Entrepreneurial Activities among Tribal Women in Kerala-The Means to Empowerment

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Abstract--- Empowerment of tribal women has emerged as an important issue in recent times. Entrepreneurship can be viewed as one of the best ways towards attainment of self-sufficiency and poverty alleviation among tribal women in the country. Entrepreneurial activities provide not only economic development but also an upward social movement and ensure dignity of life at par with others. This paper seeks to examine the various entrepreneurial activities that can be initiated among tribal women in Kerala. The paper also attempts to explain the need for promoting such activities and the role of the society and public in promoting the same.

Keywords--- Entrepreneurship, Tribal Women, Empowerment.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in the economic development of a country. An entrepreneur is often considered a person who runs his/her own business or set up his/her own industry. Women entrepreneurs are generally viewed as women who initiate, organize and operate her own business enterprise providing employment to a handful of persons. Women empowerment among tribal community has emerged as an important issue in recent times. Entrepreneurship is not a characteristic endowed with some society, class, caste or religion; rather, entrepreneurial qualities, abilities and skills are widely distributed among people of different castes and cultural backgrounds. Our country is characterized as having the second largest tribal population in the world. According to the 2011 census, tribals constitute 8.2% of total population of the county. Not only that, they are the most deprived and oppressed sections of India. Gender bias and oppression reveals that “adivasi” women are the worst affected. Poverty, deprivation and absolutely poor health are the major problems encountered by them. In Kerala, adivasis constitute 1.1% of the total population of which females outnumber males. The economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Entrepreneurship can be viewed as one of the best ways towards attainment of self-sufficiency and poverty alleviation for women in a country. The involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities would ensure effective utilization of labour, generation of income and hence improvement in the quality of their life. Entrepreneurship among tribals will be in the nature of rural entrepreneurship, where tribal women should concentrate in their home or local area and contribute to the creation of local wealth. Economic empowerment of women via entrepreneurial activities would surely result in increased socio-economic opportunity, political participation, social equality, family and community development, and thereby the development of the nation as a whole.

DOI: 10.9756/BP2018.1012/12
Under this backdrop, this paper deals with 3 issues. Firstly, it tries to set out the reasons as to why promote entrepreneurship among tribal women; secondly, it seeks to identify the various micro-entrepreneurial activities that can be initiated among tribal women; and finally it attempts to expel the policy changes that are necessary for creating an environment conducive to entrepreneurship among tribal women.

**Objectives**

- To examine the socio-economic status of tribal women
- To highlight the reasons as to why we should encourage entrepreneurial activities among tribal women
- Suggested micro-entrepreneurial activities that can be initiated among tribal women

**Methodology**

This is purely a theoretical paper. Secondary information provided by various authors and researchers have been used for the study. Necessary information has also been collected from various journals, books, Government reports, etc.

**Entrepreneurship Concept**

Defining entrepreneurship is not an easy task. There exist many definitions for the same. To some, entrepreneurship means innovation, while some others view the concept as risk taking ventures undertaken. A few others consider entrepreneurship as the act of starting, owning and managing a business enterprise. Accordingly, an entrepreneur can be viewed as a person who adopts new methods of production, invents new products and markets, finds new sources of supply, undertakes risks and fully exploits the existing business opportunities (Schumpeter, J.A, 1980, Stevenson H.H, 1985, Byrd W.A., 1987, Tryson, Rogers Petrin T, 1990).

Entrepreneurship among tribals will be in the nature of rural entrepreneurship which consists of finding a unique blend of resources within or outside agriculture. This can be achieved by widening the base of farm business through major changes in the land area or production. Thus entrepreneurship among tribals is usually community based and has a greater bearing on the tribal community itself.

Micro-entrepreneurial activities are viewed as activities that help in mobilising available resources within an area, especially within or outside agriculture with a view of improving the quality of life for individuals, families and communities, thereby creating a healthy economy and environment.

**Who are Tribals?**

The word tribals or adhivasis strike our minds as half-naked men and women, speaking unintelligible language, residing in groups, follow primitive and odd lifestyles bearing a sense of introvert attitude and reluctant to show off before the general society. Tribals refer to a “socially cohesive unit, associated with a territory, the members of which regard them as politically autonomous”, (Mitchell, 1979; 232). The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1911, defines a tribe as a “collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not endogamous though originally it might have been so”.

DOI: 10.9756/BP2018.1012/12

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**Tribals or Adivasis in Kerala**

Out of 8.2% of the national population, tribal in Kerala constitute 1.5%. There are 36 major tribal communities in the state with highest concentration of tribal population in Wayanad district (31.24%), followed by Idukki (14%) and Palakkad (10.8%). Paniya tribes are the biggest tribe among them with highest concentration in Malappuram district (56.3%). The primitive tribals constitute 5% of the total population, and they include the Cholainaikans, Kurumbas, Kattunaikans, Kadars and Koragas (Census 2011, Govt. of India).

**Conceptualizing Empowerment**

United Nations (D.D. Mali, 2001) defines women empowerment as “the process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices”. Empowerment as per this paper is a process by which entrepreneurial activities enable women to build their inherent talents and capacities, and remove certain inhibiting factors like lack of skill and resources through awareness creation among them.

