



Women Social Entrepreneurship in India – A Reality

Tushar Sharma

B.E. Student (4th year) PEC University of Technology Sector-12, Chandigarh India

Dr. Anju Singla

Assistant Professor Department of Applied Sciences PEC University of Technology Sector-12, Chandigarh India

Parul Grover

Assistant Professor Department of Applied Sciences PEC University of Technology Sector-12, Chandigarh India

ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship acts as a catalyst towards socio-economic development of the country as it creates employment, contributes in production and exports, generates income and alleviates poverty. The role which women can play in the socio-economic development of the country is manifold. The concept of women entrepreneurship clubbed with the concept of social entrepreneurship has given rise to a new concept of women social entrepreneurship. Therefore, this paper makes an attempt to study the start-up ventures of some successful young women social entrepreneurs who have not only contributed to the economic development but brought innovative solutions to the social problems of the country.

KEYWORDS : Women Social Entrepreneurship, Start-up Ventures, Social Problems, Socio-Economic Development.

Introduction

India is a developing country, growing at an average annual growth rate of 6 percent from 1951 until 2015 (Trading Economics, 2015). In the past decade, India has witnessed development in many spheres of the economy. However, the problem of poverty still shackles the development process of the country. Although India has reduced its poverty with 21.9 percent of its 1.2 billion people living below poverty line as against the target of 23.9 percent to be achieved by 2015, still one-fourth of the world's poor live in India (Agarwal, 2015). One of the most important factors behind poverty and degradation of livelihood as disclosed in various researches is unemployment (Jha, 2013). The overall unemployment rate in India was 4.9 percent in 2013-14 with 4.1 percent among men and 7.7 percent among women (Press Trust of India, 2015). The high level of poverty and unemployment adversely affects the socio-economic development of the nations. This is quite evident as India ranked 94th on GDP and 102nd on Social Progress Index out of 132 countries in 2014 which is lowest among the BRICS nations (Press Trust of India, 2014). This clearly indicates the poor standard of living and social progress of India at the global level. One common solution for eradicating poverty, creating employment opportunities, generating income and bringing social development can be 'Entrepreneurship'.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a process through which a person, called entrepreneur takes calculated risk, innovate a business idea and organize a business of his own to run it profitably. In other words, entrepreneurship means the function of creating something new, organizing and coordinating, and undertaking risk and handling economic uncertainty (Arora & Sood, 2005). Thus, entrepreneurs shape economic destiny of nations by creating wealth and employment, offering products and services and generating taxes for government because of which entrepreneurship has closely been linked to economic growth of a country (Kumari, 2014). Entrepreneurship solves problems of economic and social development of the country as social development is a consequence of economic development. However, another dimension of entrepreneurship, called 'Social Entrepreneurship' has a greater potential to accelerate the pace of social growth of the country.

Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is the recognition of a social problem and the use of entrepreneurial principles to organize, create and manage a social venture to achieve a desired social change. While a

business entrepreneur typically measures performance in profit and return, a social entrepreneur also measures positive returns to society (Singh, 2012). Entrepreneurs are innovative, highly motivated and critical thinkers, and when these attributes are combined with a drive to solve social problems, a social entrepreneur is born (Seth & Kumar, 2011). Hence, social entrepreneurship is a concept where business is started and run by an entrepreneur for a social cause. It is very much different from corporate social responsibility (CSR). In CSR, companies along with the main business are engaged in social activities like charity or projects whereas in social entrepreneurship, the venture, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, is entirely based on a social issue.

One of the initial social entrepreneurial ventures is the 'Grameen Bank' originated in 1976 by Prof. Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh to provide micro credit to poor women in groups. This Nobel Peace Prize winning initiative was based on the social issue of poverty and women empowerment which emphasized that poor has under-utilized skills and the potential to take loans, repay them and come out of the poverty clutches. He believed that women are a medium of development for any household and economic liberty given to women brings both economic and social benefits to her family. The concept of Grameen Bank has been replicated in many countries including India as it has been successful for generating many women entrepreneurs and alleviating poverty of poor households.

Women Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment

According to Government of India, "women entrepreneurship involves an enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having minimum financial interest of 51 percent of the capital." (Sinha, 2015). Hence, women entrepreneur can be defined as a woman or group of women who initiates an innovative business activity, takes calculated risk and manages that business enterprise. Mrs. Rajni Bector of *Cremica Group*, Mrs. Shahnaz Hussain of *Shahnaz Herbals* and Mrs. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw of *Biocon* are some of the renowned women entrepreneurs of Indian origin.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity." (Agarwal, 2012). This means a woman is equally strong as a man as far as the mental ability and intelligence is concerned. However, still the woman is treated unequal with man. According to the Human Development Report 2014 by United Nations Development Programme, India ranked 127th in a list of 152 countries on Gender Inequality Index (United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2014). Currently only, 39 percent of Indian women is formally employed, compared to 81 percent of Indian men and 71 percent of Chinese women. Moreover, India scored second to last in a Gender Female Entrepreneurship Index among women entrepreneurs in 17 countries (Guardian News and Media Limited, 2015). This clearly indicates the need for women empowerment through women entrepreneurship considering the role of women in socio-economic development of the country. The lack of female participation in the workforce results in a cultural vicious circle (British Council, 2015) and has adverse impact on the society. Increasing the participation of women in working population of the country by encouraging women entrepreneurship will reduce gender inequality and improve the socio-economic status of the poor Indian women.

