

CHALLENGES OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA AND THE EMERGING DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Indian society today has witnessed a surge of women entrepreneurship. There arises a need to examine the challenges of women entrepreneurs in greater depth. This study attempts to understand these challenges as well as explore the dimensions that emerge from these challenges. The study is based on exploratory qualitative study of 20 women entrepreneurs in India. The narratives reveal six major themes: Desire to create self-identity and derive satisfaction through entrepreneurship, doing what one loves to do, perceiving risk taking as an enjoyable experience, entrepreneurship as a medium to contribute to society, success speaks for itself and willing to learn, unlearn and relearn.

Keywords : Women Entrepreneurship, India, Challenges of Entrepreneurship, Self Identity, Risk Taking.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Women and Entrepreneurship are two important domains and their interface has been the object of study for researchers worldwide. More so because the traditional roles of women as home makers is deeply imbibed in Indian society over the last decade. But today, Indian society has witnessed a surge of women entrepreneurship. This has led to an increased interest from academia and practitioners in the topic of women entrepreneurship. There is a need to examine the challenges of women entrepreneurs in greater depth. The main research question of this study is: What are the challenges of women entrepreneurs? What are the dimensions that emerge from these challenges?

The paper is structured in four parts. The first part looks at the literature on challenges of women entrepreneurs. The second part explores the typical challenges faced by 101 women entrepreneurs. The third part explains the life histories, entrepreneurial issues and choices of 20 women captured through in-depth semi structure interviews. The final part discusses the emerging themes from the narratives on the emerging dimensions of women entrepreneurs.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

52 % of Euro Chambers member organizations carried out a survey in their respective countries, with varied success rate.

Overall 1356 female entrepreneurs replied that the main problems they faced when creating their enterprise were financial questions and combining work and family. In the daily running of the businesses, these problems appear to remain, liquidities and financial issues being a major concern, as well as the reconciliation of work and family (Euro Chambers, 2004).

Another research shows that family support, social ties and internal motivation are the significant elements affecting success among women entrepreneurs in Malaysia. Only innovation through ICT has no direct effect on success of women entrepreneurs in business in Malaysia (Alam, Jani & Omar, 2011). Women entrepreneurs faced so many problems in aspects of financial, marketing, health, family etc. Some guidelines should be given by the Govt and the financial institutions to the women entrepreneurs time to time (Kaushik, 2013).

In another study, one objective was to identify the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs and another to determine the solutions for such problems. It was found that challenges faced by women entrepreneurs are lack of right public or private institutions, poor achievement motivation, lack of awareness about Government assistance, other problems like legal or bureaucratic problems, male dominated society, poor management skills, technology,

business sophistication or troubles with raw materials and supplier, lack of confidence, low level risk taking attitude, business sophistication or competition, marketing problems, cultural value, primary and higher education, financial problem and lack of family support (Ismail, 2016).

Majority of the women entrepreneurs “suffer from shortage of finance”, followed by stiff competition for marketing their products, scarcity of raw material (Suresh & Vasanth, 2016). Women entrepreneurs faced constraints in aspects of financial, marketing, production, work place facility and health problems. Financial problems faced were non-availability of long term finance, regular and frequent need of working capital. Poor location of shops and lack of transport facility were major marketing problems. Production problems included the problem of non-availability of raw material. Other entrepreneurs mainly faced health problems such as fatigue, tension, and headache. Women entrepreneurs also faced problem of improper water and space facility (Sumathi & Gunasundari, 2016).

Majority of women operate their medium and small scale enterprises under exceptionally unfavourable conditions. In addition to the fact that it is troublesome for them to discover premises, discover markets for their products, get information and credit, however, they likewise have restricted access and understanding especially in the rural areas (Malyadri, 2014). Social, financial, personal, marketing, technological changes and educational challenges are the main challenges faced by the women entrepreneurs. However, social challenge is the main hurdle in the women entrepreneurship development followed by financial and personal challenges. Lack of basic accounting and law knowledge and mobility are the least constraints of women entrepreneurs (Manchanda, 2014).

