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Problems and Prospects of Women Entrepreneurship in Sonowal Kachari Society

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Abstract

Assam, the land of blue hills and green forestry, is one of the tribal living states of India. The total number of tribal population is highest in Assam as compared to other North-Eastern states. Fourteen (14) schedule tribes inhabit in Assam. SonowalKacharis inhabit over upper Assam covering seven districts viz-Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. Some of SonowalKachari people inhabit in Arunachal Pradesh also. Among these districts of Assam Dibrugarh district is the largest inhabitat of SonowalKacharis. According to 1991 population census the total SonowalKachari population was 2,51,727. It has increased to 3,12,656 in 2001 in the state of Assam. The development of a society requires full participation by all section of the population including women. Involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities would ensure effective utilization of labour, generation of income and hence improvement in quality of life. It is realized by all the nations that social and economic changes can be ensured mobilizing women to take up entrepreneurial activities. The present study seeks to examine the economic activities and also problems faced by them in their various entrepreneurial activities in the society. Thus the present paper carries a great importance to study about the position of entrepreneurial activities among women in sonowalkachari society. The present study is based on data collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data are collected from field survey through direct personal interview with the help of well-designed questionnaire. The SonowalKachari women are in recent time very much interested in entrepreneurial work. But it has been observed that like other community women the rate of growth of women entrepreneurship is not enough among them. This is due to some basic problems arising in relation to entrepreneurial development in such societies. By considering all these sides the present paper is prepared with the objectives like, level of education, Causes of selecting this profession, age- group, training, finance etc. Based on all the objectives the present paper is presenting the main problems faced by the women entrepreneur like lack of education, lack of finance, lack of training etc. After identifying different problems the paper includes some suggestions to solve those.

TRIBAL POPULATION OF ASSAM

Assam, the land of blue hills and green forestry, is one of the tribal living states of India. The total number of tribal

population is highest in Assam as compared to other North-Eastern states. There are fourteen (14) schedule tribes inhabit in Assam. These fourteen tribes

are Barmans in Cachar, Bodo-Kachari, SonowalKachari, Miri (Mising), Deori, Hojai, Lalung, Mech, Rabha, Dimasa, Hajong, Khamti, Singpho and Garo. The tribes of the state have heterogeneous social system, culture, myths and legends. In our study we get the Sonowal Kachari tribes, which have an interesting past and differential socio-cultural behavior

THE SONOWAL KACHARIS

SonowalKacharis inhabit over upper Assam covering seven districts viz-Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat. Some of SonowalKachari people inhabit in Arunachal Pradesh also. Among these districts of Assam Dibrugarh district is the largest inhabitat of SonowalKacharis. SonowalKacharis belongs to the greater kachari tribes. For originity or the history of the Kacharis in Assam can be dated (traced) back to several hundreds of years. The Kacharis in Assam rooted to Tibeto-Mongoloid race. They were earlier called “Kiraat” which was originally the name of a tribe. A class of the “Kiraat” tribe in the “Mahabharata” which flourished in the banks of the river “Brahmaputra” and the “Barak”.

SONOWAL KACHARI POPULATION

According to 1991 population census the total Sonowal Kachari population was 2,51,727. It has increased to 3,12,656 in 2001 in the state of Assam. After 1991, since community wise population data were not collected, hence it is not easy to present recent population strength of Sonowal Kacharis. But those population noted as S.T. inhabit under the jurisdiction of Sonowal Kachari Autonomus Countil.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Sonowal women are independent. They do all domestic works like weaving, animal husbandry and also work at the crop-field. They are expert in fishing by *Jakai* (fishing instrument). There was not the system of child marriage, satidah etc. in the past time also but have allowed the system of widow remarriage. They have equal freedom as the men and they can even move openly to take education anywhere and enter other social sectors too.

SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

The Sonowal Kacharis of Assam have a rich cultural heritage. They have marked their identity as a tribe having their own regional dialect and culture, society, customs and traditions and as a colourful tribe. They have influenced the civilization of Assam and have added to the rich heritage of India. The various cultural and religious activities of the Sonowal Kacharis are associated with the *Baithow Puja*, the *Haidanggeet*, *Hogra-Nritya*, *Bahuwa-Nritya* etc. They celebrate *Bihu* also. The SonowalKachari women engage themselves in *Aainaam*, *Gusaninaam*, *Biyanaam*, *Lakhiminaam*, *Hubusoni*, *Kunwarigeet*, *Gathiyankhunda*, *Phulkonwargeet*, *Manikonwargeetas* part of a social or cultural gathering. The Sonowal Kacharis have progressed in various other spheres. They were skilled in handloom weaving and crafts, mason work and sculpture.

ECONOMIC CONDITION

The economic condition of the SonowalKacharis is still backward like other tribal communities. The economy of the SonowalKacharis is predominantly an agrarian one. Their livelihood depends on agriculture and other allied activities. They devote a

larger portion of cultivable land for growing rice. Besides growing rice, they have also undertaken cultivation of various types of other crops like vegetables, potatoes, mustard seeds etc. But still in this century the modern technology is not properly a habitual practice for them. The frequent floods in the monsoon season largely affect the growing crops in the field and lack of marketing facility for agricultural products produced also badly effect most of villages. Unemployment is another growing burning problem among SonowalKachari community.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS

The educational attainment or literacy rate is also not satisfactory. Most of them lower-standard educated and very few of them have the education more or less 10+2 standard. This is said to be because of backward socio-economic condition of the SonowalKachari community. According to 1991 census report only 27.14 per cent of SonowalKacharis are literate.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:

The development of a society requires full participation by all section of the population including women. Involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities would ensure effective utilization of labour, generation of income and hence improvement in quality of life. It is realized by all the nations that social and economic changes can be ensured mobilizing women to take up entrepreneurial activities. This study seek to examine the economic activities and also problems faced by them in their various entrepreneurial activities in the society. Thus, the study carries a great importance to study about

the position of entrepreneurial activities among women in Sonowal kachari society.

METHODOLOGY:

This study is based on data collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data are collected from field survey through direct personal interview with the help of well-designed questionnaire. Six villages of Sibsagar district are selected randomly and the survey has done for 50 Sonowalkachari women entrepreneurs. The villages are namely, AhomPathar, Nemukur, JamiraRajabari, Bhatgaj, Paraliguri, DihingmukhTeteliguri, under Demow revenue circle, Sibsagar. The secondary data are collected from books, magazines, websites etc.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The SonowalKachari women are in recent time very much interested in entrepreneurial works like, Handloom weaving, Piggery farm, Poultryfarm, Dairy farm, DTP Computer Education, Handicraft etc. But it has been observed that like other community women, the rate of growth of women entrepreneurship is not satisfactory among them. This is due to some basic problems arising in relation to entrepreneurial development in such societies. By considering all these sides the present topic is prepared with the following objectives:

- i) To examine the educational level of women entrepreneurs.
- ii) To know about the causes behind women entrepreneurship.
- iii) To verify their age-groups.

- iv) To know about the availability of training for women entrepreneur.
- v) To examine their income level.

The most important element to achieve success in any short of business is the level of education. Through our field study we tried to enquire how much our sample entrepreneurs have got formal education and the following results found:

FINDINGS

Level of Education:

Table I: Level of education of the entrepreneurs:

	No of Women	Percentage
Illiterate	00	00
Upto VII	14	28.00
UptoX	26	52.00
UptoXII	8	16.00
BA	2	04.00
MA	0	00
Others	0	00
Total	50	100.00

Source: Field Survey

It is very much pleasure to say that in our sample we have not met any illiterate women entrepreneur. But it is also true that the level of education of our sample entrepreneurs is not up to the mark. Around 80.00 percent of total surveyed entrepreneurs are under-matric. Only 2 women are BA passed. From this result it is clear that among women entrepreneurs they are not achieved required education which is

very much important to develop their skills.

