

Socio-Economic Status of Female Entrepreneurs in Northeast India

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Abstract: The status of women in north-eastern India is quite different from that of women in other parts of the country. However, Indian societies are governed by values, culture, and traditions, which are almost the same in all the regions. Thus, better women's status is possible when they are given equal rights and they become empowered. The entrepreneurship is a vibrant step towards economic empowerment of women which brings better status for women in the society. The women of north-eastern region of India are privileged to have almost equal status with men as compared to mainland Indian women. The womenfolk work hand in hand with men in all spare of life in northeast India. The present paper is based on the socio-economic status of female entrepreneurs in north eastern region. The basic objective of the paper is to figure out the level of women empowerment through entrepreneurship in the north-eastern region of India. The paper outlines that female entrepreneurs in the north east have similar kinds of social recognition and levels of income.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is not just a concept of having business, it can be considered as a process of empowerment to the poor and women in the economy. The process of strengthening the potential of individuals or groups is referred to as empowerment. There is evidence to suggest that countries with a higher number of women entrepreneurs in their population have progressed significantly more quickly than other countries. Surprisingly, India was rated 140th out of 156 nations in the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2021 (WEF, 2021). Women make up roughly 48 percent of the population in India (Census, 2011), however they only play a very limited role in economic growth of India. Women's entrepreneurship growth will empower women while also hastening the economic development process (Sethi, 1998). In India, women's earnings are projected to be one-fifth of men's. As a result, women play a critical role in the Indian economy in this increasingly complicated socio-economic context.

Women are now taking up business roles in order to find significance in their lives. Women in business are thus a relatively new phenomena in India (Singh and Singh, 2012). Women are gradually transitioning from being housewives to being female entrepreneurs. Some of the changes could be attributed to education, a shift in cultural norms, or globalisation. Entrepreneurial success is influenced by environmental elements such as social (Kumar, 2014), economic, legal, political, and technological aspects, all of which influence their activities and contribute to successful entrepreneurship (Shakila and Melwyn, 2021). When given the necessary exposure, education, expertise, and support, these women will entail to be valuable assets in India's economic progress. The entrepreneurial success is influenced by environmental elements such as social, economic, legal, political, and technological aspects, all of which influence their activities and contribute to successful entrepreneurship.

The women entrepreneurs of north east India work equally as men in the society. They work hand in hand with men to support the family and contribute in the region's economy. The north-eastern states comprise of tribal population mostly, who belongs to rural areas and associated with agriculture, farming and other activities.

The present study extensively uses the term female entrepreneurship. Thus, the female entrepreneurs are those who start a business by their own. In other words, a female or women entrepreneurs are individuals who initiate and organise an entrepreneurial venture. Women entrepreneurs are those who are willing to take on new challenges are ambitious, hardworking, patient, motivated, adventurous, conscientious, educated, and intellectual. According to Government of India, "an enterprise owned and controlled by women with a minimum financial stake of 51 percent of the capital and at least 51 percent employment offered to female" are considered as female owned enterprises.

2. Review of Literature

In a developing economy like India, the savings of individual in the rural areas are being utilized in establishing micro enterprises. Hence, the rural entrepreneurship and its association have been given much importance since it brings in socio economic empowerment in rural and backward region. The studies conducted by various researchers cited various aspects of women empowerment through entrepreneurship. The demographic parameters such as age, education, and family type have a significant impact on working women's socioeconomic status, particularly their monthly income and savings (Kulkarni and Srinivas, 2019).

In the northeast part of India, scholars found that women have autonomy in decision making and also get better social support which backs the enthusiasm to work more and achieve greater heights. In this section few selected studies are highlighted for better understanding of the socio-economic factors related to women entrepreneurs in northeast India. The religious beliefs, gender discrimination, lack of education, cultural norms, fear of failure, lack of confidence, lack of moral support from family, financial constraints, etc. are various aspects to consider those have impact on women entrepreneurs (Patil and Choudhary, 2020).