**Socio-Economic Status of Tribal Women in Kerala**

In terms of gender composition, the tribal women constitute 2, 46,636 (2, 19,884 rural and 26,752 urban). The overall sex ratio of the scheduled tribe population is 1057/1000 males as against 990/1000 males at the national level (Census 2011, Govt. of India). The educational status of tribal women reveals that only 1748 girls from tribal community seek admission to various Arts and Science Courses (Economic review 2012, Kerala State Planning Board, Office of the Collegiate Education Department, Govt. of Kerala). There are 887 unwed mothers and 20,301 widows among this group. Only 17% are getting pension. Poverty and poor health status are some other problems faced by this category (Living conditions of tribal communities - 2011 Kerala Survey).

**Entrepreneurship among Socio-Economic Backward Communities- Empirical Evidences**

During the past, entrepreneurial activities were confined to the socio-economically forward communities, but today entrepreneurial qualities are distributed among people in different areas, castes, religion, cultured background and countries across the world.

Empirical evidences support promotion of entrepreneurial activities among socio-economically backward categories. While Hagen (1962) views perception from other social groups that their purpose of life and life values are not respected by other society members as a reason for entrepreneurship among such categories, Young (1971) and Shapero (1975) considers the low social status, but plentiful resources, than other groups as a stepping stone to entrepreneurship.

Sometimes negative factors like frustration, social grievances, etc., may also be the reasons as to why some become entrepreneurs (Shapero, 1982). All these factors force members of such marginalized group construct their own vision of life through entrepreneurship.
Entrepreneurial Activities among Tribal Women-Supporting Reasons

Tribal community women are found to be active and they work hard with their male members for the family. Majority of them depend on agricultural practices, rearing of domestic animals and weaving clothes. They are found to have inherent skills and expertise in making beautiful handicrafts products with locally available raw materials like wood, paper, thread, etc., but majority of them lack marketing skills and facilities. Attention in this area from the Government and public will surely enhance the socio-economic status of tribal women, thereby empowering them economically.

Suggested Entrepreneurial Activities for Tribal Women

A few entrepreneurial opportunities and activities can be cited which is suitable to Kerala context. All these are microenterprise development activities. These activities would be more beneficial to the rural tribals as it provides them an opportunity to take care of their home and maintain a better standard of living without moving to outside areas.

- Microenterprise development related to agriculture and allied activities. They include cultivation of natural vegetables, flowers, oilseeds, mushroom growing and bee keeping. It was found that tribal women are experts in producing such products, but they are prepared only for their consumption. What is necessary is to create awareness among them that such products have lots of demand in the market and provide them with proper marketing facilities of such products.
- Microenterprise development related to household-based operations like stitching, weaving and embroidery, thread embroidery, creation of handcrafted gift items, beautiful handicrafts and handloom products, etc. The success of such activities lies in diversification of markets for their produce.
- Microenterprise development related to livestock management activities like poultry farming, dairy farming, and livestock feed production and production using animal waste. These activities are to be encouraged because women can utilise their technical skills and raw materials from their own farm to earn substantial income. Small agro processing units can be started in this regard.
- Microenterprise development for promoting natural skills among tribal women. Entrepreneurial opportunities exist for women using wood, stone, metals, etc., to create handicrafts and gift items; cane and bamboo for making furniture and decorative pieces; clay for making pots, vessels and other items; basket making from straw; carpet making from jute, etc. Industries catering to such products need to be encouraged.
- Microenterprise development related to rural retailing, which focus on tribal women selling low cost economically branded products in rural areas so that they can reach the remote places. Since tribal women know the local language, tastes and preferences of the rural population, such activities may prove beneficial to them as it would create new sources of incomes for the underprivileged rural women, thereby improving their standard of living, better health, education for family members, etc.
Role of Government and Society

Empowerment of tribal women is a challenge. Entrepreneurial activities to a certain extent help to meet these challenges. Tribal women can do wonders through involvement in entrepreneurial activities. The government and the society have to do much in this regard. Entry of tribal women in entrepreneurial activities needs to be encouraged. Knowledge regarding various funding agencies, awareness on government welfare programmes, technical skills, etc., should be imparted. Tribal women should be motivated to come out of their traditional occupations for accepting more challenging and rewarding economic activities. Encouragement of tribal women entrepreneurs’ network would be a welcome step in this direction for providing information and lectures, imparting technical knowledge in production, processing, procurement, management and marketing of various products. Promotional and funding agencies should play an active role in understanding and helping tribal women entrepreneurs. It is necessary that the funding agencies should reserve a certain percentage of loans for tribal women in various self-employment schemes. Various institutions should be set up at the state and district levels to help tribal women upgrade their skills. More educational institutions, especially those meant for women in conducting entrepreneurial training programmes should be set up.

Conclusion

To sum up, promotion of entrepreneurial activities among tribal women requires a multi-pronged approach. With liberalization, privatization and globalization, new vistas of entrepreneurship development should be created. To make women think globally and operate efficiently, there is a need to formulate policies with aim for women empowerment through various entrepreneurial activities, because when women move forward, the family moves, the villages move and the nation moves. Entrepreneurial activities can help tribal women improve their economic independence and social status.

References