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Gender Comparison in Entrepreneurship: A Study of MSMEs in Aizawl District, Mizoram

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Abstract

The emergence of women entrepreneurs in any society may be caused by many things, some of which may be because of force, some may be by chance and some other may be due to ambitions. However, there are some other women whose aim is becoming entrepreneurs and they take up entrepreneurial pursuit intentionally. Some people expressed their view that as far as the need for success and monetary gain are concerned, men and women are same. The problems faced by men and women entrepreneurs are same and it is not prudent to give uniqueness on the problems faced by women entrepreneurs. But this view is found to be senseless that men are more entrepreneurial than women. It is accepted that what is not a problem for men may be a very big pain for women. This paper considers the emergence of women entrepreneurs in Aizawl district, Mizoram. This study is based on a survey of 406 entrepreneurs from Aizawl district, Mizoram. It was found that the proportion of women entrepreneurs was only 15%. This paper makes apparent, though there are some common problems with men, the need to give more importance to promote women entrepreneurs.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs, MSME*

Introduction

The entry of women in the field of entrepreneurship is relatively recent phenomenon though the concept of entrepreneurship was never restricted to men alone. In common perception,

entrepreneurship particularly of Industrial type, is an all male game. Not only in entrepreneurship, but overall participation of women is unfavourable compared to those of their male counterparts. In India and some other countries also, there seems to be a cultural bias regarding the comparative role

of man and women (Saxena 2005). Gross National Product (GNP), per capita income and wage are not only the measures for growth of an economy, the development of an economy is also measured in terms of involvement and exploitation of the capabilities of both men and women as a constructive human resource potential (Mary 1996) In this circumstance, the role of women cannot be neglected from the total fabric of development. Identical involvement of men and women in social and economic sphere is a necessary condition for the growth of not only of the women but also the economy as a whole.

Almost half of the world population is women. However, the participation of women in lucrative employment is relatively low compared to their men counterparts. In almost all countries in the globe, the average income of women is less than those of men (Jerinabi, 1998). Women entrepreneurship coming to the fore and the conceptualisation of 'women as entrepreneurs' is flattering a global episode now. As per the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), women amount to be more than one-third of the people associated with in entrepreneurial venture and are plausible to take part an even substantial position when unorganised sectors are contemplated (Minnuti *et al.* 2005). Women all over the world are playing a vital role in business community. Morris (2001) asserted that higher levels entrepreneurship in developing countries will significantly improve the economic performance and raise incomes. A study by the United Nations (2002) found a causal relationship between entrepreneurship, economic growth and poverty reduction and

noted that the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of the private sector in the developing world since they create jobs. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) business enterprises are considered to be the most critical factor in dealing with problems of unemployment and poverty both in rural and urban areas. MSMEs empower the poor by developing skills, self esteem and self efficiency. Businesses undertaken by women continues to exhibit economic power throughout the world. As per the report of GEM, 8.9% of women participated in entrepreneurship worldwide.

According to the former Prime Minister Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, 'women are central to human development'. As spouse, as mothers and as part of productive force, women wield significant catalytic capabilities in limiting the size of families, spreading the message of the small family norm and imparting education to the rising generation and enhancing, production and productivity of economic enterprises (Vasanthi 1998).

The National Convention of Women Entrepreneurs which was held for the first time in New Delhi in 1981, called for priority to women entrepreneurs in the allocation of sheds, sanction of power, industrial license etc. The government of India initiated the scheme 'Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas' during the sixth five year plan. The 1991 New Industrial Policy also redefined the women entrepreneurs for encouraging their growth and development. Women's cells are opened in many banks and financial institutions to

help women entrepreneurs. These things have helped in the coming out of women entrepreneurs in India (Choudhury 2000).

In India, according to the Second Census of Small Scale Industries (1990-91), 7.69% of the enterprises were undertaken by women, out of which 12.5% were located in North East India (NEI). As per the Third Census of Small Scale Industries (2001-02), women enterprises comprised of 10.1%. The result of Fourth Census of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (2006-07) revealed that 7.36% of the enterprises were women-run enterprise. However, 9.46% of the enterprises were actually handled by women.

