

Awareness of Legal Rights among Rural Women Entrepreneurs in North East Region of India

Pubali Saikia¹

1. Asstt. Prof., Department of Home Science, Vidya Bharati College, Kamrup (Assam)

Corresponding author e-mail: pubalisaikia1983@gmail.com>

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of entrepreneurs in a society depends to a great extent on the economic, social, religious, cultural and psychological factor prevailing in the society. Besides, it is a prerequisite for the development of any nation. Growth of women entrepreneurs can be a vehicle of socio-economic empowerment. During the last two decades, Indian women have entered the field of entrepreneurship in increasing numbers. With the emergence and growth of their businesses, they have contributed to the Indian economy and society. On the other hand, rights provide legal opportunity to every individual for realizing their democratic citizenship as well as to protect them from various violence whether it may be related to mental or physical injury. Women rights in a sense are inseparable from human being, since human existence without rights is of no consequence. Women entrepreneurship, women empowerment and nation building are therefore synonymous. In recent years it has been observed that women entrepreneurs of Assam are venturing into different non-traditional fields also. Both entrepreneurship and legal rights are very much essential for a women to become self-reliant in different aspects of life. Hence, this study was conducted in three districts of Assam to assess the awareness of legal rights among rural women entrepreneurs in north-east region of India. Data were collected from 100 respondents engaged in different income generating activities. Purposive random sampling method was used in selection of respondents. Keeping in mind the objective of the study, an interview schedule was designed for the purpose of collecting data with the limited time frame. The results of the study revealed that membership in organization was found highly significant with all the selected areas of women's rights.

Key words : Awareness; Legal rights; Rural women; Entrepreneurs;

Entrepreneurship is necessary to initiate the process of economic development of a country. It is also instrumental in sustaining the process of economic development. Women entrepreneurs are inspiring. An entrepreneur is someone that organizes, manages and assumes the risk of a business enterprise. Today, more women are breaking free from the traditional, gender-specific roles and venturing into the business world.

The movement of entrepreneurship promotion and development in the past few decades has gone a long way in North East India, particularly in the state of Assam. The handloom sector in Assam is mainly handled by women. Women entrepreneurs in Assam are engaged mainly in traditional activities like weaving,

knitting, embroidery, jam-jelly and pickle making and so on. This is partly because of opportunities of training in different fields and partly because of enlargement of entrepreneurial opportunities.

The rural women are having basic indigenous knowledge, skill, potential and resource to establish and manage enterprise. They can do wonders by their effectual and competent involvement in entrepreneurial activities. According to Garter (1985), entrepreneurship is the creation of new organizations. Borah (2014) conducted a study on "Socio-Economic Status of Women entrepreneurship – A case study of Morigaon District in Assam" and mentioned that a new time oriented govt. policy is required for the sustainable

development of women enterprises. *Mehta (2013)* observed that 20.00 per cent of women entrepreneurs belonged to age group of 25-35 years followed by 65.00 per cent of respondents belonged to 35- 45 years age group and rest 15.00 per cent belonged to 45-55 years age group. It was also reported that 50.00 per cent of respondents had education up to post graduate level followed by graduates (30.00%) and 20.00 per cent of respondents were below graduates.

Goyal and Parkash (2011) highlighted his finding that many women started their business due to some traumatic events like divorce, discrimination due to pregnancy or the corporate glass ceiling, the health of a family member, or some other economic reason such as a layoff.

Lathwal (2011) in his study on “Women entrepreneurs in India” observed that majority (52.20%) of the respondents were between the ages of 36-45 years, 50.00 per cent of respondents were graduates followed by 25.00 per cent were undergraduates/diploma holders, 10.00 per cent were postgraduates and 15.00 per cent were professionally qualified, 78.00 per cent were married, 8.30 per cent were divorcee and 8.30 percent were widows. A large percentage (63.30%) of the respondents belonged to nuclear families.

Generally, women’s rights and freedom include the right for safe living, the right not to be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to equal protection according to humanitarian norms in times of international or national armed conflict, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to equal protection under the law, the right to equality in the family, the right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health and right to just and favorable conditions of work. Although there is a broad picture of sufferings of women predominantly due to non-exercise of rights given to them by law more particularly in the developing country like India. We the social scientists, workers can not let women continue to get these sufferings. It is the right time to find out the basic reason for this ever increasing rate of women’s sufferings. Therefore, the present investigator was inclined to take up a research study to identify the awareness level of rural women entrepreneurs living at grass-root i.e. the rural women regarding availability of various provision given by law for their protection through the Indian Constitution.

The present study was carried out with the following specific objectives-

- i. To study the socio –economic status of rural women entrepreneurs.
- ii. To find out the relationship between level of awareness about their rights with the selected socio-personal variables.

