

Challenges Encountered by Women in India in Technology Entrepreneurship

Ms. Rina Chakraborty Ghosh¹, Dr. Deepika Pandita²

¹Symbiosis International (Deemed University) Pune

²Symbiosis Institute of Business Management Pune, Symbiosis International (Deemed University) Pune

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Abstract

Over last two decades, there has been an escalation in the number of innovative start-ups and technological ventures in India but the majority of them have been founded or co-founded by men. Technology and Innovation has performed a major role in the 21st Century. The Indian Government's ambitious initiatives such as Start-up India and Stand-up India to build dynamic ecosystem for growth up of start-ups has failed to attract female entrepreneurs. Though women entrepreneurs are ambitious, the success rate in start-up or technology ventures has been low. Since about 48% of the population in India is women efforts must be made to increase number of women entrepreneurs are increased in number in the technological area. This would result in an economy boost for the country. This paper is a comprehensive review of the barriers Indian women entrepreneurs encounter especially in start-up and technology. It also examines if mentoring can address some of the challenges to improve the number of technology and business start-ups by women entrepreneurs and increase their chances of success in business and has proposed a model. The study aims to create a scope for futuristic research with the potential of new topics being unearthed.

Keywords: *technology, entrepreneurship, challenges, women entrepreneur, start-ups, innovation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has been considered to perform a major role in the economy of a country across the world. Inventions and advancement in technology has shaped the 21st century. The very foundation of technological entrepreneurship has been the amalgamation between the disciplines of business, science and technology (Poznańska, 2010). In the last few decades, technological entrepreneurship has caught the attention of the Indian Government and the Department of Science and Technology (DST), in particular, has played a crucial part in its' promotion. Universities and colleges too have started offering programmes on Entrepreneurship and Innovation. Initiatives such as Start-up India and Stand-up India to build dynamic ecosystem for growth up of start-ups have failed to attract female entrepreneurs. Donald Kuratko (2005) described 21st Century as the era to

envision, discover, innovate and create. These words ironically are pertinent to all entrepreneurs regardless of gender. Though women entrepreneurs are ambitious, the success rate in start-up or technology ventures has been low.

According to the Government of India (Sharma, 2013), "An enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having a minimum financial interest of 51 per cent of the capital and giving at least 51 per cent of employment generated by enterprise to women".

According to Kamala Singh (Sharma, 2013), "A woman entrepreneur can be defined as a confident, innovative and creative women capable of achieving self-economic independence individually or in collaboration, generates employment opportunities for others through initiating, establishing and running the enterprise by keeping pace with her personal, family and social life."

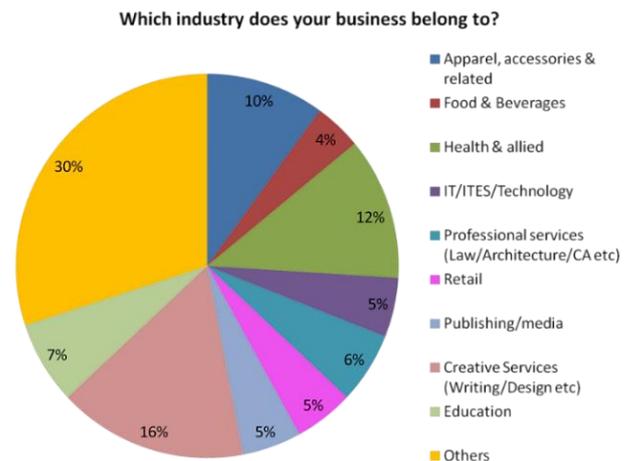
Over years, the terms ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ have been explained through many different definitions. Ambrish (2014) define entrepreneur as a person who has the ability to translate opportunities, to provide services or goods, by introducing a novel or improved way, improve methods and by setting up new business or improvising the existing one, to deliver better goods or services. While one of the principal traits of entrepreneurship is to start new organisations eventually, definitions ranging from history to recent times include words such as risk-taking, innovation, opportunism, new processes (Bird and Brush, 2002).

Over the last two decades, the number of innovative start-ups and technological ventures has increased boosting the economy of India progressively and seen women entrepreneurship in the extension of preparing Pickles, Papads and Powder, commercially. Over time women due to business cognizance and advancement in education have endeavoured into other industries relating to consultancy, educational services, beauty salons, hospitality, catering, public relations, etc. and in the last few decades or so in technology.

