



Women entrepreneurship as a catalyst in reducing gender discrimination

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Abstract

Discrimination of women can be observed in all spheres of life. Various measures have been taken by the Government, NGOs and other agencies to reduce gender discrimination and promote empowerment among them. Promoting women entrepreneurship can act as one of the best strategies to resolve the issue of gender discrimination thereby empowering them. In this context, this paper focuses on understanding the concepts of gender, gender discrimination and women entrepreneurship followed by an attempt to gain detailed insights into how women entrepreneurship can act as a feasible strategy to reduce gender discrimination.

Keywords: Women, entrepreneurship, gender, gender discrimination, empowerment

Introduction

The term 'gender' refers to the assignment of social roles to males and females on the basis of their sex. The difference between sex and gender of an individual is that while the former is determined by biology, the latter is determined in terms of cultural definition of the roles and behavior.

A woman who gives birth to a child is said to be fulfilling a sex role because it is by virtue of her biology that she delivers the child and when she nurtures the child as a mother, we say that she is performing a gender role because she is doing what is considered appropriate for women in her culture.

Biological differences between men and women act as a basis of division of labor in society (Murdock, 1973) [7]. Parsons says, in a family, women's play 'expressive role' and men play 'instrumental role' in the family that is women provides emotional support and warmth needed for socialization of the children and men plays the role of a bread winner (Booth, Bab Chuk and Knox, 1968) [1].

According to Ann Oakley (2005) [9], gender is a cultural term and the division of labor in society is not universal. While refuting the views of Murdock and Parsons she argues that giving statements like women are not capable of carrying out heavy and demanding works is a myth and categorizing the role of men and women as expressive and instrumental is done for the convenience of the men.

To Durkheim, in primitive societies, both men and women were fairly similar intelligence as well as strength and only as civilization progressed new codes emerged which restricted women from working outside home leading them to become weak and less intelligent (Merton (1934) [5].

Earlier, anthropologists like Malinowski, and Radcliffe Brown in their studies have not given due importance to role of women and this male bias was criticized by Margaret Mead (1963) [4]. Through her research on tribes in the pacific she found that the sex roles and personality in these tribes were not the same that is found in the western society. What one may easily derive from an understanding of the difference between sex and gender is the proposition that both men and women perform roles and behavior

considered culturally appropriate to their sex. So far, there is no problem because there seems to be neat division of labor i.e., a clear-cut distinction in each culture of what a man would do and what a woman would do.

We are aware that some people in society are given more privileges while others are made to live in conditions of poverty and violence. This negative treatment provided to others can be referred to as 'discrimination'. The most common forms of discrimination found in the society, are based on caste, race, class, gender, ethnicity and income.

Gender Discrimination

It is difficult to imagine situations of gender-based discrimination. How and why should there be discrimination on the basis of gender if both men and women & how what they are supposed to do and their roles are complementary? Well, the roots of gender-based discrimination lie deep in the ideology and the way people think.

Often women's work is devalued and taken less seriously. Furthermore, many of them are economically dependent on men. This encourages men to exercise control over women. In many societies boys are encouraged to display physical strength and valour while girls are encouraged to be caring, nurturing and emotional. This leads to the formation of gendered identity. The subservience of women is glorified and reinforced in several religions. It is then understandable that the position of a widow in society is precarious.

Gender-based discrimination gets manifested in several practices both within the family and outside it. It is possible to trace the roots of gender-based discrimination in seemingly simple practices of some mothers: paying greater attention to needs of sons, serving larger portions of food than daughters, and preferring sons over daughters in providing educational and technical training opportunities, and distributing assets and resources.

Often, such practices are treated as part of the process. At the other extreme are more violent forms of gender-based discrimination such as sex pre-selection, feticide, female infanticide, wife beating, harassment for dowry, rape and

many others. These forms of discrimination are not confined to India or to the South Asian region alone rather, they are wide spread. Many women in different parts of the world are beaten up by men, bought and sold into prostitution, denied inheritance of property rights. In some country's women are discouraged from participating in public life. It is observed that women get lower salaries compared to men for the same work even in developed countries.

