



Woman Empowerment through Entrepreneurship in Service Sector with special Reference to SHGs in Tourism

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KEYWORDS :

Women empowerment is a process by which women achieve increased control over domestic/public decision making.

There are several basic constraints, being faced by women in the country in their way to Empowerment. Some of them are Traditional Male Domination, Dowry Problem, Gender discrimination, Gender-wise abortions, Malnutrition, Illiteracy, Rural Poverty, etc.

Mainstreaming and empowerment to women is central to human development. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved.

Jawaharlal Nehru had said **"You can tell the condition of the nation by looking at the status of women."** This statement alone signifies the importance of women's role in the cultural, social and economic development of any Nation.

Swami Vivekananda had said **"That country and that nation which doesn't respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future"** and in pursuit of making India a great nation, let us work towards giving women their much deserved status.

The experts observe that there are five levels of the women's empowerment framework They are - welfare, access, conscientisation, mobilisation and control.

Even the Educated women in Urban Areas earning with employment or business are still felt kept away from empowerment and decision making. Then, the position of the Rural Women is still worse than the Urban lot – with illiteracy, poverty, dependence on the male head of the family for everything, succumbing to the whims and fancies of the family heads. They do not have an opportunity to explore their inner strengths and capabilities to become good entrepreneurs.

Of late, during the past few years, women are seen stepping forward in various areas of economy to take up the reins of management. The role of women worldwide is undergoing a dramatic change. Women owned businesses are highly increasing in the economies of almost all countries. The hidden entrepreneurial potentials of women have gradually been recognized and are changing with the growing sensitivity to the role and economic status in the society. From the situation of a woman not permitted to step out of the house in India - to the same woman stepping on the Moon as Astronaut, there is rapid change in the social status of woman in our Country – through ages. In India women constitute fifty percent of the total population – and exploration and exploitation of the potential in the women – will significantly improve the economic situation of the families in particular and of the Nation in general.

Service sector is one, wherein, women are shining well with their natural and inherent understanding and patient nature.

Role of Women in Service Sector:

Service Sector involves a variety of areas – where in service provision is involved. They range from simple Housewife to the highest seat of the country ie., President of India – at various levels. The service may be as a Housewife, Teacher, Doctor, Lawyer, Administrator, Politician, Technocrats etc. India has seen from olden days – several women with outstanding performance in their fields – like Gargi and Lopamudra of Vedic period, Razia Begum (the only woman empress of the Delhi) Rudrama Devi, Molla, Jhansi Lakshmi Bai etc., in middle age, to Smt. Indira Gandhi, our ever best Prime Minister for about

17 years, in the contemporary period. To-day, the two biggest banks of India - State Bank of India and the ICICI Bank are being steered successfully by women chairpersons.

In the service sector, to begin with a Housewife, a woman's role is described as '*Karyeshu Dasi; Karanesu Manthri; Bhojyeshu Maatha; and Sayaneshu Rambha*'. Her services are multi-faceted as a House wife. The woman is also responsible for up-bringing the children in the righteous way. It is often said that '*the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world*'. Thereby, it shows that women play a vital role in preparing the quality of the future citizen. Thus, the role of women in service sector started at Home – the invaluable service sector. Generally, women are considered more sincere, determined, dedicated, concerned, and committed in their pursuits than men. It is believed that women alone will have an eye for detail in any subject. What man can do women can do better. A women entrepreneur depicts the balance between home and office done very effortlessly and however very effectively.

The Government of India (GOI) has recognized the need for tapping the hidden potential in the enterprising and entrepreneurial nature in women, has brought out several legislations to give a helping hand to the women entrepreneurs. The GOI defined 'women entrepreneurs' based on women participation in equity and employment of a business enterprise. Accordingly, a 'woman entrepreneur' is defined as an enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of the employment generated in the enterprise to a woman. The business establishments owned and run by women are given an edge over those of men – in financial assistance in the form of more subsidies and margin monies; and preference in sanctions and permissions. Besides this, the concept of Self help groups is introduced for the benefit and betterment of the economies of women at micro level of the economy, and have been liberally extending financial assistance through Banks to the Groups - popularly called " DWAKRA' groups to day.

I would like to touch upon the role of women in one of the service sectors – 'Tourism' on this occasion. Women individually, or in the form of Groups, have a lot of space in the Tourism service sector.

