

Promoting Skill Development and Entrepreneurs among Women: Role of Academic Institutions

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Abstract - Women in the given social construction and gender roles, are expected to be prioritizing to household activities and care economy. With education and social consciousness, affirmative action and interventions of the State, it is made possible for women to acquire skills and hire our the same in the market. Still there are gaps which is evidenced in research studies that not all women and women students in colleges use the skills to initiate entrepreneurial ventures. It is true that women entrepreneurship promotion is a necessary condition for over all development of the nation and empowerment of the Women. The approaches towards women have got a shift from equity to welfare to empowerment where the women are recognized as agents of development. Entrepreneurship would directly contribute to women empowerment as the agency of women are being articulated. There are several challenges right from motivating the women to take up a business venture, to initiate, grow and sustain them in enterprise development. It is partly due to the gendered socio cultural, economic and political factors and partly due to personal, psychological hindrances and obstacles. The former is being imposed and internalized in the cultural environment while the latter is acquainted by the women due to the pressure of the society. The space that the women occupy, the gender role division, the productive opportunities extended etc have really pushed the women to backseat and remain invisible. Given that the women have entered all the fields which were originally considered as domains of men, it is proved that women can do and engage in all activities provided opportunities are being extended with equal social environment and motivation. There are number of social institutions including academic institutions to support and motivate the women to make their career choice to entrepreneurship as often women shy away from the same. Women continue to engage in micro enterprises, feminine nature of products, increasingly dependent on informal credit, confine to traditional enterprises till recent times. Women are to be introduced to MSMEs, avail bank loan, engage in non-conventional enterprises and venture into areas which are considered only as

domains of men. This could be possible only when the women are in collectives to represent and influence the State and the Society and succeed in instilling the entrepreneurial spirit among women. The challenges lie in the recognizing their talents and skills, harnessing the skill, provide support from family, encourage their mobility, leave them independent to take decision, extend financial support and hold them when failed saying that failure is temporary or stepping stone to success, create awareness on various support schemes with the government, facilitate to marketing through innovative means including digital marketing, take to management training including managing an enterprise, book keeping, auditing etc, and above all to learn business communication. This paper presents the experience of the Department of Women's Studies, Bharathidasan University in promoting women entrepreneurship through the initiation of Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT) which is unique and innovative where the Research has converted the findings into action research and created institution to leave to the community to govern. It would be informing the challenges and opportunities in promoting women entrepreneurship and the scope for modeling and replicating in other institutions thereby making every academic institution to commit to promote women entrepreneurship. Gender barriers are to be overcome by the women where the role of academic institutions would be crucial. Current WEAT is engaged in offering skill training to college students on both convention and non-conventional areas including welding, ecofriendly products manufacturing, which really kindled the interest of the students to acquire additional skills in their curriculum and motivating the women to start enterprises in future.

Index Terms - Women Entrepreneurship, Skill Development, gender, micro small and medium enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

Research is something which involves questions or issues which block the development process and responding to such questions must involve deep and analytical components with inclusive perspectives. The global society is endowed with differential availability to resources particularly natural resources. There are social institutions which have created inequalities to access to different social groups which are human created. The social construction is rooted deeply where there are hierarchies of power relationship in which those who are fortunate enough to get footed at the top are able access and use the resources to their favour leaving the little to others in the bottom to avail and use. In the Indian context, this is influenced by the institutions such as Caste, Class, Religion, Region, culture etc, where the rules are being framed by the dominant social order in the respective institutions. Capitalism and patriarchy complement the dominant social order and accordingly it gets reflected in the State policy to address multiple inequalities. This paper presents the gender socialization and the cultural constructs in the society as social realities in shaping the Women's questions in the society and the need for research towards reconstruction or deconstruction of the process of socialization through the evidences of research which in turn goes to further research. Women's Studies being the interdisciplinary and dynamic subject, it needs to be updated with the changing gender context in any society. The gender roles are changing and the patriarchy based society has accepted some of the role change say participation of women in education, employment, decision making roles including politics though still tokenism, glass ceiling, chilly climate, lack of pipeline flow etc continue to serve as hurdles. Women's Studies researches specifically inform and keep contributing to the new and emerging body of knowledge and literature where the Women's Studies teaching must emanate from what is being researched and revealed. In the Indian context, the students of Women's Studies/Gender Studies have been exposed to the the Western feminist theories and there is lack of scholarship to really theorize the kind of feminism that is taking place in the Indian context. It is the responsibility of the researchers to show and guide the future generation to understand and acknowledge the kind of journey that the Women's Studies have travelled over the years and try to argue on the line of gender and its insectionalities with the class, caste,