They also experience discriminatory employment laws (which mean that there are laws prohibiting women from undertaking certain jobs) and/or discriminatory enforcement of laws including family codes that place authority and decision making in the hands of men.

Since the last two to three decades efforts are underway to empower women by eliminating discrimination against them and promotion of women entrepreneurship is one such effort.

Women constitute almost half of the population but they have not achieved equality with men. Women entrepreneurs are playing an important role in most developed and developing countries (Brush, 1992). Although the number of women entrepreneur's participation is still relatively small compared to men-owned businesses (Minniti and Arrhenius, 2003; Mutalib, *et al.*, 2015)^[6, 8].

According to Singh and Raghuvanshi (2012)^[10], women have always contributed towards productivity. In developing countries like India, women have been found to be positively engaged in collaborative entrepreneurship as a way to gain financial and psychological development.

The earnings generated by carrying out business ventures enables women to raise their bargaining power in family, freedom to take personal decision and undertake personal actions to bring about significant changes in their life which as a result help them feel psychologically empowered (Datta and Gailey, 2012)^[2].

In India there is a continuing concentration of women in low paid and low status occupations, indicating that women are marginalized in the labor force. There is a common assumption that men are the bread winners of the family and that women work either as a hobby or to obtain only a supporting income for the household.

The major reasons for the marginalization of women and their work are the social prejudice that a woman's world is required to be focused on the family and the household. In addition to this, in the rural areas of India, there is a lack of education and effective employment opportunities for women. Such constraints and social traditions largely inhibit the emergence of the vast potential of women, which remains the nation's greatest untapped resource.

Women Entrepreneurship definition

Women entrepreneurs may be defined as the women or a group of women who take initiative to set up a business enterprise and to run it smoothly. In other words, women entrepreneurs are those women who generate business ideas or select the best opportunity, mobilize resources, combine the factors of production, undertake risks and operate the enterprise in the most effective manner with a view to earning profit.

According to Government of India, female entrepreneur is an owner of a business which is controlled by woman of at least 51 percent of the company shares and 51 percent of the employees are women (Goswami *et al.*, 2008)^[3].

Characteristic features of Entrepreneurs

According to Mc Clelland the qualities of a successful entrepreneur are technical competence, initiative, good judgement, intelligence, leadership qualities, self-confidence, energy, attitude, creativeness, fairness, honesty and emotional stability.

Robert H. Hisrich has identified the following personal characteristics that an entrepreneur should possess which are: motivation, self-confidence, long term involvement, high energy level, persistent problem solver, initiative, goal setter, moderate risk taker and leadership.

Functions of an entrepreneur

The functions performed by an entrepreneur can be broadly classified into primary or specific functions and other functions. Primary functions include: risk bearing capacity, decision making, managerial functions, function of innovation, capital formation, addition in per capita income, creation of employment, balanced regional development, improvement in living standards and economic self-reliance. The other functions include, diversification of product, expansion of the enterprise, maintaining cordial employer and employee relation, tackling labor problem, co-ordination with outside agencies and dealing with public bureaucracy.

Traits of an entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDI) in order to resolve the controversy on what traits are necessary for a successful entrepreneur has conducted a study of entrepreneurs and identified the following entrepreneurial competencies: initiation, watching for opportunities, persistence, information seeker, quality conscious, commitment of work, efficiency lover, work planning, self confidence, assertiveness, persuasion, efficient monitoring, concern for employee.

Governing Factors

The factors governing women entrepreneurship are social factors like lack of social contacts and male dominance; Economic factors such as lack of economic support from family members and inadequate finance; Technical factors include lack of technical know-how, project ideas and implementation capacity; Psychological factors such as lack of self- motivation, dual responsibilities of managing household activities and running an enterprise.

Push factors like lack of income, dissatisfactions from previous work and need for flexible timetable; Pull factors such as to be independent, desire for wealth and power, and self efficacy.