Women entrepreneurs and their contributions to the state economy are influenced by socio-cultural factors (Pradeepika, 2017). The study conducted by Chatterjee *et al.* (2017) reveal that psychological and socio-cultural factors have an impact on the core human attributes of an entrepreneur

and influenced entrepreneurial growth is positively. Women entrepreneurs benefit from a variety of entrepreneurial activities that provide them with similar rights, privileges, and responsibilities as their male counterparts, and they are able to enhance their socioeconomic situation (Bora, 2019). Female entrepreneurs are confident in their lives, and their socio-economic standings have improved significantly after venturing to entrepreneurial activities (Shakila and Melwyn, 2021). The personal traits of female entrepreneurs that influence their success (Jeni *et al.*, 2021). Further, female entrepreneurs' age and education increase, they obtain more knowledge, which help them generate more money, and their socio-economic level rises automatically (Lakshmi *et al.*, 2019). It was also discovered that entrepreneurial skills and micro-finance have an impact on life satisfaction, which enhances the socio-economic condition of women entrepreneurs (Prathiba and Shanmugasundaram, 2021).

The positive and negative aspects of female entrepreneurs' lives help to paint a more complete and accurate picture of women's overall status in the North East Indian regions (Singh *et al.*, 2020). However entrepreneurs lack skills, knowledge and proper training in their activities in most of the women owned enterprises (Kulkarni and Srinivas, 2019).

It also demonstrates that the most important economic issues affecting women entrepreneurs' effectiveness include a lack of financial access, strong competition, and insufficient access to training, technology, and raw materials (Jeni *et al.*, 2021). The primary economic issues that affect the performance of women entrepreneurs include market competition, lack of market access and lack of business training (Mall, 2020). Women entrepreneurs struggle more in manufacturing business due to some social obstacles (Rahaman, 2018). In rural areas weaving is practiced by a wide range of entrepreneurs, and it is possible that it is an income-generating activity for them (John and Kamini, 2016). Rural women's economic interdependence and social status can both benefit from entrepreneurship (Sarma, 2014). Hence, due to their participation in entrepreneurial activities, rural women gained more self-confidence, self-reliance, and independence (Saikia and Deka, 2017).

Most of the female entrepreneurs were having high respect in the family and society. There were high participation in the social activities among the sample entrepreneurs (Singh & Monga, 2013). The women entrepreneurs become economically self-reliant, economically independent, gained respect in the society (Awati and Deshpande, 2020). The main motivating factor to start an enterprise was to earn money (Sinha, 2015), self-actualisation, status of independence, family encouragement, generation of income (Patil and Choudhary, 2020). It was also suggested that, providing vocational education and training programs that focus on entrepreneurship education to the rural female micro-entrepreneurs in the region (Goswami *et al.*, 2017).

3. Objectives and Hypotheses of the Study

3.1. Objectives of the Study

- To study the demographic characteristics of female entrepreneurs in northeast India.
- To examine the social status of women entrepreneurs in northeast India.
- To figure out the level of economic empowerment of female entrepreneurs in the northeast India.

3.2. Hypotheses of the Study

H₀₁: There is no relation between capital cities and range of monthly income among female entrepreneurs in north east India.

H₀₂: There is no relation between capital cities and level of social recognition among female entrepreneurs in north east India.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Materials and Methods

The study focused on the socio-economic status of women entrepreneurs and issues related to female entrepreneurship in north east India. The present study is empirical in nature and data collected from capital cities of northeastern India. The population of the study is unknown. Hence, equal numbers of female entrepreneurs were selected from different cities in the region. The convenience sampling technique has been used for the purpose of obtaining the sample units for the study.

Table 1: Sample Respondents from the Capital Cities of Northeastern States of India

<i>Sl.</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Agartala	30	12.5
2	Aizwal	30	12.5
3	Dispur	30	12.5
4	Gangtok	30	12.5
5	Kohima	30	12.5
6	Imphal	30	12.5
7	Itanagar	30	12.5
8	Shillong	30	12.5
	Total	240	100.0

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

For the purpose of study 30 numbers of respondents from each capital cities of northeastern India were selected to fill the survey questionnaires. Hence, in total 240 numbers of female entrepreneurs from formal and informal sectors have been incorporated in the study. The primary data of the study is presented with the help of tables, graphs and charts, and analyzed and interpreted with descriptive statistics. Further, the correlation has been observed between demographic variables with socio-economic factors to analyze the result lucidly.

4.2. Study Area

The present is conducted on the capital cities of North Eastern States of India. The eight north eastern states and there capital cities are depicted in the table 2.