religion, region, culture, politics, sexual orientation etc. Feminist approaches to underlines the epistemology of feminist framework. It includes the focus and objective to critically engage the women's lived social realities with the view to change them for a better. Intersectionality as a guiding methodological and ethical attests to the diversity of women's lived realities and feminist approaches. (Sumanya Laher,2019). There is a need to set an agenda to do gender work. Feminist orientation and doing gender are different and gender research with feminist approach bring the social realities and sow seeds for interdisciplinary research with intersections and influence of various social institutions and ideology like patriarchy on research . Feminist approaches and researches refutes the mainstream thinking assert for the political commitment for a democratic and fair society where the gender inequality be eliminated which is further help to eliminate other forms of inequalities in the society As Mary Evans (1997) underlines that women's studies are not necessarily and inevitably feminist if one takes feminism to mean the prioritizing of women's interests whereas feminism implies some form of political action not an essential requirement of women-centred study. Hence the feminist approaches to research and teaching and questioning the inequalities in different spheres necessarily advocates new and innovative methods with the focus on inclusiveness questing the gendered research methods. The feminist research keeps the questions of women and the marginalized at the centre and treats the participants as subjects. It admits and allows subjectivity with the qualitative focus where the experiences of women is counted disregarding or not much focusing on the objectivity, empirical evidences from large sample etc. The sub ordination of women and the related suppression and subjugation in the patriarchal society may differ across class or caste, but in general the women's question do not and they form the base for the feminist approaches. Sue V. Rosser has distinguished at least ten different feminist approaches to science and technology (Rosser, 2005). The aim of skill development is not just simply preparing them for jobs; but also to boost their performance by improving the quality of work in which they are involved. □ Empowering them through skill-building programs would give them more opportunities to earn their living and become self-

reliant and there is need to devise policies with gender perspective. (Anjali Vyas, 2018)

Make in India to be successful, youth of the country must acquire skills, innovation, technological up gradation, vocational training etc. (Jagdish et al.2017) Inculcating women to skill development and entrepreneurship has been quite challenging given the socio cultural barriers and restrictions. There are class, caste and religious intersections with gender which often push the women to remain passive and not able to use the skills acquired into business and entrepreneurial ventures. The women's movement in India has created the base for Women's Studies and it is an Academic arm of Women's Movements. The ground realities about the issues that the women and the marginalized have been facing in terms of economic, social, political and cultural discrimination which has reflected in their subordinate status in the society. In the social learning, the human beings are brought out such that there is seldom any scope of questioning, rational questioning and scientific argument. The original process of gender division of labour and the space division as public vs private etc were contextual and cannot be disputed where the gender roles were ought to be reproduction for women and breeding winning for men. However, with the civilization, invention of agriculture, shifting of barter trade to exchange economy, the gender roles have began to change. Later in the colonial context, the freedom struggle really brought women to the public where Mahatma Gandhi had put women into the Centre of Struggle. Women's presence brought huge change and several social reformers right from Mahatma Gandhi, Jawarhalal Nehru, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jothi Rao Phule, Savitri Phule, Annie Beasant. Sarojini Naidu, Muthulaxmi Reddy, Ramamirtham Amma, Panditha Ramabai, Akkama Devi, Durgabai Deskmuk, K.P Janaki Ammal, Soundaram Ammal, Ruckmaniammal, Manalur Maniammai and several other women across India and contributed to freedom movement. The Nationalist movement did not differentiate between women's movement as everyone focus and concern was freedom. The colonialism coupled with feudalism did not encourage all women and their participation. Socially excluded women did participate but there is hardly any document to evidence. Hence the history is mostly revealing of the participation of those who got the fortune of being documented. Patriarchal

