



## **A STUDY ON WOMEN’S ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA**

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### **Abstract:**

In India, women entrepreneurs are making waves across various sectors, shaping not only their own futures but also the broader society. A recent study dives into the dynamic world of women’s entrepreneurship in the country, exploring how these efforts contribute to women’s empowerment. Drawing on case studies from different industries, along with existing literature and reports, the study paints a detailed picture of the opportunities available to women entrepreneurs in India. It also sheds light on the many challenges they face—from limited access to finance and markets to navigating social, familial, and cultural expectations. What stands out in this research is the innovative ways women overcome these hurdles. The study reveals how women leverage creativity, resilience, and community support to break barriers and succeed in their ventures. This holistic approach helps us understand the complex ecosystem in which Indian women entrepreneurs operate. Beyond just observing these trends, the study offers practical insights and policy recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive environment. It calls on policymakers, stakeholders, and society at large to recognize the vital role women entrepreneurs play and to create supportive structures that promote gender equality. Ultimately, the research urges collective action to address systemic obstacles and support women’s entrepreneurial journeys. By doing so, India can move toward a more inclusive and thriving future where women’s contributions drive sustainable development and social progress.

**Keywords:** Women entrepreneur, Empowerment, Gender inclusivity, Economic growth

## **1. Introduction**

In India, women’s empowerment through entrepreneurship has gained significant momentum over the past decade. This evolving landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for women entrepreneurs. With the country’s rapidly growing economy and increasing focus on gender equality, it is essential to understand the complexities of women’s entrepreneurship and the innovative strategies they employ to overcome obstacles.

This paper explores the multifaceted nature of women’s entrepreneurship in India and examines its impact on women’s empowerment through a series of insightful case studies. Recently, there has been a growing recognition of women’s critical role in driving economic growth and social change. However, despite this progress, gender disparities in entrepreneurship remain widespread globally and in India.

Women entrepreneurs in India face numerous challenges including societal norms, cultural expectations, and limited access to resources and markets, all of which hinder their ability to start and scale businesses successfully. Nevertheless, there have been encouraging signs: women’s enrollment in higher education has

increased by 28%, enrollment in skill development courses has risen by 43%, and nearly 20% of businesses in India are now women-owned. These trends reflect a notable rise in women's entrepreneurship and empowerment.

This growth demonstrates remarkable resilience, creativity, and determination, as women carve out their space across diverse sectors of the economy and succeed despite the odds. The significance of this research lies in uncovering the intricacies of women's entrepreneurship in India and providing valuable insights into how it fosters empowerment. Such understanding can guide policymakers and stakeholders in designing targeted interventions to support women entrepreneurs, ultimately promoting greater gender equality and economic development.

### **Exemplary Women Entrepreneurs in India: -**

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw – Founder of Biocon Ltd. in 1978, when the biotech industry in India was nascent. Despite facing gender discrimination and numerous challenges, she exhibited resilience, innovation, and strategic vision, successfully building one of Asia's largest biopharmaceutical companies.

Falguni Nayar – Founder of Nykaa, an e-commerce platform for beauty and cosmetics. She inspired many women to break away from traditional career paths and pursue their passions by leveraging technology and innovation to establish a highly successful business.

Sudha Murty – Chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, she has empowered women in rural India by creating employment opportunities. Through initiatives like the Desur project in Karnataka, she has provided financial support, training, and market linkages that have transformed communities and fostered entrepreneurship and innovation.

Chetna Sinha – Founder of the Mann Deshi Foundation, a microfinance institution in Maharashtra that has gained international recognition. She has enabled thousands of women to start and expand their businesses by offering access to financial services and entrepreneurship training, significantly contributing to community economic development.

### **According to Reports and Indices, Current Status of Women Entrepreneurs in India**

According to a **Bain & Company Report**, nearly 20% of businesses in India are owned by women, reflecting a significant rise in women's entrepreneurship.

The **Women in India's Startup Ecosystem (WISER) Report** highlights that women-led startups have grown to represent 18% of all startups in India since 2017.

However, the **Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs** ranks India 57th out of 65 countries, indicating considerable room for improvement in supporting and empowering women entrepreneurs.

