



**REFLECTIONS
ON PROFESSIONAL
SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

An Indian Perspective

Editors

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Social Entrepreneurship – An Ameliorating Factor for the Empowerment of Rural Women in Kerala – Special Reference to Peermedu Taluk

Robin Thomas

Abstract

Globally, women and girls are at greater risk of poverty, violence, and abuse than boys and men. They are more likely to be malnourished and less likely to be educated. Women make up half the world's population and yet only 23 percent of its parliamentarians. On average women earn less than 75 percent as much as men and are more likely to be unemployed. And yet, working women invest 90 percent of their income back into their families, whereas men invest only 30-40 percent. Even in developed economies like the UK or USA, women experience an average wage gap of over 15 percent and are under-represented in business in both leadership and management positions. The UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. One hundred and ninety-three countries have signed up to this target, but there is a long way to go before boys and girls, women and men have the same rights and opportunities. Over the past 15 years, some progress has been made towards greater gender equality. The same period has seen the spread of social enterprise as an approach to tackling social and environmental issues around the world. So far, social entrepreneurs have played a relatively minor role in women's empowerment, but it has the potential to play a much greater one.

Keywords: women empowerment, social entrepreneurship, ameliorating skills, financial autonomy.

Introduction

Social Entrepreneurship has been identified as a possible solution for many social problems such as poverty, social exclusion, domestic violence, unemployment and illiteracy (Williams, C. C., & Horodnic, I. A. 2019). However, Indian women entrepreneurs have to go a long way to achieve

equal rights and position because of deep-rooted traditions in Indian society where male domination persists explicitly in all spheres of social relations (Goyal, M., & Parkash, J. (2011). Besides, women living in the rural area are among the most marginalised groups. Their un-favorable position, furthermore worsened by tradition and patriarchal system of values that does not support women as socially and economically independent agent perpetuates this notion by which women are primarily seen as housewife and mothers (Kabeer, N. 2012). Regardless of women's assigned gender roles, power asymmetries in life-world, Indian women appear to stand tall from the rest and often highly praised for their accomplishments in their respective arenas.

Historically, the role of women in Indian society has varied from Vedic to modern times. In the early Vedic society women enjoyed equality between men and women, and women enjoyed appreciable liberty in the context of those times. In the later Vedic period, the Indian society became more male-dominated. Still, the roles of men and women were generally defined because the idea of Dharma or social morality was more or less followed. But the rigidity of the caste system became more prominent, which also indirectly affected the position of women in India (Parijat, P. (2014).

Consequently, in the 19th and 20th centuries, various social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Mahatma Gandhi and many others initiated movements for the liberation of women pointed towards women education, widow remarriage, stoppage of social practice like Sati system, restrain of polygamy etc. Eventually, these movements resulted in the enactment of legislation on Sati prevention, child marriages (Joshi, S. N. 1962). Dowry prohibition (Gazette, 1986), equal rights of women on par with men (Ahmad, T., & Mishra, A. K. 2016), rights in property and remarriages of widows etc. In recent years, gender equality and women's empowerment have been recognised as crucial to the health and socio-economic development of entire country, not just individual families. This is evident in the fact that promotion of gender equality and empowering women is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Increased participation of women in electoral politics can also be seen as a social change in the general direction of women upliftment in India, and many women had already excelled in the political field (Parijat, P. 2014). According to Pope Francis World religious leader wrote in his encyclical (Evangelii Gaudium) that "Gender equality is not a women issue, it is a human issue. It affects us all" (Pope Francis, 2013). The gender equality and empowering women is one of the Sustainable Development Goals of UNDP. The fifth goal mentioned that, "Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the

empowerment of all women and girls at all levels". The Constitution of India guarantees equal status to women based on the equality principle. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 42, 51 (A) (E) ensure the equality of women. Notwithstanding these constitutional safeguards, Indian women have been struggling for a long time (Sarma, A. V. (2014).

When it comes to business, traditionally, India had experienced a vibrant culture of entrepreneurship. As evidence suggests, India maintained global trade relations through transnational waterways and road routes from many years. From ancient times Indian goods and merchants were famous for their capabilities and commercial expertise. Still, for varied reasons, commerce and industrial operations have been regarded as a male domain. Against the odds, fortunately, a few middle-class women entrepreneurs in India help in family businesses, thanks to the progress in education and attitudinal changes in society. These invisible women are primarily involved in agriculture, dairy production, weaving, crafts and other forms of petty production and services (Parijat, P. 2014). Even so, being successful in any business is very challenging for women of all classes.

Though there is a lack of responsibility of the state and society, women struggle to manage a balance between family and career requirements. Little financial freedom, absence of direct ownership of the property, the inconsistency of entrepreneurial skill, the class difference in economically rich and poor women, the inadequate system for capacity building, anticipation of risk factors involved, access to financial institutions and credit market, lower level of self-confidence, lack of professional training, mobility limitations and lack of exposure with successful entrepreneurial class are major problems of women entrepreneurship development in India¹. Yet, surprisingly, the last two decades have observed a remarkable change in the status and workplace participation of women in India. In recent times, women's entrepreneurship has developed manifold as a result of the integration of global economy, changes in societal attitude, higher education, political intervention (Kumbhar, V. M. 2013), scientific progress and diffusion of mass media etc. Financial stability of a community is an essential factor for social, educational, cultural and holistic development.

Review of Literature

The social entrepreneurship examined that essential opportunity for economic and social development and progress in Bangladesh (Sasikala, T. 2015). The study identifies rural and urban women entrepreneurship. The Rural women who are homemakers and entrepreneurs, women workers

placed in an inappropriate situation in the society. In urban areas women have greater opportunities for business development, but they lack assistance in the access to credit, skill training, and marketing facilities. The study suggested that special training course should be offered for women entrepreneurs in skills development. Interest free loans for women entrepreneurs must also be provided.

Johnson analysed the socio-economic and attitudinal characteristics of entrepreneurs, in Kerala. The study is based on primary data. The result indicates that business acumen neither runs in families nor was there any evidence in that religion had an impact on entrepreneurship. The economic status of the family, age technical education, training and work experience in a similar or related field has favored entrepreneurship (Johnson, 2000).

In the journal, observed that socio psychological factors were influencing industrial entrepreneurship in rural areas. Study was made in the Thanku region of West Godavary District in Andhra Pradesh. The study evaluated in depth the sociological and economic factors, which helped this particular area to develop at a faster rate than the surrounding areas. The study gave valuable insights to the officials and non-officials working for industrial development and enabled them to identify the strong points, for such development in particular areas (Jammalamadaka, 2001).

Entrepreneurship education should not be confused with general business and economic studies. Its goal is to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment, and may include the following elements: developing personal attributes and skills that form the basis of an entrepreneurial mindset and behavior (creativity, sense of initiative, risk-taking, autonomy, self-confidence, leadership, team spirit, etc.); raising the awareness of students about self-employment and entrepreneurship as possible career options; working on concrete enterprise projects and activities; providing specific business skills and knowledge of how to start a company and run it successfully (Meenu Maheshwari, 2015).

Joint families are generally more supportive to women who want to enter in the business world and start up their own enterprise. Despite this belief, women entrepreneurs belonging to nuclear families have to venture into their own enterprise. This is so because the women entrepreneurs belonging to the nuclear families have an equal say and it is more easier for them to convince only one person i.e. their husband rather than convincing each member of the joint family in taking up an enterprise (Shaik, S. 2012).

More and more women want freedom of work and control their own reproduction, freedom of mobility and freedom to define one's own style of life. It is contended that freedom leads to greater openness, generosity and