Profile of the region under study

Mizoram in the Northeast India is industrially, agriculturally and economically backward region compared to other parts of India. The unfavourable position because of hilly surface features of the land and geographical state of the region, pair with bad infrastructure and communication bottlenecks, are some of the difficulties for the entrepreneurs to proceed in the direction of enterprise development. The manufacturing sector in the state is not performing well. The economy of the state observed only inconsiderable migration of workforce from agriculture, industrial and service sector. Activities like tailoring, carpentry, vehicle repairs, iron and steel fabrication, bakery and confectionery, handloom and handicrafts, weaving, blacksmithy and tinsmithy etc, account for almost two-third of the total MSMEs in the state. The scope and prospect for large

enterprise is very less and as such MSMEs dominate the industrial outline of the state and it has a prominent place in the economic development of Mizoram. (Economic Survey: Mizoram, 2017-18).

Industrialisation in Mizoram is at an infantile stage. As noted, the entire state has been notified as backward and is categorised as 'no industry state' due to non-existence of big enterprises. As per the 2011 Census, Mizoram has a population of 10,91,014 (District Census Handbook: Aizawl, 2011). Out of the total population, 5,52,339 are males and 5,38,675 are females. Aizawl district has the highest population with 36.7% of the total population in the state. Mizoram is a highly literate agrarian economy but production of crop is very low. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for about 70% of the state population. But the share of agriculture to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) was less than 10% every year. Development of industries in a hilly and remote region is a very difficult endeavour because the investors are petrified due to tiny market, poor infrastructure and many other allied reasons. Whilst Mizoram is regarded as peaceful and there is right set of circumstances, absence or poor perception and readiness to traverse the possibilities retards the growth and development of business enterprises. The farmers are unhappy with the present system of occupation and there is general discontentment among the people to continue their occupation by practicing shifting cultivation. They want to generate an alternative employment to bear the increasing requirements of their family (Laskar, 2010). In this background, the

MSME sector has a definite place in the upliftment of the economy of Mizoram. MSMEs can be set up with less amount of capital and without technical skills. The gigantic human, material and forest resources locally available at cheap rate may be exploited further systematically and with well organised manner so that the MSME sector will be strengthened in the state. The poor people, under-privileged people, women and local artisans will get better chance for gainful employment. This will assist in registering the ambition of comprehensive development.

Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine the participation of women in entrepreneurship with regard to MSMEs in Aizawl district, Mizoram.

Data and methodology

The present study was in Aizawl district covering all types of enterprises. It is based on primary data gathered from the entrepreneurs. According to the Third Census of Small Scale Industries (2001-02), the total number of enterprises registered in Mizoram was 2718. Among them there were 2027 enterprises in Aizawl district (rural constitutes 113 enterprises and urban comprises 1914 enterprises). These are the exact population from which the sample enterprise was selected. The largest proportion of entrepreneurs taking up entrepreneurial ventures such as manufacturing, printing and publications, food processing unit, handloom and handicrafts, repairing works, trading,

tailoring, etc are found to be plentiful in Aizawl District. Three-fourth of the enterprises (2027 out of 2718) is concentrated in Aizawl District. Therefore, it was believed that there is no difficulty in taking Aizawl District as the representative of the whole of Mizoram. The sample size was taken at 20%. Consequently, 406 enterprises were selected. On that account the sample was taken by using random sampling technique. However, at the time of administering questionnaire in the field to the entrepreneurs, it was seen that some enterprises were sick and found to be closed. In such situations, random selection of the enterprises was done again. Questionnaire was administered to collect information from the entrepreneurs at the place of work. Unstructured interview was also conducted to the entrepreneurs in order to supplement the information so collected by means of questionnaire.

The enterprises from which the information was collected were categorised into seven groups. Each of the group has 58 enterprises each. They are:

- *Food items*: Under this group all the enterprises who are engaged in manufacturing of food and food related items are included.
- *Wooden*: All the enterprises who are involved in manufacturing and repairing wood items including bamboo and cane products are included.
- *Repair services*: Every kind of repair services are included here. This type of service may be ranging from repair of

tiny mechanical items to huge machines, including automobile repairs.

- *Steel/Metal*: This includes the enterprises engaged in making, fabricating, repairing, constructing or manufacturing steel structures.
- *Printing/Publications*: Under this category, all types of paper works like printing, typing, photocopying, book binding, newspaper printing, etc are included.
- *Handloom*: Those business units whose main activities are weaving and stitching of clothes, shawl and garments are put in this group.
- *Tailoring*: Every type of business enterprises undertaking tailoring and related activities including embroidery are placed under this category.

