



WOMEN'S SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON RURAL WOMEN

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Abstract:

This paper considers and revolves around 2 major aspects- Entrepreneurial skills amongst women and their contribution in uplifting rural communities more precisely Rural women. Indian rural women are the ones who are exposed to poverty and other social challenges. Thus, the paper focuses on apprehending and addressing the needs of a marginalized group of society. The research studies the role of women in social entrepreneurial activities and also emphasizes the growth of society as well as the economy. After assessing 3 case studies of the social enterprises led by women, conclusions are drawn concerning the working of the enterprises and their contribution into the field of skill development and empowerment of women in rural areas.

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Introduction:

Entrepreneurs are the driving factors contributing to the country's economic growth. Gone are the days when entrepreneurs were driven by the sole objective of profit-making. With the emergence of the concept of social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs are now looked at as contributors to social welfare. "A Social Entrepreneur is a mission-driven individual who uses a set of entrepreneurial behaviors to deliver social value to the less privileged, all through an entrepreneurially oriented entity that is financially independent, self-sufficient, or sustainable." Samer Abu-Saifan (2012). Thus, the primary goal of social entrepreneurship is to serve society whereas the profit-making goal stands secondary.

In India, there has been around a 20% increase in social enterprises every year. This is prominently due to rising awareness about a sustainable future coupled with impact-oriented businesses and the need for social interventions (Udayagiri V 2021). The concept of social entrepreneurship gains more prominence in the context of rural areas. This is primarily because opportunities are not tapped despite adequate talent. A variety of obstacles in terms of the absence of technological advancement, and socio-cultural setup could be responsible for this. In such cases, social entrepreneurs are said to play a critical role to tap the right opportunities thereby enabling the rural population to learn and earn.

In this context, it is even more important to see the role of women social entrepreneurs in rural areas. The participation of women in entrepreneurial activities is crucial for sustainable economic development and economic growth. Besides due to their specific sensitivity towards social needs, women social entrepreneurs are said to play a significant role when it comes to social innovation (Attina 2016).



This paper thus attempts to analyze social entrepreneurship amongst women and its impact on women in rural areas.

Objectives:

1. To focus on the role of Women Entrepreneurs in the upliftment of society with special reference to the rural women population.
2. To study Skill Development activities conducted in rural areas.
3. To evaluate the outcomes of Social Entrepreneurship on society.

Research Methodology:

In order to study the impact of social entrepreneurship on rural women, in particular, the case study method has been adopted. For this, 3 case studies have been identified. The social entrepreneur in all these case studies is a woman. This was purposely selected to further highlight the “By women for women” approach.

Review of Literature:

The concept of Entrepreneurs; an important factor of production was first defined by Schumpeter (1934) as an innovator who implements entrepreneurial changes within the market. They are said to carry out an exceptional set of activities with the intention of earning profits. However, the concept of entrepreneurship tends to differ from an entrepreneur. Kao and Stevenson (1985) identify entrepreneurship as a process of the creation of value. Timmons and Spinelli (2010) extend this definition further and add entrepreneurship as a way of thinking, reasoning, and acting that is holistic, persistent, and balanced. Up until the 1980s, it was felt that attaining profit was the sole aim of an entrepreneur. However, it was later revealed that an entrepreneur can have social objectives in mind for which they divert their resources. This led to the emergence of the concept of social entrepreneurship. However, there is no concrete definition of social entrepreneurship. Leadbeater (1997) identified social entrepreneurs as those who want to make social changes while Thompson et al (2000) considered social entrepreneurs as Social Value Creators. Social entrepreneurs address critical social problems and are dedicated to improving the well-being of society Zahra et al (2008). However, there is a lack of clarity on the exact definition of social entrepreneurship and the role played by the social entrepreneur. In this context, Samer-Saifan (2012) identified certain features of social entrepreneurship which made them different from other types of entrepreneurship. A social entrepreneur is a mission-driven, emotionally charged, social value creator who is socially alert. The objective is to achieve social values yet remain financially self-sufficient by blending social objectives along with wealth maximization.

In the context of social entrepreneurship, the role of women is worth studying. Studies on social ventures in developed and developing economies suggest that social entrepreneurship is a key contributor to the creation and diversification of entrepreneurial activity, economic growth, emancipation, and empowerment of women (Bhatt & Gailey, 2012). According to Marieke Huysentruyt (2014), the 'gender gap' in social entrepreneurship is much smaller than the gender gap in 'mainstream' entrepreneurship, suggesting that social entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool to increase female entrepreneurship, skill development, and participation in the labor market. Albert Nsom Kimbu and Michael Zisuh Ngoasong (2016) in their study have revealed how women



integrate their commercial and social goals of transforming societies in their business strategies while serving defined communities.

These studies highlight the need for studying the role of women in social entrepreneurship and the impact they create on society.

