additional clients through the development of relationships.

The majority of them attend numerous trade shows conducted by various organisations, which aids in the development of client relationships across India. Birbhum also attracts a large number of tourists, who routinely purchase things from these artists on many times.

Financial assistance is crucial in the sense that no firm can function without sufficient funds. As a result, a steady stream of funding from implementing agencies and banks will undoubtedly assist them in expanding.

Because most of them are getting training through their separate agencies, their parent's employment history isn't going to matter all that much.

They do not place a high value on market orientation because they rely only on government-sponsored trade shows to sell their wares. They have very little understanding of the market and their marketability. It is a disadvantage for them because gripping their hands will not aid them in the long run.

CONCLUSION

Women artisans will play a vital role in boosting the rural economy as women begin to contribute financially to their family. Today, as a result of the continual promotion and engagement of multi-level government agencies, it is clear that they have begun to embrace the new earnings rules. Women aren't designed just for domestic duties. The replies gathered from the study district also aid in the comprehension of the same emotions.

They're breaking out on their own, starting businesses, and selling their wares from one location to the next. At this moment, the most significant disadvantage that has been identified is product promotion. As previously said, continuing to grasp their hands will not benefit them in the long run. To succeed as an entrepreneur, individuals must first comprehend the market, its dynamics, and the needs of their clients. Only if they can expand their reach will the business model become more sustainable. The authorities should also give financial aid to them in order for them to develop a modest domestic enterprise in their community centred on Kantha weaving.

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