

ROLE OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA

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Rural women are multi taskers. They perform several roles in the society. They are the resourceful income generators of their families. They are entrepreneurs; they also perform roles of farm and non-farm labourers. Some are self-employed; at the same time they are the home makers who take a disproportionate share of unpaid work at home. A part from these they have lot of potential that is needed to excel in various fields like business, politics, education, defense etc. However, their full potential has never been realized due to the limited and unequal access to resources and persistent gender discrimination. Society has scripted gender roles, and also designed responsibilities and opportunities of men and women regarding the type of work they should do, both in urban and rural areas. Rural women are often thwarted by discriminatory property rights, family and inheritance laws and practices. These days' rural women in developing countries like India are being heavily burdened through their double roles as paid or unpaid workers and family care providers. Thus leading women not to engage themselves in productive work and limits their time for education, training and economic activities since their attention is grabbed towards the family care providing activities. Thus many social enterprises have initiated measures to encounter these harsh environmental obstacles for rural women and are striving hard to empower them. In this backdrop this paper has been developed. It aims to identify potential skills among rural women in India. It further presents the hindrances for rural women to use their multitude skills. Finally the paper attempts to present initiatives of social enterprises to unleash the potential of rural women of India.

Keywords: Rural Women empowerment, Social entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, social empowerment, Economic development

INTRODUCTION:

Rural women are multi taskers. They perform several roles in the society. They are the resourceful income generators of their families. They are entrepreneurs; they also perform roles of farm and non-farm labourers. Some are self-employed; at the same time they are the home makers who take a disproportionate share of unpaid work at home. A part from these they have lot of potential that is needed to excel in various fields like business, politics, education, defense etc. However, their full potential has never been realized due to the limited and unequal access to resources and persistent gender discrimination. Society has scripted gender roles, and also designed responsibilities and opportunities of men and women regarding the type of work they should do, both in urban and rural areas. Rural women are often thwarted by discriminatory property rights, family and inheritance laws and practices. These days' rural women in developing countries like India are being heavily burdened through their double roles as paid or unpaid workers and family care providers. Thus leading women not to engage themselves in productive work and limits their time for education, training and economic activities since their attention is grabbed towards the family care providing activities. Thus many social enterprises have initiated measures to encounter these harsh environmental obstacles for rural women and are striving hard to empower them.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Though women occupy significant portion in the total population in almost any country in the world, they remain still in minority with respect to the economic and entrepreneurial activities, and India is no exception for this. In a report of GEM 2006 on a study on Women and Entrepreneurship, it is found that more enterprising skills are found among the women belonging to low/medium income countries. The majority of women in low and medium income countries get involved in entrepreneurial activities for their survival. Since the survival itself would be a great challenge for them because of unemployment, poverty or underpayment. Whatever may be the reason it is seen women do not lag far behind men regarding development of business ideas, in those countries but the possibilities of establishing business venture are very limited. It is observed that in India percentage of Self Employed rural is found more than rural men. Whereas the ratio of rural women engaged in regular wages and casual labour are found less when compared to rural men. Hence it is clear that interest of rural women is being increased towards the entrepreneurship in India. According to Delic & Peric, 2009 the reasons for this scenario are the restricted access to

financial resources, insufficient support in balancing their work and family life, as well as the deep-rooted stereotyped roles of women that women business is not to do business or earn money. The governments, the NGO's have initiated measures realizing the fact that real country's development will depend on rural development and the rural development in turn depends on gratification of rural women potential skills. Here it is pertinent to say that rural women empowerment is possible with social enterprises. Since social Entrepreneurs mainly focus on problems in the society. They address this issue especially in countries like India in a much more effective manner. According to Bulsara, Chandwani, & Gandhi, 2014, the social enterprises initiate innovation by mobilizing the resources available to build social arrangements in response to the social problems. It is also believed that Social Enterprises act not only as a strong catalyst in the society, but as change agent in the social sector. Desai, 2001, they act very aggressively in spite of limited resources in hand and exhibit heightened accountability to the society.

POTENTIAL SKILLS AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN INDIA:

Indian women have enormous skill set which are not used constructively by the society since for many centuries. These potential skills identified among the rural women.

- Rural women are found creative and innovative in their daily routines and these are quite evident while they perform their household duties.
- They have excellent perceptual skills which help in taking effective decisions.
- Women are found to be good team players because of their get going attitude in any kind of environments.
- Rural women are found physically and mentally strong.
- Rural women are hard working in nature because they work quite long hours in the fields and also attend to their household duties as men aspire to relax soon after finishing their job.
- Women are best known for their social skills which are very much required for running an enterprise.
- They have strong entrepreneurial opportunities in rural areas like Icecream manufacturing, channel products, papads and pickles and Readymade garments which are found less explored.