According to the statistics provided by the Sixth Economic Census issued by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, around 13.76 % of the total entrepreneurial base in India are women i.e. 80.5 lakhs out of 585 lakh entrepreneurs. This has generated employment to about 10.24 % worker across the country in different activities. Some female have become entrepreneurs by choice some women have become so accidentally.

In order to see what has changed over these years, an online study was conducted by the Women’s Web Women & Entrepreneurship in India during the period of December 2018 – April 2019 wherein 220 women entrepreneurs responded across the country. Fig.1.0 below reflects the response of the women towards the type of industry they belonged to. Majority (30%) of these female entrepreneurs belong to the sector which includes travel and tourism, Manufacturing etc. 16 % in creative services and the third position is in the Health and Allied sector. It is observed that only 5 % female ventured in IT/ITES/Technology.

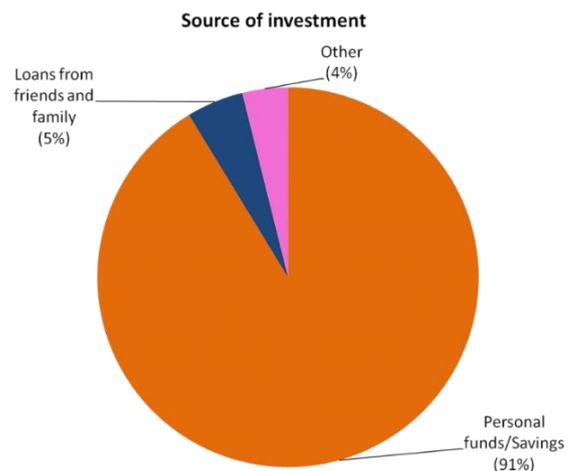
Fig.1: Women Entrepreneurs Sector wise



Source: Women’s Web Women & Entrepreneurs in India 2019 Survey

While Fig.2 reflects the source of finance for starting the venture wherein 91 % of the women responded that they used their savings and personal financial resources as the source to start their venture. This relates well with the fact that the majority of women are micro and small business owners.

Fig 2.0: Source of finance for entrepreneurship



Source: Women’s Web Women & Entrepreneurs in India 2019 Survey

Start-ups in India

The Indian Government’s ambitious initiatives such as Start-up India and Stand-up India to build dynamic ecosystem for growth up of start-ups has failed to attract female entrepreneurs even though women entrepreneurs are ambitious. The

Entrepreneurship development is just not to empower women but create jobs, wealth, individual and collective well-being. In India every year more than 800 start-ups related to technology are being set-up and it is projected that 2020, around 11,500 tech related start-ups will be set-up, creating employment for around 250,000 people from the technical background (NASSCOM, 2015). According to Grant Thornton (2018), USA is leading with 83,000 plus start-ups in the world consisting of 43 % technology based organisation of which 9% are being managed by women, while India is one of the top five countries in terms of start-ups with 10,000 plus start-ups. In 2014-15, the number of incubators crossed the mark of 100 giving boost to the start-up saga. The Grant Thornton report (2018) also gives information on the distribution of start-up ventures in India, sector wise under the bifurcation of technology and non-technology. Amongst technology based start-ups, 33 % of the enterprises are E-Commerce, 24 % Business to Business (B2B), while Internet related businesses are 12 % and mobile apps of 10%. Under Non-technology based enterprises, 17 % start-ups are engineering related, 13 % in Construction, 11 % in Agricultural products related ventures and others as 32%.

Apart from Biocon Ltd., Kalaari Capital, Ritu Kumar, Shahnaz Herbals, Apeejay Park Hotels, Trent limited, Rajshree Sugars & Chemicals Ltd., Mobikwik, VLCC, according to Babu, (2015) over the last few years, several women entrepreneurs began start-ups like Lime Road, Kaaryah, Zivame, CashKaro, Shopclue, media technology organisations such as Your Story and POPxo and women-only job portal, attracting attention of the investor and are significantly expanding the business.

According to the data by Start-up India, only 13.76 percent of total entrepreneurs in India are women. In other words, there are around 8 million entrepreneurs who are women, while the number of entrepreneurs who are men have crossed 50 million.

Objectives

On this backdrop, objectives of the study are:

1. To understand barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs which make them opt out from technology entrepreneurship
2. To examine if mentoring can address some challenges resulting in improvement in the number of women entrepreneurs in technological entrepreneurship.