society really forgot or deliberately gave it up. So tracing the history about the gender role division informs the upper class and caste domination in framing the rules which has been presented as religious, cultural texts and literature also. Gender got deep rooted through socialization which has further been fuelled and safeguarded by the social structure including feudalism, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, and at present in the globalization where women are increasingly seen as consumers and not agents of development. It is often not questioned in the day today life as to why the gender discrimination starts from fetus to baby girl to adolescence, adulthood and continues till her domb, what it is being referred as 'womb to domb' and 'dawn to dusk'. There has been considerable change and complete shift in the current context of globalization where women have been opened up to new opportunities and equally to challenges. Women have grown equal in terms of education, employment, participation in managerial and decision making positions, defense, science and technological innovation, space research etc. There have been advancements in science and technology, information technology, communication, etc which has helped the drudgery of women and eased out the social reproductive role. But what is not happening is, the unpaid work that women are expected to perform does not change much, neither at the private space nor at public. The patriarchal notions founded on the capitalistic principles time and again emphasize the women to contribute to social reproduction so that men will be comfortable to contribute at the work place. In case of absence of women, the corporate capitalist may need to pay more for the food and other needs of workers, which will have s say over the surplus accruing to the owners. It is also equally seen that employing women in highly paid, managerial and decision making positions will have additional cost in terms of maternity leave, child care, elder care etc, for which either the facilities like crezhe, etc is to be provided, which will take away the profit of the capitalist. Such a perception further motivates more men to join and leaving more with in the lowly paid putting out, foot loose economic activities which do not claim more wage. Feminization of labour at the lower rung both at the urban and rural areas make the women to live in distress who belong to marginalized who are economically and socially backward communities. Such differences in access to resources

has been created by the landlord and feudal section in rural and the corporate in the urban device the working conditions, wage fixation and other social security measures without affecting the surplus value to go down, though the wage will be stagnant. It is such social realities of labour market exploitation sown seeds to building theories by Karl Marx and other feminist theories. This paper aims to present the feminist approaches being implemented and followed in the research projects and action research projects of Department of Women's Studies and the share the experiences as how understanding social realities have contributed to identify research areas and conduct researches. This study would focus on women entrepreneurship development and the related research and action research which has been lessening the dynamics of positioning of women in the business and entrepreneurial setting and the related challenges. It has also informed and remained as an eye opener that women do show interest to occupy the public space and involve in the hitherto maintained domains of men.

Women's Experience as base for Women's Studies Research

Being a Woman, rural woman, BC/SC/ST woman, from farming community, married with children or without children, widows, homeless, single, elderly, disabled, women have their own experiences. The challenges of marginalized women can be understood with the lived experiences of being a marginalized woman better than others. Same is true with women who are employed and face issues from higher officials, sexual harassment or other abuses facing women, women in business, women in management, executive, politics and decision making positions, women who are employed in local, outside, every day community women in unorganized sector with lack of social security, women in huts, unprotected homes, women in short stay home and all forms of destitute and deserted women have their own stories to share which go beyond the spectrum of mainstream research. The methodology to be applied to analyze or narrate the issues and challenges through the experience of the above categories of women cannot just be presented with quantitative and empirical methods. Subjectivity is inevitable, in feminist research to bring out the social realities. Women are caught up with patriarchy which stands as a great