## **Objectives of the Study**

To explore the opportunities available for women entrepreneurs to achieve growth and empowerment in India.

To investigate the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs across diverse sectors in the country.

To analyze strategies that promote a supportive ecosystem conducive to women's entrepreneurial success and empowerment.

To assess the implications of women's entrepreneurship for advancing gender-inclusive policies and practices in India.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Modi and Balaji (2023) emphasize the crucial role of entrepreneurship in creating opportunities, addressing challenges, and employing innovative solutions that lead to empowerment and socio-economic progress.

Ali et al. (2023) discuss the multifaceted benefits of women-led entrepreneurial ventures, including empowerment, improved socio-economic status, and the promotion of inclusive growth.

Pendse and Pandey (2023) focus on the importance of nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit as a foundation for fostering empowerment among women.

Rastogi and Mansi et al. (2022) explore the obstacles, opportunities, and key characteristics of women entrepreneurs in India, underlining the impact of gender disparities, entry barriers, support systems, success factors, and socio-cultural norms on their entrepreneurial journeys.

Mahajan and Bandyopadhyay (2021) analyze the intersection of women entrepreneurship and sustainable development, particularly in the sustainable energy sector, highlighting how women entrepreneurs drive sustainability and innovation in this industry.

Pachorkar, Sakshi, et al. (2020) investigate the relationship between women's entrepreneurship and empowerment through the Jwala Mahila Samiti case study, demonstrating how entrepreneurship can advance gender equality and empowerment in India.

Lenka and Agarwal (2017) provide valuable insights into the role of women entrepreneurs and NGOs in Uttarakhand, focusing on the socio-economic context, opportunities, barriers, and strategies used to overcome challenges and promote entrepreneurship.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Data Collection: The study utilizes secondary data for comprehensive analysis.

Sources of Data: Data is gathered from multiple sources including case studies, reports, and existing literature such as research papers, journals, articles, and books.

Selection Criteria for Data: Data sources are selected based on the relevance to the research topic, credibility of the sources, and representation from diverse sectors to ensure a broad perspective.

Analytical Techniques: The collected data is analyzed using content analysis, comparative analysis, and thematic analysis to identify patterns, contrasts, and key themes related to women's entrepreneurship and empowerment in India.

#### 4. DATA INTERPRETATION

The secondary data analyzed in this study is sourced from the MSME Annual Report, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) portal, and the Women in India's Startup Ecosystem Report (WISER). The analysis focuses on four key parameters: Women's Entrepreneurship, Women's Empowerment, Challenges Faced, and Opportunities for Women in India.

##### Overview of Women's Entrepreneurship in India

The data highlights the share of women-owned Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (wMSMEs) in both rural and urban areas. A graphical representation illustrates the percentage distribution of wMSMEs, providing insights into the geographic spread and scale of women's entrepreneurial activities across India.

Area	Percentage
Urban	18.42%
Rural	22.24%

Sources: MSME annual report 2022-23

According to the MSME Annual Report 2022-23, women-owned enterprises have a higher share in rural areas, accounting for 22.24%, compared to 18.42% in urban areas. The accompanying graph illustrates the percentage share of women-owned MSMEs in India, categorized by enterprise size, highlighting the distribution across different segments.

Category	Percentage
Micro	20.44%
Small	5.26%
Medium	2.67%

Source: MSME annual report 2022-23

According to the Ministry of MSME Annual Report 2022-23, the majority of MSMEs in India fall within the micro sector. Specifically, 20.24% of women-owned enterprises are single-person microenterprises, while 5.26% are classified as small enterprises, and only 2.67% are medium enterprises. Additionally, the number of women-owned MSMEs registered on the Udyam Portal of the Ministry of MSME from July 1, 2020, to August 8, 2023, reflects the growing formalization and recognition of women entrepreneurs in the country.

Year	No. of Registration of Women-owned MSMEs
2020-21	489054
2021-22	910375
2022-23	1487840
2023-24	652715

Source: Udyam Portal of Ministry of MSMEs

The above table illustrates the number of women who have registered as entrepreneurs on the Udyam Portal of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) in India over the years, highlighting the increasing trend of formal registrations by women-owned enterprises.