II. REVIEW OF EXISTING LIETRATURE

In the Indian context, prospects of start-ups are huge but so are the barriers. According to Chokhani(2017), experienced talents are cautious an doubtful to join start-ups , as they have seen large number of people being sacked due to downsizing and downscaling.

According to Bailetti (2012), for development, variation and competitive advantage at the organisation, district and nationwide level, Technology entrepreneurship is needed. While barriers such as “culture”, “social”,”finances”, ”Government regulations”, “Infrastructure related to technology”, and issues with sustainability have been explained by Thornton (2016). According to Shukla, Chauhan & Saumya (2018), their research presented an organised presentation of the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs.

While for women entrepreneurs, the significance of research as a separate entity has been highlighted by prominent researchers as there are major differences between motivations of men and women, characteristics, business growth and development with respect to entrepreneurship. According to Mathew (2012), male entrepreneurs identify entrepreneurship as a way of livelihood, advancement in life and they relate it with positive environment. Women Entrepreneurs identify entrepreneurship as a way of sustenance, achievement in life and additional doing something meaningful in life. Thus the entrepreneurship is more meaningful for women.

Meyer and Mostert (2016) have studied that the methods in which women entrepreneurs manage their businesses and compile strategies have clear characteristic features. Carter et al., (2006) conducted a study which stated that women are more opposed to taking risk and debt, which could be the reason as to why their ventures did not attract opportunities for investment unlike men.

Botha et al., (2007) advocated that as compared to men some women needed help with self-assurance and confidence. Barsh and Yee (2011) further advocated that the mind-sets of women are different as compared to men due other matters such as different structural hindrances, lifestyle issues and their individuality. Greene et al., (2003) reported that over two decades many studies have been conducted and similarities have been identified between male and female entrepreneurs, but there are no substantial discussions regarding the differences between male and female entrepreneurs. Hence, it can be stated that while there are proof of similarity of certain business traits between both men and women, there are differences in many other traits.

21st century has seen women participating in the workforce worldwide significantly more. Though the participation of women have increased in number worldwide, scientific sectors and fields such as pharmaceutical, biotechnology, healthcare, and education have seen higher female representation but in hard sciences fields which are related to technology and information technology, women are still underrepresented (Hewlett et al., 2008). The Hewlett et al. (2008) study has shown that 56% of women in the USA workforce belonging to the sciences, engineering and technology (SET) sector quit from the technology industry and look for jobs in other fields. Extreme demanding work environment, antagonistic male work culture, difference in compensation packages are some of the reasons given by these women. The same report also elucidates how the SET workforce market has barriers for female which affect the SET areas and its structure. Despite the growing rate of women entrepreneurs especially in economically developing nations (GEM, 2014; Ramadani et al., 2015), the business growth is limited due to gender related issues and ethnicity stereotype in some regions (Gatewood et al., 2009). Study by Baughn et al. (2006) has noted that those countries which encourage gender equality, have an attitude of respect, nurture and support female entrepreneurs, have a higher number of them as entrepreneurs.

Challenges related to women entrepreneurship such as family ties; male domineering society; inadequate education; societal barriers; manipulation by middle-men; inadequate raw

material; extreme competition; difficulty in receiving financial assistance; high production cost; legalities; inadequate aptitude for entrepreneurship; restricted movement; lack of managerial skills; poor risk-bearing capacity and absence of self-reliance have been identified by Sharma (2013). Women from Asian developing countries are deprived of freedom which hampers their efforts in entrepreneurship. Sinha (2005) proclaimed this occurrence has more predominance in the South Asian countries when compared to other Asian regions. Freedom and basic human rights are not enjoyed by the women, in these regions; it is unlikely to even consider that women have equal rights and are at par with men with regard to business activities. According to Goheer (2003) study on women entrepreneurs in the Asian region also support these outcomes. A study by Asian Development Bank (2001) show that enterprises run by women in Bangladesh lack the basic system, prospects in marketing and support in social and regulatory matters. While female entrepreneurs of Nepal encounter challenges such as restricted access to land and assets, finance and marketing networks, poor risk taking ability; restricted access to modern technical knowledge; apprehension towards sexual abuse and absence of self-safekeeping; absence of personal reliance; competitive rivalry from national and international organisations; and socio-ethnic challenges, such as complete responsibility of taking care of family and travel (Acharya, Acharya, & Sharma, 1999). It was revealed by Roomi and Parrot (2008) that women entrepreneurs, due to intrinsic prejudiced socio-ethnic values and customs, did not get similar opportunities like women. Other scholars too have studied various challenges related to female entrepreneurship in varied context (e.g., Akehurst et al., 2012; Hussain et al., 2015).