Age –Group of the Entrepreneurs:

Entrepreneur age is also another considerable element for the success. Generally a person can work hard during the middle age of life. In this regard we made an attempt to know about their age, while they are running their entrepreneurial activities and we got the following results:

Table II: Age Group of the Entrepreneurs

Age-Group	No of Women	Percentage
Less than 20	02	04.00
20-30	27	54.00
30-40	18	36.00
40-50	2	04.00
50 and above	1	02.00
Total	50.00	100.00

Source: Field Survey

It is very much pleasure to say that 90.00 per-cent of the total surveyed entrepreneurs are belonging from the age group of 20-40 years. Thus, those women who are dealing with the entrepreneurial activities are belonging from the best age show their best performance. Remaining 10.00 percent are from the age group of more than 40 and less than 20 years.

Marital status:

In our study we tried to know about whether our respondent are married or unmarried as, it is believed that a woman generally face lots of problems in continuing their past activities after marriage, and we got the following response:

Table III: Marital status of the entrepreneurs

Marital status	No of women	Percentage
Married	31	62.00
Unmarried	19	38.00
Total	50	100.00

Source: Field Survey

The above result gives us an interesting result that, among our surveyed women 62.00 percent of them have started their entrepreneurial activities after marriage. Again while we were tried to know whether they receives support from their family members especially from husband or not, they gave a satisfactory result that they always gets full support from their family members. Thus this result carries the meaning that, in SonowalKachari culture majority of people supports women entrepreneurship. Thus marriage is not a

barrier for women development in this community.

Reason for selecting entrepreneurship:

In respect of attaining success in entrepreneurial activities another important element is the cause behind the selecting the profession. In general, progress of the enterprise is based on the interest and urge of the person concerned. In this regard we have got the following results:

Table IV: Reason for selecting entrepreneurship

Reason	No of women	Percentage
To earn money	33	66.00
To be self-dependent	12	24.00
Due to the inspiration of the family members	4	08.00
To utilize the quality	1	02.00
Total	50	100.00

Source: Field Survey

It has been observed from the table that the main objective of our women

entrepreneurs in selecting their professions is to earn money. At the same time, from our

eye observation during the time of field survey, we have seen that majority of surveyed family's living standards and quality of lives are not that sound, which reflected by their house types, no of durable goods, sources of income etc. Of course a good amount of respondents told that they want to be self dependent in life and so, they have selected their professions as best means to attain self employment.

Table V: Sources of finance

Source.	No of women	Percentage
Own Saving	3	06.00
Institutional Sources	15	30.00
Non-institutional	32	64.00
Total	50	100.00

Source: Field Survey

The above table reveals that, there is a lacking of adequate supply of institutional credit from the sources like, Commercial Banks, Cooperative Societies, Regional Rural Banks and assistance from SonowalKachari Autonomous Council for the SonowalKachari women. Around 64.00 percent of women are still depending on village moneylenders by paying high rate of interest. In this regard the women have

Table VI: Level of training received

	No of women	Percentage
Yes	13	26.00
No	37	74.00
Total	50	100.00

Source: Field Survey

The above table express that, only 26.00 per cent women entrepreneurs have formal training. Around 74.00 percent women have not got any training at all. In this regard we come to know that those

Financial Support:

Another important instrument to run any enterprise, which can be term as life blood for any entrepreneurial work is finance. In general we have seen that, our entrepreneurs cannot move forward their steps due to the shortage of finance. Regarding this case our respondents had given the following respond:

expressed that they need the regular supply of credit facilities.

Level of Training:

The basic requirement for the success of any sort of business as well as industry is the proper training to the entrepreneurs. Because without some basic knowledge on the preferred field, it is quite impossible to all round management to achieve the goal. From our survey we have drawn the following results in this regard,

women who have not got any training are running their activities based on some eye-view and some idea form experienced people. Those entire women entrepreneurs

who are left without training have strongly realized that they need training.

Marketing and Transport:

In our village community, the producers always face the problem of marketing as well as transportation. In this context our respondents told that, they are unhappy with the prevailing marketing system. In general they have to depend on weekly market to sale their products where they are compelling to sale even in very low price. Simultaneously, some middle-men also come to collect their products and they always try to pay very less price. Thus our respondents told that, they hardly receive the

expected price for their products. Again the common transportation problem is also another obstacle in their marketing as well as smooth entrepreneurial growth.