Women Entrepreneurs development can be facilitated by considering women as specific target group for all developmental programs; Better educational facilities and schemes should be extended to women folk from government part; Adequate training programs be conducted; Encouraging women's participation in decision making; Imparting vocational training to women would enable them to understand the production process and production management.

Government initiatives

The following are some of the initiatives taken by the Government for women development: Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP; Khadi and Village

Industries Commission (KVIC); Training of Rural Youth for Self-employment (TRYSEM); Entrepreneurial Development Programme (EDP's); Marketing of Non-farm Products of Rural Women (MAHIMA); Micro credit scheme Rashtriya Mahila Kosh; SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi; SBI's Stree Shakti Scheme; Micro and small enterprises Cluster Development Programmes (MSE- CDP) etc.

Theories of entrepreneurship

Max Weber's theory of religious belief: according to this theory entrepreneurship is a function of religious belief and the impact of religion shapes the entrepreneurial culture. He emphasized that the entrepreneurial energies are exogenous supplied by means of religious belief. The central feature of Weberian theory of social change, therefore, consists in his treatment of the protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. Thomas Cochran's Theory of Entrepreneurial supply centers round the sociological aspect of entrepreneurial supply. Beginning with the premise that fundamental problems of economic development are economic, he emphasizes in the cultural values, role expectation and social sanctions as the key elements that determine the supply of entrepreneurs.

E.E. Hagen's Theory of Social Change propounds how a traditional society becomes one in which continuing technical progress takes place. The theory exhorts the following features which presume the entrepreneur's creativity as the key element of social transformation and economic growth.

Frank Young's Theory of Group Level Pattern, points out that entrepreneurial initiative is a function of group level pattern. Young has elaborately analyzed the shortcomings of psycho generic interpretation of entrepreneurship and suggested a causal sequence where transformation codes are developed by the solidarity groups to improve their symbolic position in their larger structure and thus become entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneurs-challenges

Lack of self-confidence, role conflict as an entrepreneur and as a wife, mother, daughter-in-law, male dominated society leading to discrimination, low risk-bearing capacity, lack of encouragement from family, discrimination in upbringing, role conflict, lack of education, low mobility, Problems of access to finance, Stiff competition, negative attitude of financial institutions, lack of managerial efficiency, lack of business experience, inefficient marketing strategies and difficulty to procure raw materials.

Women entrepreneurship advantages

Economic empowerment, Improved standard of living, gaining self confidence, awareness generation, Sense of achievement, increased social interaction, Improvement in leadership qualities, Involvement in solving problems related to women and community, Greater involvement in decision making activities.

Women's entrepreneurship is both about women's position and their role as an entrepreneur in society. It can be said that today we are in a better position wherein women participation in the field of entrepreneurship is increasing at a good pace. Efforts are being made by enactment of laws to provide equality of opportunity to women in all spheres like education and politics. However, unfortunately the initiatives taken by the government have benefitted only a

small proportion of women population belonging mostly to the urban middle class. Hence, at this juncture, effective steps are needed to provide entrepreneurial awareness, orientation and skill development programs to women.

Resurgence of entrepreneurship is the need of the hour so, due emphasis be given for women education, awareness generation and making them realize their own strengths so that they can succeed in their enterprises and contribute in the economy.

Women entrepreneurship must be molded properly with entrepreneurial traits and skills to meet the challenges in the global markets and also be competent enough to sustain and strive for excellence in the entrepreneurial arena.

If every citizen works with such an attitude towards respecting the important position occupied by women in society and understanding their role in the modern business field too, then very soon we will be able to do away with the conservative and stereotyped mindset regarding role of women, which is one of the major barriers in our nation building process.

A women entrepreneur has the potential to generate employment opportunities to her fellow-beings and can help to raise their living standards therefore; women should be encouraged to uptake entrepreneurial activities so that they can make an effective contribution in the Indian economy leading to their empowerment.

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