A mentor, in lay terms, may be a described as a guide, philosopher, friend who guides a person who is less experienced by supporting and helping them to transition to a level they want to be by learning and improving. Parsloe (2009) advocated that people can maximize their capabilities by evolving and learning new expertise, bettering their performance, eventually becoming the individual they aim to be through mentorship. Entrepreneurs are supported with problem-solving through

Mentoring (Kickul & Gundry, 2006). Studies have also shown that successful mentoring have helped women to reduce their feeling of isolation, be a source of inspiration by learning decision-making (Woodd, 1997). According to Browder (2011), women entrepreneurs emphasize that mentoring relationships are significant because it contributes positively in their professional and personal development.

Robin L. Laukhuf1 and Timothy A. Malone (2015) after a study on 22 women entrepreneurs highlighted that mentoring is a vital for women entrepreneurs and also suggested the significance of an ongoing mentoring relationship between two women entrepreneurs. According to John Rollins (2018), mentoring relationships have positive results in organisational growth, leadership skills, business accomplishments etc. While, a report on ‘Mentor Plan for female entrepreneurs’ released by the Scottish Government (2019) has proposed that mentoring is a great tool to provide insight to budding women entrepreneurs.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to identify about the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs which prevents them to opt for technology entrepreneurship and seeks to substantiate the current thought processes and evidences found. The literature has been primarily obtained from internet and management journal databases such as EBSCO, EMERALD, Elsevier and SCOPUS. A comprehensive literature review was done and it has been established that not only the challenges have been identified which are holding women entrepreneurs back from venturing in technological entrepreneurship but also identified that mentoring can play a major role for women entrepreneurs to sustain the fast-paced ever revolutionising technology sector which requires support and tenacity to never give up.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Changing times and progressive mind-sets, have unleashed the power to women to participate in social, economic, political and developmental aspects on equal footing with men.

The findings have shown that the challenges are a result of gender bias which impacts restricted

access to finance, capital and infrastructure. Also, women feel less confident and are overwhelmed by the requirements of sustaining in the complex, fast-paced, ever-revolutionising sector of technology and innovation and hence prefer venturing into other businesses.

As per the literature review, the barriers encountered by women entrepreneurs can be broadly categorised as:

Table I: Challenges encountered by Women Entrepreneurs

| Type of Challenges | Challenges |
|--|--|
| Monetary | Access to bank loan or funds due to no credit history |
| | Funding or Capital Deficiency |
| | Use family assets for getting loan from lending agencies |
| | lack of strategies for revenue generation |
| | Management of Cash flow |
| Technical | Non availability of machinery |
| | Technology infrastructure |
| | Poor technical knowledge |
| | Poor Cyber security |
| | Lack of specialised skill |
| Regulations and Policies of Government | High taxes |
| | Multi window clearances |
| | Lack of financial assistance |
| | Unfriendly environment for women |
| | Others |
| Individual Attributes | Poor self confidence |
| | Family responsibility |
| | Less education |
| | Poor entrepreneurial aptitude |
| | Poor managerial skills |
| | Fear of Risk |
| | Poor Training |
| | Lack of Patience |
| Social | Poor connection with Mentors |
| | Predictability of Consumer behaviour |
| | Lack of Market structure |

Out of the challenges classified, studies have shown that women entrepreneurs refrain from venturing in the sector as technological entrepreneurship require:

Large Finances and revenue generation: The options require loans, grants, angel and crowd

funding, support from venture capitalists etc. and the requirement increases as the business expands. As business increases, expenses increase forcing the entrepreneur to concentrate on the funding aspect instead of fundamentals of the business. Hence, it is critical to monitor the degree of spending finances by the start-ups in the preliminary phase.

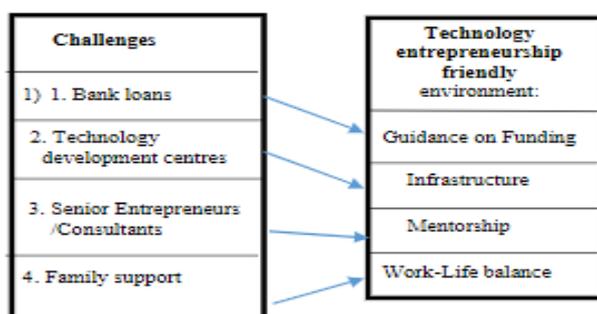
Lack of mentorship: Mentoring is one of the key challenges faced in the Indian start-up environment. Lack in guidance and support during the start-up phase can result in limitations in the markets, understanding customer expectations, up gradation of skills, ineffective branding strategies, poor risk taking ability etc.