Income received by the entrepreneurs:

In our study we tried to enquire how much the women entrepreneurs are succeed in their respective business and we got a satisfactory result that, most of them are happy with their business as it is providing them their minimum level of expected profit. The following table represents income of the entrepreneurs:

Table VII: Monthly Income received by the entrepreneurs:

Amount(monthly)	No of women	Percentage
Less than Rs.3000	06	12.00
Rs.3000-Rs.5000	13	26.00
Rs.5000-Rs.10,000	27	54.00
Rs.10,000and above	4	08.00
Total	50	100.00

Source: Field Survey

From the above table it has been clear that, around 80.00 percent entrepreneurs are earning the income monthly ranging Rs.3000-Rs.10,000, which can be considered as a good amount of income by considering their level of education. Although the respondents have told that they are still not satisfied with their income, yet the minimum income that they are deriving, is helping them to satisfy their personal as well as the family's some basic

needs. They also opined that, they are happy with their business and are trying their level best to improve it, to earn more profit.

Contribution towards society:

While discussing about the women entrepreneurship and its importance, it is very much important to study how much the women entrepreneurs are contributing to the society. In this regard we tried to examine what does our women entrepreneurs are felling about them and their work and we got the following information:

Table VIII: Contribution towards society:

Contribution	No. of women	Percentage
WomenEmpowerment	50	100.00
Creationof employment opportunities	17	34.00
Financial help to the family	50	100.00

Donation towards different social works,	27	54.00
Influence to others,	34	68.00

Source: Field survey.

The above table extends the view that all of our respondents feel that, after entering in this field they started to think about life in a different form, that is they come to know that they have some own creativity and if it is utilized properly they can get many success in lives. This information reveals the creation of the knowledge about women empowerment. Again 34.00 per-cent women told that they are hiring labour to help them in different works. Thus, the surveyed women are creating some amount of employment opportunities also. Some of the women told that from their income they are contributing some amount for the developmental activities like, construction of Namghar, celebration of social functions like, Bihu, Puja, Rashlila etc. At the same time, 68.00 percent women told that by influencing their works, many poor women are showing their interest for starting enterprise. In this regard they opined that they personally also encourage their friends to come forward in this field.

Suggestions:

The following suggestions can be offered to solve the inner problems as well as development of women entrepreneurship among SonowalKachari women and the nation as a whole:

Firstly, there is a big importance of frequent training programs for our women to develop their skill and abilities. Such trainings should be free as well as conduct in their locality. Again the trainings should be regular but not for long duration, i.e. short-run trainings are more preferable for our rural women.

Secondly, the financial reforms are also considered as an important instrument

to improve entrepreneurship. Since, the rural sonowalKachari people are poor for which they always afraid to come forward for entrepreneurial work. But, in practical field it has been observed that the availability of credit facilities is very less and hence most of the interested women are not aware about the sources of finance. Hence, rural industrial credit facilities must be making available at a cheaper rate so that interested women can move forward.

Thirdly, the prevailing education system should also be revised as there is a requirement of inclusion of vocational courses in the syllabus. Again a proper environment should create so that women are also achieve required formal education to improve their personality.

Fourthly, the marketing system should be developed. There should be an environment that the women entrepreneurs should make free to sale their products. The entrepreneurs should give the facility to concentrate only on production not for sale. There should be a mechanism of sale of their products at reasonable price.

Fifthly, the transportation system which is quiet poor in rural area should be developed so that the entrepreneurs can cheaply carry their required materials for smooth development of their projects.

Sixthly, there is a requirement of frequent checkup system for those entrepreneurs who are dealing with animal husbandry, so that the dangerous diseases cannot affect their animals. Thus the veterinary health facilities should be expand properly to utilize modern technologies in their farms.

Conclusion:

In conclusion we can say that women are increasingly taking up entrepreneurial carrier for improving their economic status and also fulfilling their creative urge. The government and the non-governmental organizations are playing important roles in mobilizing women to become entrepreneurs

through different programs. The number of women entrepreneur has been increasing over the years. It is expected that more women will be taking up entrepreneurial carrier in future. In this regard the very important requirement for the society is to respect women and their creativity.

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