Case Studies:

1. Ayzh Inc.

- **Know about Ayzh (eyes)-**

Ayzh Health and Livelihood Private Limited (Ayzh Inc.) is a social enterprise based in India that develops products that contribute to uplifting women's lives and improving their reproductive health. Ayzh was founded on 10th March 2010 and it was the brainchild of Zubaida Bai. The registered office is in Chennai.

- **The story behind-**

The trauma which Zubaida Bai had to undergo after her childbirth despite delivering in a city hospital made her think of what could be the situation in rural areas. The absence of adequate sterilized instruments made childbirth in rural areas very dangerous. An Interaction with midwives and health workers in rural areas made her realize the need to produce low-cost health products which would take care of women's reproductive health needs. Keeping these factors in mind Zubaida Bai started Ayzh with an aim of bringing dignity to women's health.

- **Products of Ayzh-**

Ayzh has launched 4 products– First product is Janma Kit: for clean and safe delivery, Shishu Kit: ensuring a child's good health, Janani Kit- a mother care kit for post-delivery hygiene, the fourth kit is Kanya Kit- for menstrual hygiene and an up-coming kit: The Maitri Kit.

- **Social Impact**

- Ayzh aims to provide access to essential reproductive services, adhere to global standards on safe deliveries and care, and bring to the forefront Women's Health as a core topic. They have impacted over a million women and babies and girls through the distribution of Ayzh Products (kits).
- Ayzh has created job opportunities for numerous rural Indian women. It employs underserved women to assemble kits in its 3 factories in India. Women are employed at every stage of the production process right from co-creating purse designs to ensuring that purses are culturally acceptable, to introducing new kits based on the underserved healthcare needs of women. Local Indian women in rural areas assemble the kits, which are then sold directly to health institutions. Thus, Ayzh has provided livelihood to numerous Indian women.
- After developing the product, it was also realized that the midwives and health workers needed to be trained to ensure clean birth. Keeping this aim in mind, a mobile training program was conceptualized to ensure the kits are used correctly. It has trained over 400 healthcare workers.

- **Challenges faced by the team-**

- Ayzh faced tough competition from organizations working in this area. These organizations provided

sample kits free of cost. Despite such freebies, the kits were not put to use. Thus, for Ayzh it was difficult to compete as a non-profit organization. It was a challenging task to plan strategies to run a business with a profit-making motive and to launch products that can be found affordable and can be used by rural people at large.

- ii. It was very difficult to foray into an area that was so far dominated by the use of traditional and orthodox ideologies. Entering the market by increasing awareness and introducing products was a matter of concern.

2. Kadam

• Story of Kadam

Since 2009, Kadam (NGO) and Kadam Haat are two organizations founded by Payal Nath that work unitedly to skill, to create opportunities, and to provide sustainable livelihoods to the disadvantaged group in rural areas. They use 100% eco-friendly local materials. In the enterprise, 85% of the artisans are women. Kadam Haat Basketry Barn Private Limited is a private company incorporated on 17 December 2021. The registered office of the company is situated in Kolkata. The company's vision is to promote sustainable and plastic-free living for consumers worldwide. Through various development programs the enterprise trains women, which empowers women to be in a position to help their families escape from poverty. They also provide an organized platform for women to showcase their skills.

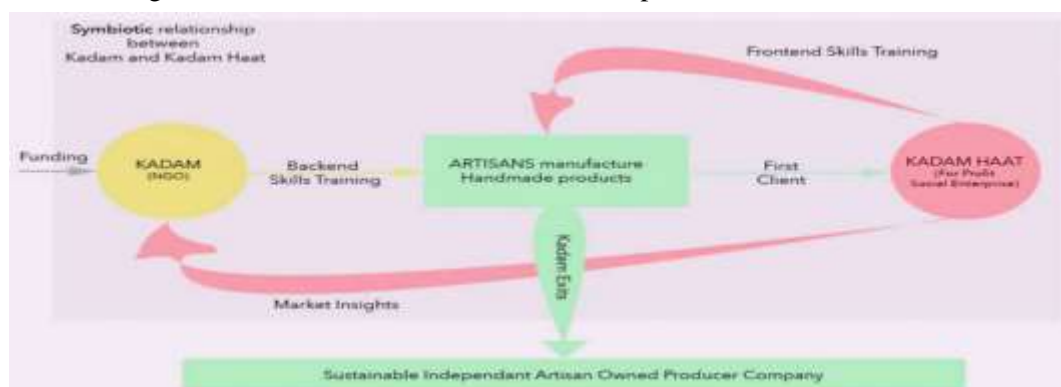
Kadam has organized clusters and actively working in West Bengal, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Kashmir, where the artisans are engaged in Sabai, Bamboo, Sitalpati, Woodcrafts, Moonj Craft, Cotton Handloom, and Wicker Craft.

• Products

Kadam manufactures different baskets, table mats, and other home décor articles. They also have a wide variety of Kitchen and dining-related merchandise like roti boxes, trays, platters, coasters, cutlery, etc.