Women in Tourism Sector:

One of the service sectors is 'Tourism', the fast upcoming Service Industry on the economic scenario of the world. It is considered the second largest foreign exchange earner to the world after the Oil business. Its potential is abundant and amazing; and the same is being recognized by all Nations. The tourism business include development of Tourism Products (sites), Travel Agency, Transport, Hospitality (Food and Accommodation), Guide Services and therefore Tourism is considered as a composition of several activities; and not a stand alone activity.

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) which has taken the theme '*Tourism opens doors for women*' for its celebration of the World Tourism Day on 27th September 2007, recognized that the women, with their presence in this sector, have contributed to the cause and betterment of tourism in their own unique way.

One traditionally feels the presence of a woman in Tourism sector – as Air Hostess in Flights. In early Seventies, when the Tourism Industry was in a budding Stage, it was considered that only a few areas are suitable for women in this Industry. But to-day, she is everywhere –

from Ministers for Tourism in Several States, Bureaucrats in Ministries of Tourism in the Governments, Chairpersons and Managing Directors, managing big Hotels, marketing Aviation business, managing Travel and Visa Services, planning executing Holiday packages etc. It is amazing to note that several Indian women are heading key positions in various Tourism sectors in other countries also.

Apart from the participation of educated and urban women in Tourism business as discussed above, the Tourism focuses light on the Rural areas also with 'Rural Tourism Projects' in order to improve the economic and social conditions of the rural women at micro level. The recent concept of 'Self-help groups' could awake the enterprising nature of the rural woman – to work in groups and contribute their capacities and creativities for their common cause of welfare; and the Rural Tourism projects are targeting the rural poor women through the vehicle of 'Self-help groups' (SHG). Rapid progress in SHG formation has now turned into an empowerment movement among women across the country. Micro finance is necessary to overcome exploitation, create confidence for economic self reliance of the rural poor, particularly among rural women. The object of the 'Rural tourism' is to strengthen rural livelihoods via the tourism process, based on rural community art and craft skills and assets in the cultural and natural environment. Thus, the SHG concept in the Rural Tourism will facilitate interactive experience of rural life in India to the paying visitor; and at the same time, it is a direct income to the local communities. This income route is supposed to reach the most disadvantaged rural sector directly – for betterment of their lives; as well as to strengthen their capacity building and rural infrastructure. Most of the tourism spots in our Country are in rural areas, requiring a lot of infra creation for the shelter, food and guidance to the visitors in these areas. In the absence of these minimum facilities, visitors are not showing interest in visiting many of the marvelous locations – natural or man made, and even those who visit these places, are hurrying away their trip to reach the nearby urban places for their stay overnight.

If these areas of providing minimum and basic accommodation with comfort and hygiene, minimum decent food availability, well in-

formed tourist guide facility are handed over to the interested SHGs (DWAKRA Groups) with reasonable training to them, it serves many purposes – like uplifting the economies of the SHGs working in this area; and also retaining the visitor for a day or two at the places of visit; and thereby their spending will be income to the locals and thereby to the economy of the Country as a whole.. This concept of providing shelter and food – is age old custom in our Country in the name of 'Pootakoollamma House' where a woman is emphasized; and where service of food and shelter was available with love and affection; We call it now a days as a Hospitality service, which can be better managed by women, as proven since ages. This is a hidden treasure, if such spots are identified and developed in the above discussed lines, to the Tourism industry as at macro level and to the SHG Groups at micro level.

Besides, women have major role in the creation of handicrafts of the Rural India like Kondapalli / Yetikoppaka Toys, Cherial handicrafts, Nirmal paintings, Pedana Gold covering Jewellery, Palakollu/ Narsapuram Lace works, Embroidery on Maggam works, etc., sitting pretty at homes and participating in the manufacture of these items. The increase in visitors to places with good infrastructure at such places will automatically create more market for these items; and thereby the production of such items increase; and help improve the economies of the rural families.

Hence, I have taken up this subject to touch upon the role of women in Entrepreneurship in Tourism industry – in the process of providing multifarious opportunities for women; and also in creating economic opportunities for the rural women with a lot of economic activities and thereby self sustenance, self actualization and thereby improvement of empowerment to Women in the Country.

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