Table 2: Northeastern States and its Capital Cities

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>North Eastern States</i>	<i>Capital Cities</i>
1	Arunachal Pradesh	Itanagar
2	Assam	Dispur
3	Manipur	Imphal
4	Meghalaya	Shillong
5	Mizoram	Aizawl
6	Nagaland	Kohima
7	Sikkim	Gangtok
8	Tripura	Agartala

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

The northeastern states composed of different ethnic groups and the artistic talents are tremendous in the region. The female population is also very active in the economic activities in the northeastern region.

5. Data Analysis

In order to accomplish the objectives laid in this paper, the results of the filed survey are depicted in the subsequent tables and due interpretation and discussion have been made. These characteristics are discussed in the following tables:

The table 3 depicts that the sample female entrepreneurs mostly are in the age group of 31 years to 40 years of age. It means the female entrepreneurs of north east India are mostly youth. However, only 3.8 percent of female entrepreneurs are in the age group of 61 years or more. The table also shows that around 20 percent of female entrepreneurs are graduated and 20 percent are matriculated. The region shows 11.7 percent of female entrepreneurs do not have formal education at any level and on contrary 9.6 percent of sample female entrepreneurs are holding post graduate qualifications. The study shows that 73.8 percent of female entrepreneurs of north east India are married and rest 26.2 percent sample entrepreneurs are unmarried.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Female Entrepreneurs

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Age Group	18 - 30 Years	56	23.3
		31 - 40 Years	90	37.5
		41 - 50 Years	57	23.8
		51 - 60 Years	28	11.7
		61 Years & Above	9	3.8
		Total	240	100.0

contd. table 3

Socio-Economic Status of Female Entrepreneurs in Northeast India

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
2	Educational Qualification	Illiterate	28	11.7
		Primary	47	19.6
		Matriculation	48	20.0
		Intermediate	45	18.8
		Graduate	49	20.4
		Post Graduate	23	9.6
		Total	240	100.0
3	Marital Status	Unmarried	63	26.2
		Married	177	73.8
		Total	240	100.0
4	Social Category	General	64	26.7
		Other Backward Class	31	12.9
		Schedule Tribe	131	54.6
		Schedule Caste	14	5.8
		Total	240	100.0
5	Religious Belief	Hindu	74	30.8
		Buddhist	23	9.6
		Muslim	11	4.6
		Christian	96	40.0
		Indigenous Belief	36	15.0
		Total	240	100.0

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

The tables 3 also projects that, around 54.6 percent of sampled female entrepreneurs in the study area belong to scheduled tribe category followed by 26.7 percent entrepreneurs are from general category. The table further presents that only 5.8 percent of female entrepreneurs are from scheduled caste category. It can be viewed that 40 percent of the female entrepreneurs are Christians. Around 30.8 percent of entrepreneurs are Hindus, followed by 15 percent of them follows Indigenous belief. Notably, only 4.6 percent of entrepreneurs are from Muslim religion in the sampled studied.

The table 4 projects that 74.2 percent of sampled women entrepreneurs are from the urban areas and rest 25.8 percent of them are from rural part of the capital cities of the region. The study also reflects the type of family setup for sampled female entrepreneurs in the region. It is also found that 53.8 percent female entrepreneurs are in joint family system and rests are in nuclear setup. Around 47.5 percent of female entrepreneurs cited that they have six and more members in their families. Whereas, only 12.5 percent of entrepreneurs stated that they have upto 2 members in the irrespective families.

Table 4: Entrepreneur's Family and Enterprise Profile

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Family Type	Nuclear	111	46.3
		Joint	129	53.8
		Total	240	100.0
2	No. of Family Members	Upto Two	30	12.5
		Three to Five	96	40.0
		Six & Above	114	47.5
		Total	240	100.0
3	Family Support	Yes	174	72.5
		No	66	27.5
		Total	240	100.0
4	Location	Urban	178	74.2
		Rural	62	25.8
		Total	240	100.0
5	Trained or not	Yes	144	60.0
		No	96	40.0
		Total	240	100.0
6	Years of existence	Less Than 3 Years	70	29.2
		3 Years to 5 Years	91	37.9
		More than 5 Years	79	32.9
		Total	240	100.0

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

In addition, the table 4 depicts that 72.5 percent of the sampled women entrepreneurs get support from their family members for operating business. However, 27.5 percent of women entrepreneurs cited that they do not get family support for their business in the region. It is also analysed that 60 percent of sample women entrepreneurs in northeast India are trained for running enterprises. However, still 40 percent of female entrepreneurs have not attended any training for operating business venture. The table also shows that 37.9 percent of female entrepreneurs have less than 3 years of experience in running enterprises; followed by 32.9 percent entrepreneurs operating their enterprises since more than 5 years.