HINDRANCES FOR RURAL WOMEN TO USE THEIR MULTITUDE SKILLS:

In spite of the best skills among the rural women they are still not empowered. Empowering women to participate in economic development is not only a major concern but also a great challenge. Availability economically and socially empowered women paves path for the sustainable development of a country. But women may have to face many obstacles, hindrances to succeed and gain a significant economic and social status. The entry of rural women particularly into entrepreneurial sector is always and encouraged because they can do wonders by exerting their extraordinary skills. The major hindrances that come in the success path of women are as follows:

- Major obstacle for the rural women is their illiteracy. Rural women are deprived from undergoing education. They are not allowed to complete their primary education because their roles are pre-scripted by the society i.e., their role is to do household duties. Thus they are made to learn to perform household works rather to educate them.
- Women in general and rural women folk in particular will possess less achievement-motivation when compared to the male counterparts.
- The greatest deterrent to women progression is that they are women.
- Most of the women are less risk taking and Lack of access to technology.
- Women lack self-confidence. “I can do attitude” will be seen less among women because they also strongly believe that running family or earning for the family are not their roles this attitude is found more among rural women.
- Credit discrimination and Non Cooperative officials hinder women to progress economically through their enterprising skills and be self-employed. Banks and Finance institutions are still skeptical in granting loans and advances to rural women. But they are the best creditworthy than men.

INITIATIVES OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES TO UNLEASH THE POTENTIAL OF RURAL WOMEN OF INDIA:

Social Entrepreneurs are acting as the second invisible hand of the economic system. The social cause as an entrepreneurial opportunity approach surely adds value to the society since this would address to the most pressing problems like rural women empowerment in the country. The following few such enterprises which unleash the potential skills of rural women.

- **Datahalli** : JSW Foundation started Datahalli, an all women BPO. It has emerged as sustainable social enterprise with the financial support from JSW foundation. The purpose of this social enterprise is to create employment opportunities for rural women. They provide jobs for those women who are high school pass outs. They are trained in basic computer skills like data entry and processing operations. This organisation currently is playing a vital role in the lives of 500 rural women as these women have gained economic power in certain cases they are acting as a bread earner. They are able to earn between Rs. 3000 to Rs.5000 per month.
- **Revival Style**: Revival style is a social enterprise started by Harmeet Neetu Sidhu and Allison Q. Taylor. Revival style as a way to empower women from the rural villages of India. This organisation produces ethnic and stylish apparel for women. This organisation not only preserves the traditional crafts and also considers the needs of modern day consumers by bridging the gap between both. It involves creative female artisans of rural India, thus helping in leading a quality life. Hence Revival Style inspiration is the over 180 million rural Indian women living below the universal poverty line. Moreover they offer these women fair wages and also nurture their skills through many education programs.
- **Rang Sutra**: Rang Sutra is one of the most successful social enterprises in India. It has been started by Sumita Ghose. The company aims to preserve Indian heritage the precious ethnic handi-crafts by manufacturing apparel, home furnishings and accessories. It hires approximately 2000 women artisans from remote regions of Rajasthan, Uttaranchal and Assam. RangSutra produces fine quality hand made products employing these artisans thus helping them sustainable livelihoods. Besides this they are striving to gain good employer brand image, RangSutra also made the majority of its employees as their partners and also given them representation on the board of Directors.
- **Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad**: Lijjat Pappad is one of India's most popular and oldest co-operatives women supporting enterprise. Lijjat Pappad is an organisation manufacturing various household products like papads, masalas, wheat flour, detergent powder, detergent cake and liquid detergent. It has started its journey with seven women employees it now has over 43,000 women employees throughout India and it has 81 branches.

CONCLUSION:

The Indian economy is witnessing rapid growth in the 21st century. In the same pace social and environmental problems of the country are also increasing. Hence there is need for another invisible hand to address all such issues. India is experiencing an increase in social entrepreneurship and attempts of social entrepreneurs are finding affordable solutions to various social problems of the society wherein rural women empowerment is one such problem. The social enterprises are initiating considerable measures to those women who have significant potential to seize the opportunities in the environment thus empowering them socially and economically. Social enterprises are acting as a potent force positive and a lasting change.

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