barrier to progress. Cultural patriarch determines the social patriarchy and families and individuals just follow what is being dictated by culture based value system. Since the mainstream thinking is highly patriarchal whatever norms being implemented in the name of rules to be followed in a particular culture poses different issues and challenges to men women. The challenges for men are more than get compensated with power which is often missing for women. The gender unequal positions as dominant vs sub ordination determines the gender relations and the children just follow or associate with what is being told. There is no or hardly any scope to questing the dominant social order which surrounds with upper class capitalistic, feudal connected well with upper caste, majority religion and urban elite, educated , corporate with least scope for scientific enquiry. Everyone is convinced by the system which is bound with unequal power and inequalities. The experiences of women in different caste, class, religion are not the same and similar is true with the culture in different parts of the globe. Globalization which works with corporate bodies for profit with easy flow of goods and services invariably push the deprived section be it working class, rural, tribal and scheduled caste persons. Women bear the double or triple burden as economically and socially backward class, women in gender divisions and less educated or not endowed with full capabilities like men. Patriarchy reinforces that the social reproduction that the women perform at home which are unpaid and does not command market, in the labour market and capitalism flourishes with the huge subsidy that the women pay to be labour market by engaging in unpaid work and facilitate the men to participate in paid employment. Domestic work does not command recognition because it is performed by women with no questioning back for generations together. The notion that the patriarchy created reinforce the value system where the women themselves internalized to the values that domestic work is women's work and private space is their space. So women's role, mobility, economic participation etc stands on the two pillars of the society private and public space division coupled with gender role divisions where personal is political concept emerged to question the politics of patriarchy, family democracy, capitalistic exploitation, religion and caste as safeguarding institutions for sustaining unequal society. Practicing gender equality and building

gender equality in children right from their childhood alone would help to move towards equality where everyone will be ensured with equal opportunities, space, training, motivation, and recognition.

Having said that the women's experiences would best contribute to feminist approaches which are social realities which are overlooked in the patriarchy defined socio cultural contexts and pressures. Every individual needs to recognize each other's role and need to undermine or think superior to other gender. Such perceptions sow seeds for all forms of gender, class, caste, religion, racial, regional differences in the society. Education coupled with rational thinking and scientific questioning alone would earth out such inequalities in the society. With such a background, the initiative towards promoting economic opportunities through self-employment and entrepreneurship to women through Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT) founded by the Department of Women's Studies by Manimekalai has been presented as Case study as realities sowing seeds to research and action research applying feminist approaches.

Social Realities Sowing Seeds for Research on Women Entrepreneurship and Action Research:

Entrepreneurship has long been perceived as male phenomenon. Women did not think of themselves as businesspersons and entrepreneurs in the earlier context. In India, till sixth five year plan, women were not expected to be entrepreneurs and only welfare approach was in practices. The Policy shift from welfare to equity to women in development to gender and development approaches have focused on empowering women and share the power to women. The National Policy for Women Empowerment 2001 also emphasized on the same. But there is lack of reach of policies and development programmes which may be attributed to the socio-cultural barriers and their influence on recognizing the capabilities of women. Amartya Sen puts it rightly that unless the capabilities of women get utilized, the real development cannot be realized. In this background, it was understood that the economic participation particularly in entrepreneurship and business development of women would certainly contribute directly to their empowerment and their potential could be tapped and the women's 'agency' could be recognized. In order to analyse the whether the

women really have interest to become entrepreneurs and what are the hurdles they face and the scale of operation, the nature of enterprises and the support system available, which had emanated from the research questions prevalent in the social reality, a research was conducted with the support of the University Grants Commission on "Women Entrepreneurs in Micro Enterprises" in 1999-2002, applying the mainstream approach just with the notion that whether women entrepreneurs do exist and what are the lines of engagement etc. The study revealed the following

- Women entrepreneurs in general found in service and business enterprises with feminine products (used by Women) and above the age of 40 and from economically backward communities.
- Majority of the women found comfortable with micro enterprises with minimum investment ranging from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 1,00,000
- Formal credit had not been availed by women in micro enterprises
- Majority of women engaged in conventional areas of business, trade and production say tailoring, masala powder making, readymade garments, etc.
- And above all, the women in the sample did not have any Association to represent their needs
- Push factors say to support the family, poor wage in other occupations, education and livelihood needs of the family etc helped them enter into enterprise development

These findings in the mainstream discussion will just take that the findings must be taken to policy to analyse why the women owned enterprises have such a poor base in Indian context and try to design policies. However, if a Feminist Approach is applied to understand the realities, the research will be taken up with the feminist research methods to cull out the feminist concerns of women entrepreneurs and the nature of support system, policy needed to encourage more women to participate in economic activities. It is very much needed in the context of declining work participation of women.