### Percentage of Women in Worker Population Ratio

This metric reflects the proportion of women participating in the workforce, providing insights into women's engagement in economic activities and their contribution to the labor market.

Year	Women's (%) in Worker Population Ratio
2020-21	31.4%
2021-22	31.7%
2022-23	35.9%

Source: MoSPI Portal

## II. Women Empowerment in India

The accompanying graph illustrates the rise in the number of startups, unicorns, and women-led startup funding from 2017 to 2022. This upward trend highlights the expanding role of women entrepreneurs and their increasing access to capital, signaling positive progress toward women's empowerment in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Category	2017	2022
Startups	10%	18%
Unicorns	8%	17%
Women-led Startups Funding	11%	18%

Source: WISER Report, 2023

According to the Women in India’s Startup Ecosystem Report 2023, startups are driving India’s economic growth, with women-led businesses playing an increasingly significant role. Between 2017 and 2022, data reveals a consistent upward trend in the percentage of women-led businesses across various sectors. This growth reflects women’s expanding leadership and influence within their respective industries.

### III. Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs in India

The accompanying graph illustrates the proportion of women entrepreneurs encountering challenges in occupying roles across diverse areas. This data sheds light on the obstacles women face in their entrepreneurial journeys, highlighting the need for targeted support and interventions.

According to the Women in India’s Startup Ecosystem Report (WISER) 2023, women entrepreneurs face significant challenges in securing roles across diverse areas. The graph illustrates the percentage of women encountering difficulties related to tenure and seniority over the years, highlighting persistent barriers to advancing in leadership positions.

Level	Entry Level	Manager	Director/VP	CXO/SVP
1	38%	45%	13%	1%
2	39%	45%	14%	2%
3	21%	38%	32%	7%
4	11%	36%	42%	10%
5	2%	38%	34%	24%
6	1%	17%	42%	40%

Source: Mc Kinsey Analysis; WISER Survey,2023

According to analysis by McKinsey and the WISER Survey 2023, although women and men often start their careers at similar levels, women’s tenure and seniority do not progress at the same rate. Over the years, men consistently occupy higher positions compared to women, highlighting a persistent gender gap in career advancement.

### III. Opportunities for Women's Entrepreneurship in India

Years	2022	2030
Employment	860k	4.8mn
Women Share	300k	2.4mn
Women Share (%)	35%	50%

Source: WISER Report, 2023

According to the WISER Report 2023, startups have the potential to build on their early successes and create over 2 million new jobs for women by 2030. The report also highlights that woman currently represent 19% of the workforce in the corporate sector.

### FINDINGS

Research Findings: Insights into Women's Entrepreneurship in India

This research highlights the complex and dynamic landscape of women's entrepreneurship in India, offering valuable insights drawn from a comprehensive analysis of case studies across diverse sectors. Key findings include:

Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs Currently, over 1.40 crore MSMEs in India are led by women, reflecting significant growth in women-led enterprises. At the 9th Annual Shakti International Women Entrepreneurs Summit, three major initiatives were launched to further stimulate women's entrepreneurship:

Panjikaran se Pragati

Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)-Unnati-Udyamita se Pragati

Mentorship Platform

Additionally, the government has introduced numerous schemes to support the growth and development of women entrepreneurs, including:

- a) Credit Guarantee Scheme – Provides loans with no or minimal collateral requirements.
- b) Self-Reliant Fund – A fund of Rs. 50,000 crores aimed at injecting equity into promising MSMEs to help women entrepreneurs scale their businesses.
- c) Udyam Portal – Focuses on formalizing informal sectors; government data shows that out of over 2 crore businesses registered, 19.43% are women-owned.

d) Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana – Has disbursed loans worth Rs. 30 crore to women entrepreneurs at minimal interest rates.

e) Startup India – A platform dedicated to nurturing women-led startups through networking, mentorship, funding, and specialized incentives.

f) Lakhpati Didi – Targets financial empowerment of women, especially in rural areas, to help them become “lakhpati” (millionaires) through financial assistance and training.

g) Nari Shakti Entrepreneurship Scheme – Supports women entrepreneurs with preferential loan rates, mentorship programs, training, and other resources necessary to start and grow businesses.