Discussion

Women in traditional societies are confined to the four walls of home, children and family. Women are not treated as equal partners in a male dominated society. In recent years, women have made their mark in different walks of life and are competing successfully with men in spite of social, psychological and economic barriers. This has been possible due to education, political awakening, urbanization, legal safeguards, social reforms. In India women entrepreneurs constitute a marginal proportion of the total entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs in general face two types of problems, on general problems faced by all entrepreneurs and, second

problems specific to women are male dominated society, lack of property in their own name, lack of education, family responsibilities, low risk bearing capacity, limited mobility. Behind every successful women entrepreneurs there is a long story of trials in climbing the hard way. This task has been full of challenges and they have steered out as independent entrepreneurs.

The Mizo society is a male-dominated society which the sociologists called 'patriarchal'; the man is the head of family by virtue of his position, and he controls and exercises all decision making. In a traditional society of the Mizo, a girl child is participating herself in many of the family undertakings. The women had to push various responsibilities at home and never had free time at all from sunrise to sunset. However, the boy child had no domestic duties. In addition to all those duties and responsibilities at home the women had to work in the jhum along with their menfolks. It is the responsibilities of men to defense of the village from all corners, hunting for wild animals and cutting and burning of forest land for cultivation and other tough works, all domestic works are exclusively left to the women. All adult males were presumed to take part in assault in defending the village, hunting and such other tough works. Females are accountable to take care of household activities, looking after children, drawing water from village water point, collection of wood for fire, grinding of rice, etc. Besides all these things, stitching, weaving and repairing of worn out clothes were the duties designated to women. Not only adults, but girls from an early age

would help her mother in every walk of household activities and would learn all those things which women were supposed to do, while boy child is exempted from all those things. However, if there are no male members in the family, women would have to handle all those duties and responsibilities given to men with certain exemptions. During those days, there was severe gender division. The position of women in Mizo traditional society was clear from some of the anecdotes and proverbs. For example, *“Flesh of crab is no meat”*; *“worn out fencing and women can be replaced”*; *“women have no religion”*; *“wisdom of a woman does not reach beyond village water point”*. From girlhood, a daughter has no allocation of share in the property of father. Inheritance of property is only through the male line. It is the responsibility of girl child to become a good housewife when she is grown-up. On the other hand, a boy child is educated and informed his duties and assignments with regard to his village and community from childhood (Mizo Women Today 1991).

In 1948 the British administration comes to an end. During those times a small numbers of schools exclusively for girls were set up. It was mostly because of the conservative outlook of some Mizo people concerning female education and their future economic conditions. The western Christian missionaries started schools and motivated the Mizos to go to schools and start education. In 1952 when the Mizo Hills District Council was opened, there were lot of government job opportunities and very few women got job in different government departments. This situation started the

awareness of the importance of education for women. Then it was realized that the importance of women education is all the same as that of men and then the conservative viewpoint with regard to women education was also declining. With the rapid spread of awareness of the importance of education, it is now the endeavor of most parents to send their children to educate them even in remote part of Mizoram. Now women are emerging up in all realm of occupations and there is no any areas in which Mizo women do not have any sort of involvement, be it social, politics, NGOs, church activities and government service (Lalfakzuali 2010). Now, women cannot be considered subservient to males in any sphere of activity.

The traditional Mizo practices as a whole no longer exist while many practices are still followed even after hundreds years of Christianity. Even in remote rural areas, women now need not to go through many difficulties in managing household work due to the introduction of modern technologies. Things now have changed that in many of the households it is the women who looks after the family. Though earnings for the family is considered to be the responsibility of husband, there are many families where the main earner of the family is wife. There are many families where male is only the one who supplements or contributing the income of female. It is evident from the state capital of Aizawl, majority of the street vendors, hawkers, small shop keepers, etc all are women. According to the 2011 census, the female literacy rate of Mizoram is 89.40 which is higher than the national

average of 65.46 and also the second highest among the states in India (Census of India 2011). Thus, the progress of Mizo women is very fast in spite of the fact that they had long-established and substantial family burden which are still prevalent till today. The instigation of education by the western Christian missionaries created new chances and new opportunities for Mizo people. They started schools and inspired them to start their education. The low position of women in the traditional society was predominantly responsible for the deprivation of women education. Parents are of the opinion that there is no need of sending their daughters to schools to have educations. But now as the passage of time the situations also changed and parents also perceived the need and importance of education for girls in order not only to march towards economic development but also to uplift the status of women in the society (Vanlaltlani 2005).

Within this context, it was believed advisable to explore the level of involvement of women entrepreneurs in taking up business activities in Aizawl district, Mizoram.

Table 1:

Gender of the entrepreneurs			
	Gender	No. of entrepreneurs	%
1	Men	344	85
2	Women	62	15
3	Transgender	Nil	-
	Total	406	100

Source: Field survey by author.