METHODOLOGY

Present study is being conducted in the state of Assam. The State of Assam comprises of 27 districts spread over six agro-climatic zones namely North Bank Plain Zone, Upper Brahmaputra Valley Zone, Central Brahmaputra Valley Zone, Lower Brahmaputra Valley Zone, Barak Valley Zone, and Hill Zone. Out of these six agro-climatic zones three agro –climatic zones namely Lower Brahmaputra Valley Zone, North Bank Plain Zone and Upper Brahmaputra Zone were selected randomly. From the selected agro climatic zones, three districts namely Kamrup district, Lakhimpur district and Jorhat district were selected purposefully on the basis of concentration of women entrepreneurs. A list of women entrepreneur was collected from District Industrial and Commerce Centre (DICC) of the selected districts which contained the names of registered entrepreneurs only. From the above list, a total of 100 No’s of women entrepreneurs engaged in weaving and food processing and preservation were selected. Thus the total number of sample was 100 which included both registered and unregistered women entrepreneurs. For measurement of different variables a structured interview schedule was prepared for the study. The data was collected through personal interview method. The collected data was coded, tabulated and analyzed in accordance with the objectives of the study. The required statistical techniques used .

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

SES of rural women entrepreneurs: The data on socio-economic status of women entrepreneurs is presented in the Table 1 highlighted that a high majority of women entrepreneurs were engaged in weaving (60.00%) and food processing and preservation (56.00%) followed by medium i.e. (32.00%) and (40.00%) respectively in the two areas. Only (08.00%) and (04.00%) were from low socio -economic status respectively in the two areas of weaving and food processing and preservation.

Table 1. Distribution of women entrepreneurs according to socio-economic status (N=100)

Category	Weaving (n ₁ =50)		FPP (n ₂ =50)	
	No.	%	No.	%
Low	04	08	02	04
Medium	16	32	20	40
High	30	60	28	56

Table 2. Relationship between awareness of women entrepreneurs about their rights with selected independent variables in the domain of marriage

Area	Independent variable	r value	t value
Marriage	Age	0.11	1.09 ^{NS}
	Education	0.12	1.07 ^{NS}
	Member of organization	0.48	5.39 ^{**}
	Mass media exposure	0.07	0.76 ^{NS}
Maintenance	Age	0.12	0.23 ^{NS}
	Education	0.07	0.67 ^{NS}
	Member of organization.	0.72	10.36 ^{**}
	Mass media exposure	0.03	0.32 ^{NS}
Property	Age	0.20	2.07 [*]
	Education	0.09	0.87 ^{NS}
	Member of organization.	0.72	7.82 ^{**}
	Mass media exposure	0.03	0.32 ^{NS}
Domestic violence	Age	0.15	1.52 ^{NS}
	Education	0.06	0.71 ^{NS}
	Member of organization	0.60	9.80 ^{**}
	Mass media exposure.	0.01	0.10 ^{NS}
Dowry	Age	0.30	0.27 ^{NS}
	Education	0.00	0.02 ^{NS}
	Member of organization	0.46	5.22 ^{**}
	Mass media exposure	0.00	0.04 ^{NS}
Divorce	Age	0.15	1.59 ^{NS}
	Education	0.03	0.30 ^{NS}
	Member of organization.	0.51	7.50 ^{**}
	Mass media exposure.	0.01	0.14 ^{NS}

* Significant at 5% level of significance

** Significant at 1% level of significance

A high majority of women entrepreneurs used mobile phones, T.V, two or three wheelers along with important farm assets hence they were under different socio-economic status.

Relationship of socio personal variables with level of awareness of rural women entrepreneurs about their rights : A perusal of the data in Table 2 indicates that there was no significant relationship between awareness of respondents about their rights with age, education and mass media exposure in the domain of

marriage, maintenance, property, dowry, domestic violence and divorce. It is clear from the above findings that though rural women selected entrepreneurship as a gainful profession but their awareness level on different aspects of legal rights were very poor.

On the other hand, Table 2 also shows that, there was a significant relationship between awareness of respondents about their rights with their membership in organization in the domain of marriage, maintenance, dowry, domestic violence and divorce at 1 per cent level of significance. Further, Table 2 shows a significant relationship about their rights with age and their membership in organization in the domain of property at 5 per cent and 1 per cent level of significance respectively. The importance of property is realized with increase of age which is reflected in the present investigation too

Hence, it can be concluded that membership in organization such as SHGs give ample scope to the respondents to interact with other women which helped them to develop awareness regarding their rights on marriage. Therefore, women should be encouraged to become member of some or other organization there by update their knowledge and awareness in different aspects of life through some constructive interaction among the members of the organization such as Self Help Groups.

The awareness of women entrepreneurs about their rights in the present investigation showed more with the increase of age. Probably the awareness level was more ignited with the fellow women who were members of organizations.

The findings of this study have implications for entrepreneurs as well as the policymakers who work for the improvement of entrepreneurs.

CONCLUSION

The investigator concludes from the present investigation that there was a significant relationship between awareness of the respondents about their rights with their membership in organization. Membership in organization give ample scope to an individual to interact with fellow women which helps her to develop awareness regarding different aspects. Membership in organization was found highly significant with all the areas of women's rights. Women's rights are the fundamental human rights that includes the right to live

free from violence, slavery and discrimination; to be educated; to own property; to vote and to earn a fair and equal wage. The rights available to woman in India can be classified into two categories, namely as constitutional rights and legal rights. The constitutional rights are those which are provided in the various provisions of the constitution. The legal rights, on the other hand, are those which are provided in the various laws (acts) of the Parliament and the State Legislatures.

So, it is very much important for women to exercise their right for a number of reasons. One important reason is to reduce the ever expanding crime against them such as sexual abuse, dowry demand, deprivation of property, forceful marriage, disallowing of divorce or separation etc. Swami Vivekanand said that there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly only with one wing.

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