The biggest problem or constraint of women entrepreneur is that she is torn between her family and work. Traditionally she is confined to the role of home-maker, wife and mother. Women have been confronted with the dilemma of dual role, double burden of working women or the triple burden of working mother ever since they started leaving home for the work (Mary, S Kanagumani, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

To capture the challenges and unique perspectives of women entrepreneurs, an exploratory study was needed. For this the sample was 101. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the women entrepreneurs' demographic profile.

After this a semi structured interview protocol was used,

which covered the following topics: Twenty women entrepreneurs were encouraged to illustrate the manner in which they coped with challenges and conflicts of leading their business and along with balancing family and personal lives. They also shared their dreams and aspirations.

They were also asked additional follow up questions to clarify their thoughts, feelings. Clarifications if any by the researcher were sought either during interview or through telephonic conversation and email. Handwritten notes were taken, which were transcribed at the earliest possible time after the interview.

Judgement sampling was used to locate information rich key respondents. Women entrepreneurs were identified for interviews through professional and personal network and their participation was voluntary. The sample included twenty women entrepreneurs from different businesses all over India. Since this was an exploratory study, the researchers used inductive analysis to identify themes and patterns that emerge from the data.

FINDINGS OF THE EXPLORATORY STUDY

Part 1 – Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs

54.5 % women entrepreneurs spend time with family and are able to manage work and give time for family whereas only 34.7 % are able to spend time with themselves. This explains that more time is allotted for family responsibilities than for self. Around 45% women have neither time for themselves nor their family. The challenges faced by women entrepreneurs are highest from the family (40%) followed by society (29%), financing (22%) and personal challenges (9%). The challenges faced due to family include lack of support to be an entrepreneur, as taking up a job has security and safety which a business does not give. Moreover, there are no fixed working hours for an entrepreneur and families prefer women staying at home after a certain time. In Indian society, women are expected to be home once the children and husband are back from work which makes it difficult for them to put any extra efforts. The other challenges from society are in terms of the patriarchal society which does not allow women to be independent and do not support the idea of women being an entrepreneur. Most women entrepreneurs who were interviewed as a part of the survey have used personal savings (bootstrapping) to fund their business which is 65% of the total respondents. The others have financed through borrowing from friends/relatives (17.8%), family (18.8%) and from bank (11.9%). Some of them invested their savings initially to start the business and later

on took part loans to expand or rotated the earnings from the business to keep the business afloat.

Part 2 – Emerging dimensions of the women entrepreneurs from the challenges:

Theme 1 - Desire to create self- identity and derive satisfaction through entrepreneurship

Self- identity and satisfaction derived from entrepreneurship was evident in the stories of the women entrepreneurs. It became apparent from the interviews that women entrepreneurs have a desire to be adventurous and trying out new things gave them a sense of satisfaction. The following statement support this desire: “There is a belief to go beyond, when you work for someone you go by their rules and perceptions and you cannot experiment. I wanted my own name, space, identity; own flavour of success and that has been my motivation”.

Theme 2 – Doing what one loves to do

Doing what one loves to do was evident in the stories of the women entrepreneurs. It became apparent from the interviews that women entrepreneurs in spite of their problems love what they are doing. The following statement supports this feeling: “Our community does not believe in girls doing business but our parents were really supportive. There were negative vibes but we didn't focus on that and did what we love.”

Theme 3 – Perceiving risk taking as enjoyable

The women entrepreneurs perceive risk taking as an enjoyable experience. This was evident in the stories of the women entrepreneurs. The following statement supports this feeling: “At the peak of my career from a reputed organization leaving a five figure salary job which was very comfortable and getting into entrepreneurship, where you have to start from scratch working 365 days 24*7 leaving my comfort zone is risk taking but enjoyable. As my company grows I won't feel about this which would be a privilege”. Another statement supports the theme: “When I started and set up an office I wasn't sure whether it will continue, whether it will be successful or not, when I hired employees we were freelancing and we had many employees but I didn't know how I would pay their salaries but I knew I would do it just because I was positive even though the odds were high, it was all will”.