Women Social Entrepreneurship

India's Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-12) has recognized for the first time that women are not just as equal citizens but as agents of economic and social growth (Lavanya, 2010). A social and cultural change can be prompted in a woman's status by providing her economic opportunities. On the similar note, a 'Young Women Social Entrepreneurship Development Programme' has been started by the British Council and partner Diageo in India. This programme aims to disseminate social enterprise expertise to women in communities across India with the belief that supporting the emergence of a new generation of young women social entrepreneurs is an important investment in the future (British Council, 2015).

Women Social Entrepreneurs in India

India has seen a handful of women social entrepreneurs growing and leaving a mark in the society with their innovative social ideas like Ela Ramesh Bhatt of *SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association of India)*, G. Padmaja Reddy of *Spandana* (microfinance organization), Chetna Gala Sinha of *Mann Deshi Mahila Sahkari Bank* (microfinance bank) etc. However, the spirit of social entrepreneurship has grown in recent years and a number of young women entrepreneurs have come up and started their ventures targeting different social concerns like basic needs, health, education, information, employment, entrepreneurship development, microfinance, rural development etc. The start-up ventures of some of the successful young women entrepreneurs in India have been listed as under:

Anu Sridharan started enterprise called *Next Drop* which allows urban Indian residents to track availability of piped water through SMS and already serves more than 18000 people in the state of Karnataka. She aimed at solving the problem of irregular water supply as the water is available only for a limited duration in a day or week and the time of availability is even not certain in most of the urban India. *Next Drop* sends text messages 60 minutes before water arrives in the tap and also offers tools to track leakages in water supply to utility boards.

Ajaita Shah is the founder and CEO of *Frontier Markets* which focuses on bringing high quality and affordable products to bottom of pyramid and rural households in India. Her venture aims to be the scale solution for manufactures that produce goods for the rural markets in India. She trains locals to educate and sell to rural households. Her main focus is on energy products and microfinance.

Aditi Gupta along with her husband founded *Menstrupedia.com*, which is a friendly guide that educates the females about menstrual health and hygiene. *Menstrupedia* has come up as a great initiative to shatter taboos about menstruation. The website is first of its kind in India which shares information about menstruation so openly. She has also launched a comic book named as *Menstrupedia* comic which guides the young girls about periods in form of a story.

Sheetal Mehta Walsh is the founder of *Shanti Life* which is a unique microfinance platform aiming at serving the rural poor in Gujarat slums and villages to help them create sustainable businesses. The beneficiaries not only get funds at a low rate of interest (near about 12 percent) but also have access to mentoring, financial literacy training and eco-sanitation facilities. She is also planning to create an online marketplace for the microfinance borrowers to provide them a platform to easily sell their goods globally. Besides this,

she granted microfinance loans to rickshaw drivers under rickshaw project in slums of Ahmedabad and Baroda to enable them to afford a down payment so that they can own their own rickshaw and work with freedom.

Saloni Malhotra initiated *Desi Crew*, with a basic idea to create knowledge based livelihood or employment opportunities in rural areas and small towns. Her organization has four rural offices and employs over 300 people from the rural areas. She handed over this organization to a professional management team but continues to be part of the Board. She co-founded *Safecity*, a citizen's initiative to make cities in India safer again. This venture provides a platform to people to share their personal incidents of harassment at a location. The team then works with the concerned authorities to improve situation on the ground.

Pooja Warier founded *UnLtd. India*, a premier incubator for social entrepreneurs in the country and *Bombay Connect*, the India's only co-working space dedicated to social change. She is very passionate about discovering the entrepreneurial spirit in people and encouraging them to use it to solve social problems. She also started *Journey for Change*, a travel company inspiring leaders through journeys into social enterprise. Due to her consistent efforts for promoting social entrepreneurship, she is considered as a source of encouragement and support for upcoming social entrepreneurs in India.

Priya Naik founded *Samhita Social Ventures*, an organization that helps corporations, donor agencies, NGOs, individuals and philanthropists to collaborate with each other for a large scale social impact. Prior to this, she co-founded *The Spark Group*, an education company for delivering affordable education to low income people. Besides this, she was part of two student-led start ups – *Aerovax* and *Kalpataru* while she has working as a researcher at Poverty Action Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA. *Aerovax* dealt in creation of safe, inhalable aerosol vaccines that could be delivered without the use of needles and *Kalpataru* involved delivery of innovative, low-cost technology to increase the efficiency of microfinance institutions.

[Source: (Sharma, 2014) and (Anonymous, 2013)]

Each of these women entrepreneurs has not only made an attempt to solve a social issue, but also created employment opportunities, increased productivity and generated income. These women social entrepreneurs have proved that a social enterprise can also be a profit making sustainable enterprise. They have brought up distinctive ideas to address the social concerns of the country. They have put in best of their efforts to bring innovative solution to age old social problems which have a large impact on the socio-economic living of people. Government should introduce special measures for such social women entrepreneurs for providing them essential resources like manpower, finance, guidance etc. Initiatives like 'Young Women Social Entrepreneurship Development Programme' should be encouraged. The incubators across the country should also train women to make their ventures sustainable through entrepreneurship development programmes (EDPs). Thus, a proper platform should be provided to encourage women to come up with an innovative business for a social cause.

Conclusion

Women Social Entrepreneurship is a unique concept which has gained momentum in recent years for its multiple socio-economic benefits. This concept not only provides a woman with the means of livelihood but also contribute towards the monetary and social development of the nation by generating income and employment, making women self-dependant and solving social problems. Therefore, it becomes necessary for a country like to emphasize on the promotion of women social entrepreneurship.

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