• Work structure

Kadam NGO and Kadam Haat work unitedly as a for-profit social enterprise. Kadam NGO designs training programs and ensures that the products crafted post-training are sale-worthy. Kadam Haat provides training on frontend skills to the artisans, to compete in the business world





(Source: <https://kadamindia.org/pages/kadam-kadam-haat>)

- **Social Impact**

- Kadam is being successful in providing training and creating employment for more than 460 artisans. Kadam has impacted more than 6000 lives. There is a rise of 10% to 30% in the income of women from rural areas.
- Kadam by generating employment opportunities has reduced rural-urban migration which has further resulted in eliminating other social problems.
- Along with women empowerment Kadam also promotes child health and child development and thrives to reduce malnutrition.
- At Kadam, they promote the use of locally available natural resources; thus, all the products are environmentally friendly.

- **Challenges**

- The majority of the artisans have agriculture as their primary occupation. Thus, there is an unavailability of artisans during the harvesting period.
- They have to tackle social challenges like non-acceptance by communities for equal pay to men and women. Along with this team building amongst the people who follow caste-driven hierarchies, is also a challenging task for Kadam.
- Kadam also had to efficiently deal with challenges related to logistics, price battles, quality maintenance, and other challenges.

3. Ladakhi Women's Travel Company

- **Know About the Company**

Ladakhi Women's Travel Company was formed in the year 2009. Thinlas Chorol is the founder of the company. The company currently has a strength of around 30 women employees. It is the first Travel company in Ladakh which is entirely owned and operated by women only.

The company organizes homestay treks with the view that travelers will get a chance to get sentimentally attached to the Ladakhi culture and may experience homely treatment.

- **The story behind**

Thinlas Chorol had experienced that many travel agencies were reluctant in employing female tour guides. She also knew that many Ladakhi women have an interest in trekking and aspire to become tour guides. Also, she learned that there is a great demand for women tour guides from women travelers who travel alone. All this inspired her to start her company and this led to the foundation of Ladakhi Women's Travel Company.

- **Packages**

The company organizes treks as per the requirements of travelers. They have planned region-wise treks and treks based on difficulty levels. They also conduct monastery trips and scenic trips. The company has always been promoting homestays and ecotourism.



• **Socio-economic Impact**

- i. The company has notably contributed to making rural women's communities socially active. The concept of homestay encouraged women from rural areas and also from remote areas to showcase their skills and abilities. These women get a great chance to meet and interact with new people due to which they developed confidence. All this has improved the livelihoods of Ladakhis.
- ii. The company primarily hires women who are 10th and 12th-class drop-outs. These women are hired simply because their lack of formal education does not provide them with any other job prospects. They are hired as porters and taught basic English and First-Aid skills.
- iii. As around 65% of the population in Ladakh (Census 2011) resides in rural areas, income generation has always been a challenging task, but again the increased tourism due to the company has supported them financially.
- iv. Ladakhi Women's Travel Company aims to promote Eco-tourism, they believe that along with tourism it is also vital to preserve and promote Ladakhi Nature. The company has also been helping Ladakhis to explore and foster their culture and nature. The company always ensures that the tourist activities nourish Mother nature.
- v. The Company thrives to provide a platform for Young Women to develop and show their talents and skills, which further could help them become financially independent.

• **Challenges**

- i. The founder of the company, initially faced a lot of challenges in the world which was dominated by men.
- ii. The company has planned various treks for the entire year, but there is less demand for tours in the off-season. Thus, the income made in the peak months has to be stretched out for the rest of the year.
- iii. Initially, many Ladakhi women were not well-versed in English. So, being tour guides they find it difficult to converse in English with the travelers.

Observations:

1. From the above-mentioned case studies, it can be said that these women social entrepreneurs have played a vital role in providing women in rural areas with economic and social independence through income generation and job creation.
2. These social entrepreneurs have been able to exploit opportunities in rural areas. They have helped family members to become more self-sufficient, contributing to family income, and the general purchasing power of the rural population. Thus, enhancing the quality of life in rural India.
3. These entrepreneurs have been able to impart adequate training to the employees in rural areas thus attempting to eliminate the technological barriers.
4. We see women and men at par to a larger extent in urban areas however, the same is not the situation in rural areas. The rural areas have been still stuck under the vicious hold of male ego and dominance. The enterprises referred to above have faced a lot of challenges like asking for higher pay than women, non-acceptance of

women leadership, etc. Thus, during the introductory stage, these entrepreneurs did face challenges as they were against the traditional mindset of the rural population.

Conclusion:

Despite all the hardships, there is no denial that social entrepreneurs especially women social entrepreneurs can play a pivotal role in the upliftment of their women counterparts and also contribute to rural development as well. The case studies have shown that women have come up with sustainable social innovations and they have put their hearts into their projects. In the context of rural areas, it was observed they have not only been able to empower women but have also contributed productively to the improvement of health, skill development, and education thereby giving women a voice in their communities. Thus, there is a need to encourage such women social entrepreneurs as they can be the torchbearers of economic and social changes for rural women in particular.

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