Theme 4 – Entrepreneurship as a medium to contribute to society

The women entrepreneurs look at entrepreneurship as a medium to contribute to society. This is evident in the stories of the women entrepreneurs. The following statement supports this feeling: “My profession is absolutely what the environment needs right now. We need trees and plantation, though clients do it for luxury

or show off or commercial property with a beautiful garden that's their mind-set but for me it's a very good step I took to join landscape architecture. Now any site I take up I plant 500 plants if it's a small terrace garden then 100 small plants and few big trees. It's tremendously beautiful to contribute to the environment in this way.”

Theme 5 – Success speaks for itself

The women entrepreneurs feel that success in their business will speak for itself. This is evident in the stories of the women entrepreneurs. The following statement supports this: “I'm residing in a society which is very narrow minded, I used to face a lot of demotivation but I don't care anymore, let the success speak”.

Theme 6 – Willing to learn, unlearn and relearn

The women entrepreneurs are willing to learn, unlearn and relearn. This is evident in their stories. The following statements support this: “The thing with me is because I came into this business after a very long gap you know from the time I studied to the time I started my business I needed to understand, relearn my work and there is a lot that has changed when I came back. I really did not know many things and slowly I had to learn and unlearn many things I had already because I wasn't around for 20 years. So I had to understand and learn my whole craft and relearn it in a sense”. Another statement to support this theme: “I attend lot of trainings and have been trained by people who are Nobel Laureates and whenever I have been on these trainings, national or international, one subject is time management which is very important especially for women as we are the home makers and we have to balance work and home”

DISCUSSION

The initial question that guided the research was: What are the challenges of women entrepreneurs? What are the dimensions that emerge from these challenges? For the first research question, the findings indicate that the major challenges for the women entrepreneurs are work life balance, support of family, society, financing and other personal issues. From these challenges new perspectives arise which define a woman entrepreneur today. Six themes emerged from the narratives. They are the desire to create self- identity and derive satisfaction through entrepreneurship, doing what one loves to do, perceiving risk taking as an enjoyable experience, entrepreneurship as a medium to contribute to society, success speaks for itself and willing to learn, unlearn and relearn. These themes reveal that the women consider entrepreneurship not as a mere income generating activity, but they realize that it fulfils a

bigger purpose in their lives. The entrepreneurial venture with all its challenges completes them as a woman, enhances them and takes them on to the road to self-actualization. The findings point to the new emerging women entrepreneur who is very proud of what she has accomplished and what she is currently doing. It is very evident that entrepreneurship excites the women entrepreneurs and in spite of its many challenges it also serves a higher purpose in life for them.

CONCLUSION

The challenges like work life balance, support of family, society, financing etc. will always be there for women entrepreneurs. But what is interesting is that in spite of these challenges women entrepreneurs perceive these challenges as a path towards enriching themselves. This is evident from the themes that have emerged in the study. The identified dimensions could serve as platform for other women to take up entrepreneurship as a career.

Appendix 1 Showing the Socio–Demographic Profile of Respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	Respondent	101
Age in years	N	%
18-25	24	23.6
26-35	52	51.4
<35	25	25
Education		
Intermediates	4	4
Degree	49	48.5
Post-Graduate and above	48	47.5
Marital Status		
Unmarried	52	51.4
Married	46	45.5
Widow	0	0
Divorced	3	3
No. of Children		
None	67	66.4
1	15	14.8
3	18	17.8
<2	1	1
Work Experience		
0-5 years	95	94
5-10 years	4	3.9
10-15 years	2	2

Industry		
Manufacturing	2	2
Services	58	57.5
Retail	41	40.5
No. of years running own business		
0-5 years	84	83.2
5-10 years	16	15.8
>10 years	1	1
Ownership Type		
Partnership	37	36.6
Sole Proprietor	64	63.4

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