

Entrepreneurial Ability of Rural Women Artisans of West Bengal

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Abstract

Women play a significant role in our country's socio-economic growth. Globalization poses new opportunities in achieving the objective of equality between men and women. The struggle for equal rights and economic needs leads to more women adding to family revenues in order to share the burden of their husbands and taking care of the family. In modern times, women's entrepreneurial classes play an increasingly important role in diverse areas of industrial and economic growth. Handicrafts provide a wide capacity for millions of artisans around the world, provided that most of the artisans have the intrinsic skill of being a professional. Women of West Bengal have been very popular in the 'Needle and Thread' craft. The development of women's entrepreneurship is a vital aspect of the growth of the rural economy. The present study was done to understand the entrepreneurial ability of rural women of West Bengal with the help of the Relative Important Index (RII). In addition to the development of marketing infrastructure, the government needs to provide financial assistance for sustainable livelihoods to encourage women's entrepreneurship and to boost their socio-economic situation adequately.

Keywords- *Entrepreneurial Behaviour, Handicraft Artisan, Socio-Economic Development, Relative Important Index*

INTRODUCTION

The emergence and contribution of women entrepreneurs to the national economy in India are noticeable. Within a period of time, the number of female entrepreneurs increased. Women entrepreneurs must be commended for increasing their use of modern technology, finding a niche in the export market, creating significant jobs for others, increasing investment and trending for other female businesswomen (Pal, 2016). 'Women Enterprise' implies an act of business ownership

and development that increases women's economic power and social status economically (Jayasree Datta, 2016). The inbuilt characteristic of entrepreneurial women is a deep desire to do something good, who can contribute all ideals to family and social life (Jayasree Datta, 2016).

The big entrepreneurs have been in the business for 20-25 years, in contrast to the small businesses that have established their business for less than 15 years in the district. The artisans go to the local

businessmen for work and bring home clothes with their designs. In some villages, middle-women collect the work from the big entrepreneurs and distribute it amongst the women artisans for their villages.

The Kantha stitching is an intricate piece, and many things can be made out of it, such as blouses, bedsheets, saree, chador and dupattas. From the study area, it was found that in the craft communities, the men are in no way interested in or linked to Kantha stitch. The men are responsible for purchasing the raw materials from the market and selling the finished items. Women living in the surveyed villages largely depend on the Kantha stitch for their livelihoods. They also carry out domestic work in conjunction with their cattle. Some women work in well-established homes even as domestic helpers and cooks, and few women work at nearby construction sites.

Kantha is considered as self-expression of women in Birbhum, according to the DRDC report. The stitching of Kantha is fundamentally about the story, feelings and struggle of the artisans. From the survey, it was found that craftswomen rely more on their master to supply raw materials, which brings volatility and productivity decreases.

The masters frequently fail to have the matching threads that were provided to them previously so that their work is stopped in the middle before they have the specific color threads. Sometimes they cannot do their job in due course, which often leads to payment delays. The design was mainly carried out by other people in this trade. It is an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration as women are not aware of the most recent variations and designs as they do not have adequate training. Since no fixed rate exists, the

craftswomen are used wrongly. Many masters often decide their wages based on their experience. They don't get enough money to raise their living conditions with their wages in return for their hard labor. Export management seems to be especially difficult for existing entrepreneurs to comply with large-scale orders. This poses a problem for entrepreneurs in the production process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Handicrafts of West Bengal represent a rich esthetic, creative, and artistic heritage. The sector is a lifeline for vulnerable segments of society, with women representing approximately 50% of craftsmen and a large number belonging to the weaker sections of society (Paul, 2017). The district of Birbhum has been taken into account in this analysis to analyze the entrepreneurial ability of rural women.

It has been visualized that both industrialization and the production of handicrafts have additional reach. Since the last few years, Birbhum has continuously tried to coordinate effectively with the entrepreneurs and provide all assistance to develop micro and small businesses, including follow-up with the financial institutions.

The latest theories of industrial innovation further argue that entrepreneurship and the creation of small businesses make a significant contribution to national economic growth and have a greater effect in globalized knowledge economies (Mitra and Paul 2017).

The study area is known for its beautiful and exquisite crafts and is thus a vital part of our country's social and cultural activities. Birbhum is the pride of its intricate and very common Kantha stitch, Batik, Badhni and Leather. Worldwide fame

has improved the business position of handicrafts (Anindya Mitra, 2017). The biggest barrier for entrepreneurs from the district of Birbhum was the lack of sufficient financial help from financing agencies. For start-up companies, funds are often open. However, existing companies have a very low scope of financing for operating capital.