The study found that 56.3 percent of the female entrepreneurs of northeast India invested own money as initial source of finance. However, 28.8 percent of female entrepreneurs invested own and borrowed capital for initial source of finance for their business. It is reflected from the present study that almost 98 percent of female owned enterprises are sole trading form. The table 5 also states that only 17.5 percent of female entrepreneurs have opted for the service-based enterprises. However, the female entrepreneurs mostly started manufacturing enterprises in the region.

Table 5: Source of Finance and Types of Female Owned Enterprises

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Groups</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Sources	Owned	135	56.3
		Borrowed	36	15.0
		Both	69	28.8
		Total	240	100.0
2	Ownership Style	Sole Trading	235	97.9
		Partnership	5	2.1
		Total	240	100.0
3	Nature	Service Based	42	17.5
		Manufacturing Based	198	82.5
		Total	240	100.0

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

Table 6: Monthly Income of Female Entrepreneurs

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Income in Rs.</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Upto 25,000	98	40.8
2	25,001 - 50,000	88	36.7
3	50,001 & Above	54	22.5
	Total	240	100.0

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

The study found (table 6) that 40.8 percent of female entrepreneurs of north east India earn income upto Rs 25,000 p.m., followed by 36.7 percent earns in between Rs 25,001 to Rs 50,000 p.m. However, only 22.5 percent of women entrepreneurs earn more than Rs 50,000 p.m. from their business in the study area.

Table 7: Social Recognition for the Female Entrepreneurs

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Recognition Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Low	44	18.3
2	Medium	86	35.8
3	High	110	45.8
	Total	240	100.0

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

The table 7 reflects that 45.8 percent of sample entrepreneurs have high level of social recognition in the society. Around 35.8 percent female entrepreneurs responded that they got medium level of social recognition after establishment of enterprises. However, 18.3percent of entrepreneurs cited that they have low level of social recognition.

The table 8 depicts various factors to measure the socio-economic status of female entrepreneurs of northeast India. The study projects that 94.2 percent of sample female entrepreneurs responded for better education for their children. Similarly, around 88 percent of female entrepreneurs responded that they can be able to avail better healthcare facilities after becoming the entrepreneurs. Also, around 97 percent of female entrepreneurs responded that they can afford better clothing for their families regularly after becoming businesswomen. With respect to community participation, around 69.6 percent sampled female entrepreneurs responded that their community participation have improved after becoming entrepreneurs.

In case of Household Income, 80.4 percent of female entrepreneurs stated that it has been improved due to their involvement in entrepreneurial activities. However, only 52.9 percent entrepreneurs cited that they were able to save money from their business income. Similarly, only 29.6 percent female

Table 8: Socio-Economic Factors to Measure Status of Female Entrepreneurs

<i>Sl.</i>	<i>Factors</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Better Education for Children	Yes	226	94.2
		No	14	5.8
2	Access to Good Healthcare Facilities	Yes	212	88.3
		No	28	11.7
3	Better Clothing for Family	Yes	233	97.1
		No	7	2.9
4	Community Participation	Better	167	69.6
		Same as Earlier	73	30.4
5	Income of Household	Improved	193	80.4
		Same as Earlier	47	19.6
6	Savings from Income	Yes	127	52.9
		No	113	47.1
7	Insurance Policy Purchased	Yes	71	29.6
		No	169	70.4
8	Assets Creation	Yes	89	37.1
		No	151	62.9
9	Housing Situation	Improved	191	79.6
		Same as Earlier	49	20.4
Total			240	100.0

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

entrepreneurs purchased insurance policy and rest are not at all insured with any insurance policy in the studied region. The 62.9 percent of female entrepreneurs further stated that they were not able to create assets out of their business earnings. However, most (79.6 percent) of sample female entrepreneurs have responded that their involvement in entrepreneurial activities have improved their housing situation in the locality.

6. Results and Discussion

To test both the hypotheses of the study, chi square test has been applied to test the null hypotheses. Subsequently, few inferences have also been drawn with the help of cross tabulation as well.