As depicted in Table 1, only 15% were found to be females and the leftover 85% were males. The industrially developed countries of the west have a phenomenal growth in the number of self-employed women after 1950s. For example, 25% of all the business enterprises in the United States (US) were owned and managed by women. More than 30% of small businesses were owned by women in Canada. 20% of small business undertakings are possessed by women in France. After 1980s the proportion of women self employed was expanded by three times in the United Kingdom (Prasad and Rao, 1998). It can be inferred that the entrepreneurs of the present study had also been fighting for their success on the reason that they must take care of their family, and at the same time look out on the pain of a business career mainly throughout the beginning staging. The aspirations to contribute something for the family may also be one of the factors which induce a person to take up entrepreneurial career. Many of the women entrepreneurs expressed their opinion that they wish to augment their family income, at least to meet expenses on account of education for children, etc. The work participation rate in the present study is higher than that of the national average, this may be because of the fact that Mizo women are competent enough, determined, forceful, enterprising and confident in undertaking their entrepreneurial aptitude and exploring opportunities. The wish for self reliance and becoming one's own boss were another factors which facilitate the women for entry into business. The hidden entrepreneurial

talents of the women has changed with the spreading responsiveness to the capacity and standing in the community and to the society. Now-a-days, women started to be conscious of their presence, their rights and their state of affairs. Women entrepreneurs of today make use of new way of economic engagement and interference. The expertise and ability, talents, competence, aptitude, professionalism, comprehension, motivation from family members, relatives and friends, vision and willingness to do something new and worthwhile and productive are some of the reasons for women to start business enterprises.

Enterprise-wise classification of men and women entrepreneurs was also done. The enterprise-wise categorization based on gender is given in Table 2. One distinctive feature is that handloom accounts for 53% of women entrepreneurs. More than half of the entrepreneurs engaged in handloom were female. It is interesting to note that it is only in handloom, the proportion of women entrepreneurs is higher than men. All other business enterprises were male dominated. It may be inferred that the future success for women entrepreneurs along this line of business is very big since the remaining enterprises are hegemonized by male entrepreneurs. The second line of business activity in which more number of women entrepreneurs are involved is tailoring. In tailoring business slightly more than one-third of the entrepreneurs were women. Ramswamy and Jyoti Kumar (2010) who undertook a study of entrepreneurs in Thenzawl handloom cluster, also found that 96% of the entrepreneurs engaged in handloom in the cluster were found to be

women. It is evident from the table that women entrepreneurs do not have any interest in all other entrepreneurial activities because the level of participation is not at all considerable. Generally, women entrepreneurs are in a disadvantage to run these business enterprises and therefore, the level of participation is also bound to be low.

Table 2:

Gender of the entrepreneurs: enterprise-wise				
Business enterprises		Gender		
		Men	Women	Total
1	Food items	55 (95)	3 (5)	58 (100)
2	Wooden	56 (97)	2 (3)	58 (100)
3	Repair services	57 (98)	1 (2)	58 (100)
4	Steel/Metal	55 (95)	3 (5)	58 (100)
5	Printing/ Publications	56 (97)	2 (3)	58 (100)
6	Handloom	27 (47)	31 (53)	58 (100)
7	Tailoring	38 (65)	20 (35)	58 (100)
	Total	344 (85)	62 (15)	406 (100)

Note: Figures in brackets are percentage to the total

Source: Field survey by author.

Conclusion and recommendation

It was observed that 85% of the respondents were males and the left over 15% were females. But interestingly it can be seen that the proportion of female entrepreneurs is more in handlooms than male. In handloom 53% of them were

females. Slightly more than one-third of the entrepreneurs engaged in tailoring is women. The proportion of female entrepreneurs in other lines of business is inconsiderable.

As evident from the present study, only insignificant proportion of the entrepreneurs were females. This clearly indicates that entrepreneurship finds no place among the Mizo women. Therefore, it was felt that there is a need to promote the spirit of entrepreneurship among women. For this purpose, it may be recommended that women cell may be created in various support organizations and government institute providing services to entrepreneurs and these cells be administered by women. It is further suggested that school curriculum may be designed so that the spirit of business enterprise may be inculcated in the minds of students. In case of women entrepreneurs, collateral security may be abolished they seldom have any assets or property in their own name. It may be better if banks and other financial institutions set minimum amount target which is to be given out as loan to women entrepreneurs. It is also advocated that having few years of preliminary experiences before starting business. It may also be mentioned that women should have some level of education prior to venturing into entrepreneurship.

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