Skill Development and Women Entrepreneurship through Research and Action Research:

Based on the findings of the studies, a Feminist Approach was applied to invite the women aspiring for entrepreneurship and business start up to come

forward to associate themselves as a collective under the organization called “Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT). In the thought process and need to provide platform for women to explore, WEAT was initiated as an outcome of a hardcore Economics Research. Having assumed charge as Women’s Studies Departments, it occurred to a researcher, a Researcher who wish to incorporate feminist concerns to entrepreneurship, to initiate a organization where women can have freedom to voice out and choose their area of business and articulate, negotiate and network to get their demands met. Women’s movements in the early context were very much focusing on the basic issues of poverty, livelihood, early marriage, dowry, female infanticide, economic participation, violence against women, political participation, ownership and control over resources. In the economic perspective, participation of women in work, and providing ownership and control over resource will help in empowerment. However, the actual reality is that the resources and properties will be with the women but the control, management and decision to enhance the value of the resources etc will lie with men or other elder persons. It cannot be real freedom to access to resources for women unless they have full control over and decide on the pattern of usage of the resources. Entrepreneurship and business management directly offers the women to engage in decision making with the true sense of owning and controlling the resources. So it was facilitated by WEAT the aspiring women irrespective of the background from, to become entrepreneurs, independent entrepreneurs irrespective their class, caste, religion, region, language etc. The process continues with Research -Action Research -Research where the feminist concerns, with the feminist perspectives are being addressed with collective decision and networking initiatives.

WEAT and Skill Development among College Students:

With the Action research by implementing the findings of the Academic Research, it is evidenced that there are scope for skill development among the college students and if offered, there is demand for the same. Accordingly WEAT has been working with colleges with an objective to identify the latent talent present with the students and offer guidance, skill training and motivate them to choose to

entrepreneurship as their career choice. The students are given awareness on various business opportunities and the government schemes with subsidy so that after completing their degree, it is possible to launch business.

There are more than 50 trainings in the list and the girls and boys will choose to different skill development programmes duration ranging from one day to 10 days and certain categories 30 days to 45 days. MSME-DI, EDI sponsored 45-day Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programme are also offered. There has been positive feedback. A training on repair of home appliances to Engineering colleges received the best feedback where the students expressed that they had learnt in the one day skill development whatever they studied in theory for three years. The students are exposed to various business openings in the college campuses itself say the supply of groceries, coconut, milk, oil, wheat, rice, to the Hostels, stationaries and other items to the office, contract of electrical, plumbing and other services etc, which the students can approach the management to just part with whatever they have been ordering with other agencies in the beginning and later decide to give order to the student entrepreneurs or others.

The students can be identified right from the beginning in their first years to identify their needs towards skill development and be motivated in the second and third years to horn their skills further and at the end of completion, incubation can be given by offering space or opportunities in the campus to do the business and manufacturing so that real entrepreneurship be created with the skill development.

The skill development and skill based electives in the curriculum should not be offered just for the sake of offering skill development but with the focus and objective of realizing fruits and outcome in terms of creating new entrepreneurship. Tamil Nadu State has two different schemes to promote entrepreneurship: UYEGP- Unemployed Youth Employment Generation Programme and NEEDS- New Entrepreneurs Enterprise Development Scheme in which the interested persons can get skill development and have startups with one third subsidy upto Rs. 5 crore under NEEDS and Rs. one to Rs. 10 laksh under UYEGP. It is also made mandatory that 50 percent be allocated to Women. There is a separate institute Entrepreneurship Development and Innovation Institute (EDII) Government of Tamil Nadu which

offers to cater to the needs of skill development and continue to engage in mentoring the aspiring persons to start enterprises.

Gender Concerns as base for Research and Action Research in Women Entrepreneurship:

Any social science research can equally contribute to policies like science and technology researches. But the political economy questions and structures either disregard the academic research recommendations or overlook. Hence the researchers do not show interest in taking the findings forward as to whether they work in reality or are they pragmatic etc. Women's Studies researchers expand the scope for policy implementation for micro and macro contexts. The feminist approach used to women's studies research directly provides answers to the women's question. It is evidenced through women's movements and the micro level issues dealt with to address the women's questions and women empowerment policies and interventions in India.