Table 9: Crosstab between Capital Cities and Monthly Income

Sl.	Capital Cities	Range of Monthly Income			Total
		Upto Rs. 25,000	Rs. 25,001- Rs. 50,000	Rs. 50,001 & Above	
1	Agartala	13 (43.3)	10 (33.3)	7 (23.3)	30 (100.0)
2	Aizawl	9 (30.0)	14 (46.7)	7 (23.3)	30 (100.0)
3	Dispur	24 (80.0)	4 (13.3)	2 (6.7)	30 (100.0)
4	Gangtok	8 (26.7)	19 (63.3)	3 (10.0)	30 (100.0)
5	Kohima	10 (33.3)	13 (43.3)	7 (23.3)	30 (100.0)
6	Imphal	9 (30.0)	13 (43.3)	8 (26.7)	30 (100.0)
7	Itanagar	10 (33.3)	9 (30.0)	11 (36.7)	30 (100.0)
8	Shillong	15 (50.0)	6 (20.0)	9 (30.0)	30 (100.0)
	Total	98 (40.8)	88 (36.7)	54 (22.5)	240 (100.0)

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

* Value in parentheses is in percentage

The table 9 reflects that 80 percent of female entrepreneurs of Dispur earn monthly income upto Rs 25,000 p.m. and only 6.7 percent of them earns more than Rs 50,000 p.m. On the other hand, 63.3

Table 10: Result of Chi-Square Tests on Capital Cities and Monthly Income

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	39.616 ^a	14	.000
Likelihood Ratio	39.628	14	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.109	1	.146
N of Valid Cases	240		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.75.

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

percent of female entrepreneurs of Gangtok city earn in between Rs 25,001 to Rs 50,000 monthly. It is also found that 36.7 percent female entrepreneurs of Itanagar earn monthly income more than Rs 50,000 from their business.

The Chi-Square result on table 10 states $p < 0.05$ (14, N=240). Hence we reject the Null Hypothesis. Thus, there is significant relation exists between the capital cities and the level of monthly income earned by the female entrepreneurs in northeast India.

Table 11: Result of Crosstab between Capital Cities and Social Recognition

Sl.	Capital Cities	Level of Social Recognition			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
1	Agartala	8 (26.7)	7 (23.3)	15 (50.0)	30 (100.0)
2	Aizawl	5 (16.7)	14 (46.7)	11 (36.7)	30 (100.0)
3	Dispur	2 (6.7)	7 (23.3)	21 (70.0)	30 (100.0)
4	Gangtok	0 (0.0)	16 (53.3)	14 (46.7)	30 (100.0)
5	Kohima	4 (13.3)	11 (36.7)	15 (50.0)	30 (100.0)
6	Imphal	8 (26.7)	12 (40.0)	10 (33.3)	30 (100.0)
7	Itanagar	8 (26.7)	9 (30.0)	13 (43.3)	30 (100.0)
8	Shillong	9 (30.0)	10 (33.3)	11 (36.7)	30 (100.0)
	Total	44 (18.3)	86 (35.8)	110 (45.8)	240 (100.0)

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

** Value in parentheses is in percentage*

From the table 11 it can be observed that female entrepreneurs of Gangtok doesn't have low level of social recognition, however 30 percent of female entrepreneurs of Shillong cited low social recognition in the society. On the other hand, most (53.3 percent) female entrepreneurs of Gangtok receive medium level of social recognition. It is observed that most (70 percent) female entrepreneurs of Dispur receive high social recognition after becoming an entrepreneur.

Table 12: Chi-Square Tests between Capital Cities and Social Recognition

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.688 ^a	14	.021
Likelihood Ratio	31.780	14	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.084	1	.079
N of Valid Cases	240		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.50.

Source: Authors' Own Compilation

The Chi-Square result on table 12 states $p < 0.05$ (14, N=240). Hence we reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there is significant relation exists between the capital cities and the level social recognition received by the female entrepreneurs in northeast India.

7. Conclusion

Women can play an important role in the growth of an economy. Women who are economically and socially empowered strengthen the existing workforce and contribute to regional growth. Furthermore, economic empowerment for women means confidence and autonomy, which leads to the creation of wealth. The current study examined the personal histories and business characteristics of female-owned businesses in northeast India. One of the key findings of the study is that the status of female entrepreneurs in northeast India is identical. The study looked at the demographics, income levels, and social recognition of female entrepreneurs in the region. The study's key findings confirm that women are socially and economically empowered after embarking on an entrepreneurial journey. As a result, female entrepreneurs in northeast India gain economic independence and a higher standard of living.

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