Infrastructure: Infrastructure plays an important role in the lifespan of start-ups that includes incubating set-ups, science parks and technology parks, enterprise development centres etc. Absence of such critical systems increases the probability of collapse of the enterprise.

Work-life balance: The balancing act between work pressure and responsibility of the family has always given women stress, anxiety eventually making them resentful or burn out. Both of which are negative.

Our proposed model: As discussed earlier, the focus is on the four specific challenges and we assume that if these challenges are addressed then it will create a technological entrepreneurship friendly environment, which will results in more number of women entrepreneurs in the field of technology an innovation and eventually leads to an economic growth and benefits the society at large. Fig.3 presents our proposed model.

Fig. 3: Proposed model of impact of Challenges for women entrepreneurs in Technological Entrepreneurship



Nurturing Women Entrepreneurs through Mentorship

During the first few years of business, a novice entrepreneur can bear start-up related problems, leading to the entrepreneur feeling overwhelmed and alone. Studies have shown that mentoring women entrepreneurs show benefits which include better decision-making, upgrade in skill development, boost in self-confidence which help them in achieving their goals. These benefits have a positive impact on the long-term growth of the business.

Through mentoring programmes, women entrepreneurs develop resilience in many ways. Discussions and deliberations help the mentee (women entrepreneur) to develop a clear vision regarding his goals, pitfalls to avoid, skill to recognise opportunities, upgrade knowledge. Continuous interaction and encouragement from Mentors enhances the self-confidence of the women entrepreneurs on surviving competition, risk taking ability, labour problems, teams, infrastructure, legal formalities, overload of work, mistrust etc.

V. CONCLUSION

There is a need for a ‘women entrepreneur friendly’ environment which shall give women the space to be a pioneer to create something worthwhile. Currently, there is a gap between the existing standard of activities of women entrepreneurs and their potential. This gap has to closed by an all-inclusive strategic effort both by the agencies which are governmental or otherwise. This essential as women entrepreneurship will no doubt improve the economy of the country and participation in the fields of technology and innovation is necessary for women to boost their morale and ensure their position in the society. Addressing the challenges to meet the continuous fast-paced changing developments in the field of technology by moulding the entrepreneurial characteristics and skills of women, can make them competent to sustain and endeavour for excellence.

Mentoring can facilitate and support women entrepreneurs to identify their self-confidence and expand the understanding of entrepreneurship, investment and financial know how women’s

understanding of business and investment/ financial knowledge so their insight of capabilities and opportunities can be improved.

Limitations and Scope

This is a conceptual paper and qualitative in nature. The proposed model (Fig. 3) needs to be tested empirically. Also, the study has not explored why women continue to rely on family, friends or groups for professional guidance as compared to men. Also it has not addressed the challenges which keep women from establishing mentoring relationships.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

Therefore, it is suggested that to overcome the challenges, women entrepreneurs may consider following points as a continuous process:

To enable more number of female entrepreneurs to venture into technological entrepreneurship, the challenges mentioned in the study may be addressed by training programmes in the areas of managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, legal skills, behavioural skills and mentorship as a continuous process. Organisations such as NITI Aayog's Women Entrepreneurship Platform, Catalyst for Women Entrepreneurship, and the accelerator for women in tech initiated by Zone Start-ups India are dedicated to nurture women entrepreneurs by fostering networking with other entrepreneurs, assist in fund raising etc.

Mentoring can be considered to offer benefits to the mentors and mentees. Mentorship programmes offered by various agencies can benefit women entrepreneurs to overcome their challenges and give a sense of achievement. Women entrepreneurs may consider the traditional mode of mentoring which is One-to-one mentoring wherein both the mentor and mentee are matched through a structured programme or by themselves and will have a time frame to follow. Entrepreneurs may also consider 'virtual mentoring' where both the parties are located in different places. Group Mentoring is where the mentor is connected to a group of mentees.

In India, a tool like mentoring can be a great to support women entrepreneurs to attain the right platform in technology sector. Mentoring can help

women to progress in setting up an enterprise with their original and pioneering ideas with them realising that their position is important not only in the society but also to the entire economy of the country.

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