## **2. Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs**

Despite significant progress, women entrepreneurs in India continue to face a wide range of challenges. These include socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes, limited access to financial resources and business networks, lack of mentoring, inadequate technological exposure, and balancing familial commitments with work. Other barriers include limited access to business education and training, scarcity of targeted government schemes, legal and regulatory hurdles, lack of autonomy, and insufficient family and social support. Case studies reveal that gender discrimination and biases are encountered not only within families but also in the broader business environment. These challenges restrict women’s entry into entrepreneurship and impede the growth and sustainability of their enterprises.

## **3. Innovative Tactics Employed by Women Entrepreneurs**

In response to these challenges, case studies highlight the resilience and ingenuity of women entrepreneurs. Many have adopted innovative strategies such as leveraging technology to access markets, forming alliances with other women entrepreneurs, focusing on niche markets, building supportive community networks, seeking mentorship, enhancing financial literacy, advocating for gender equality, and striving for work-life balance. They also navigate legal and regulatory frameworks effectively. These examples demonstrate how women have successfully penetrated male-dominated sectors and challenged existing norms and stereotypes.

## **4. Policy Implications**

The research findings underscore the need for supportive policies that foster an enabling environment for women’s entrepreneurship. Policymakers should address structural barriers by improving access to funding through targeted schemes and providing tailored business development services. Additionally, policies must tackle socio-cultural constraints by supporting childcare, challenging gender stereotypes

through education and awareness campaigns, and enhancing vocational training and skill development. Affirmative action and gender-inclusive policies are essential to promote equitable participation of women entrepreneurs in the business ecosystem.

### **5. Advocacy and Awareness of Economic and Social Benefits**

Beyond policy, inclusive advocacy is crucial to challenge societal norms that hinder women's entrepreneurial participation. Case studies emphasize the importance of awareness programs that highlight the economic and social benefits of women's entrepreneurship while confronting stereotypes and biases. Engaging stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector at all levels can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women entrepreneurs.

### **6. Comparative Analysis**

When compared with previous research, these findings show both consistencies and novel insights. Earlier studies have also documented the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in India. However, this research adds value by detailing the diverse strategies women employ to overcome obstacles and by underscoring the critical policy implications needed to mainstream gender equality within entrepreneurship development agendas.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This research illuminates the complex landscape of women's entrepreneurship in India, exploring the challenges, opportunities, and innovative strategies employed by women entrepreneurs to navigate the socio-economic environment. Through a comprehensive analysis of case studies across diverse sectors, the study reveals the versatile nature of women's entrepreneurship and its significant potential to drive women's empowerment.

The findings highlight persistent barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, ranging from socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes to structural constraints such as limited access to finance, networks, and business development resources. Discrimination and biases, both within families and in the broader business ecosystem, continue to impede women's entry into entrepreneurship and restrict their growth and sustainability.

Despite these obstacles, the resilience and ingenuity of women entrepreneurs stand out. Many have successfully adopted innovative tactics such as forming alliances with other women entrepreneurs, leveraging technology to access markets, and capitalizing on niche opportunities to carve out spaces in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

The study underscores the critical importance of inclusive and supportive policies in fostering an enabling ecosystem for women's entrepreneurship. Enhanced access to finance, targeted business development services, and gender-responsive policies are essential to promote an environment conducive to women's entrepreneurial success.

The implications of these findings are profound for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders across government, civil society, and the private sector. Policymakers must prioritize affirmative actions that address systemic challenges through targeted financial schemes, tailored support services, and initiatives aimed at transforming socio-cultural norms. Advocacy and awareness campaigns are equally vital to challenge stereotypes and promote the economic and social benefits of women's entrepreneurship, thereby cultivating a culture of support and inclusion.

While this research provides valuable insights, further studies are needed to explore the intersectionality of gender with factors such as class, caste, and region, which shape women's entrepreneurial experiences across India. Longitudinal research could offer deeper understanding of the long-term impacts of supportive policies, while comparative analyses could inform evidence-based policymaking by evaluating the effectiveness of different interventions across sectors.

In conclusion, by addressing challenges, leveraging innovative strategies, and championing inclusive policies and societal change, stakeholders can collectively create a more equitable and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem. This will not only empower women entrepreneurs but also contribute significantly to India's socio-economic development and sustainable growth.

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