On similar base, a Research taken up in an Academic Department has been implemented with the feminist approach to look into real barriers for women to take up entrepreneurship with the intensive engagement with women, family, children, and other stakeholders and continuous dialogue with the women has paid dividend in creating more than 100 women entrepreneurs in micro and small, service, business and manufacturing, rural and urban, educated and less educated, aged and young, married and unmarried, with lower and middle income strata, SC/BC who have proved successful in both conventional and non conventional areas. A brief note of the contribution of WEAT an academic department founded organization for the public particularly women from across various strata.

- 48 Women have got training and handholding from WEAT and Department of Women's Studies Bharathidasan University to enter into Engineering and Fabrication Units as vendors to BHEL where women dare to enter
- Eight women got training for auto rickshaw, car and call taxi driving and successfully running their units
- Several women run beauty parlour but one WOMAN runs a MEN SALOON
- Food processing, readymade garments and other service enterprises are being run with the support and encouragement of WEAT
- It is emphasized that the women should be independent and must look after all jobs without depending on others which has been taken as a policy
- No commercial focus, whoever is interested can come and get the guidance to start the enterprise
- The findings of each research and intervention have been contributing to action research and action research lessons to get inputs for action research.
- Marketing for women manufactured products have been showcased in the campuses of educational institutions fetching a regular income ranging from Rs 30000 to Rs. 40000
- Women with push factors, integrating with more than one enterprises, family support, etc have been successful
- Mobility has been promoted with independence or collective sharing
- Women entrepreneurs are directly engaged in decision making about their enterprises.
- Several women in non conventional sectors have been recognized with awards
- Media has captured the successful women entrepreneurs in the visual, audio and print media, in English and Tamil
- All these women who are successful in entrepreneurship serve as role models.
- In academia, it gives a great opportunity to holistic education where the students are provided with approaches and models of academics and it is true to other Academic Department also.
- Institutionalization has been rewarding as WEAT has become a sought-after institutions for researchers, government departments, NGOs, individual aspiring women, students etc to get the women entrepreneurs to be invited for research, seminar, conference, etc
- Directory of women entrepreneurs could be generated
- For the past 13 years till date WEAT sustains and remains as a sought after institution for all sorts of support or need for women entrepreneurship development.

As of now, WEAT has reached out across Tamil Nadu and other States and Other Countries also through media including social media. Someone has created a youtube and it is being on circulation where many women across the state are calling and in the process of taking training, awareness. Colleges are also inviting the women entrepreneurs to train and motivating the girls to become entrepreneurs. Such social media impact has facilitated the activities of WEAT to reach global level. The experiences of women who founded the organization have played a major role in building this network. It has provided a perspectives and approach towards feminist concerns where it was possible for building an institution for the public. Whatever gendered thinking which has got deep rooted into the culture has paid its dividends in the form of reinforcing the stereotyping of gender roles whereas the feminist approach towards gender development has given scope of building alternatives perspectives to reconstruct patriarchy and break the stereotypes in the women's lives. Similar initiatives to institutionalize alternative perspectives to break the stereotypes and empower women through collectives and networking from the Academia using feminist approaches, outlook, and principles will help to promote gender equality and social justice. The experiences of working with women aspiring for entrepreneurship and later seeing those flourishing as enterprise owners has been quite impressive and rewarding. Handholding at all stages of startup, growing up and sustenance stage goes a long way in promoting women entrepreneurship. Collective and Association, networking among the women is the need of the hour. College students can best be captured to skill development when they are young and group through the various skill development programmes. Government of India under RUSA has introduced Entrepreneurship Innovation and Career Hub which is catering to the skill development needs of the students in the University and College Campuses. It has to be part of the curriculum to understand the nature of skills needed for acquiring entrepreneurship development interest and it is to be mainstreamed to all students concerned. Departments of Management, Commerce, can initiative Incubator Centres to inculcate entrepreneurship either with the respective institutional support or State support.

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