The financial practices of the funding organizations must also be reframed. (Anindya Mitra, 2017). They do not have accurate details on government programs, schemes or credit facilities (Amisha Shah, Rajiv Patel, 2017). Furthermore, the middle man and trader used rural artisan sometimes. Another impediment to their goods being put on global markets was a lack of consumer knowledge and market awareness. Handicrafts are primarily marketed through the current, highly unorganized and highly exploitative marketing system (Mitra, A. & Paul, S. K. (2017).

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been conducted in the Birbhum district of West Bengal, where traditionally, the number of Kantha stitch artisans is more, and it is also part of the Ph.D. research work of the author. The present study is entirely

based on the pilot study conducted by the author in the study district. Birbhum is one of the major backward districts of West Bengal; it is important to have more number of entrepreneurial activities. A majority of SHG groups are involved in this profession. Initially, Surul Suprity Trust, an NGO, working for the betterment of Kantha stitch workers of the districts in association with NABARD, was selected for this study.

They have 480 members registered and formed Producer Organization Promoting Institute (POPI), which is working on this particular trade only. During the initial visit in the Month of February 2020, the author conducted a small study among the women members.

A random sample is applied to identify the target respondents from their SHG membership number. A structured questionnaire was prepared using a 5-point Likert type scale where 1 means strongly disagree, 2 means agree, 3 means neutral, 4 means agree, and 5 means strongly agree. The variables incorporated in the questionnaire are selected through informal discussion with the NGO and POPI members. Their expertise was taken into consideration. The Relative Importance Index method is applied here to analyse the data.

Table 1: List of Variables

Sl. 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.

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 the 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 belong to the 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 need of earning more and staying close to the family members.

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 the index is done using the below-mentioned formula:

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

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 is going to play an important factor in participating in the 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 per the result, it can be concluded that the first four factors having high importance for the respondents, while the last two factors did not carry high importance. The result shows that it is important to have motivation for higher profit which drives them down to work more. Prior work experience helps them to learn the technique within a short period of time. It will also help them to increase the efficiency of the work that they are doing.

The study identifies greater weightage on social ties and networks.

This probably helps them to attract more customers through relationship building. Most of them participate in various trade fairs organized by different agencies, which helps them build a relationship with customers throughout India. The place Birbhum also attracts a lot of tourists, and these tourists frequently buy products from these artisans on multiple occasions.

Financial support is important in the sense that any business cannot run without adequate capital. So, a sufficient flow of funds from implementing agencies and banks can surely help them grow.

Parental work background is not going to play that much importance, as most of them are getting training through their respective agencies.

Market orientation is not playing an important role for them as they totally depend on government-sponsored trade fairs to sell their products. They hardly have any knowledge about the market and their marketability. It is a drawback for them because hand-holding is not going to help on a long-term basis.

CONCLUSION

Women artisans are going to play a significant role in uplifting the rural economy as they contribute economically to their households. Today, due to the continuous promotion and involvement of multi-level government agencies, it becomes quite obvious that they are started accepting the new norms of earnings. Women are not meant for household work only.

The responses gathered from the study district also help to understand the same feelings. They are coming out of their own, doing business and travelling from one place to another to sell their products. At this point of time, the most important drawback that is coming to the notice is the marketing of the products. As mentioned earlier, it will not be going to help them in the long run if the hand holding continues.

To become entrepreneurs, they need to understand the market, its dynamics and the requirements of the customers. If they are able to increase the reach only then, the business model will become more viable. The government should also provide financial assistance to them in order to start the small household industry in their village concerning the Kantha craft.

The Success Story of Asima Bibi



Source: Photography by Sriparna Guha

Asima Bibi started her journey with the help of Surul Suprity Trust, an NGO, in the year 2003. The journey was not simple. She learnt the Kantha stitch in various NABARD sponsored training programme and came back to her village to train others. She is now a master trainer of the POPI and providing training to 20 plus women members. Her group is producing various Kantha stitch products such as saree, dupatta, scarfs, blouses, kurta, Panjabi etc. Every year she participates in various fairs throughout India and sells her products worth a few lakhs in a span of 5 to 7 days. More interestingly, during our informal discussion, she revealed that she is using her son's WhatsApp number to sell the products to her clients staying in Mumbai. She generally takes pictures of her products and sends them to her prospective clients. Once they approve the design and send money to her bank account, she sends the

saree to her clients through courier. She has learned this kind of marketing, and in this manner, she is maintaining customer relationships. According to her, this process is totally unusual and risky. In this case, she and many of the women entrepreneur like her wants proper training and guidance for suitable, risk-free and profitable marketing and promotional supports.

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