

Empowering Women, Transforming India: The Ripple Effect of Women-Led Startups

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Abstract

This study focuses specifically on female-led entrepreneurial ventures as it explores how startups might promote women's empowerment in India. In India, where ingrained socioeconomic problems and conventional gender conventions still exist, women's empowerment is a pressing issue. Startups are increasingly being recognized as potential engines of innovation and economic progress and there is growing interest in how they might empower women. Secondary data is used in the investigation. To evaluate the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of women-led startups and to comprehend their motivations, challenges faced and the impact of their ventures on individual and societal levels, data was gathered from a variety of secondary sources. According to research, women-led startups in India have a great deal of potential to advance women's empowerment. Women can overcome traditional gender stereotypes and achieve economic independence through the entrepreneurial path. According to the study, these endeavors offer chances for skill improvement, leadership experience, and boosted confidence. Additionally, the startup environment encourages networking and mentoring, both of which are vital for women's career advancement. The study also identifies a number of obstacles that prevent women's empowerment through startups from being fully realized. These difficulties include a lack of finance, bias towards women, societal expectations and weak support networks. Some of these issues have been addressed through government programmes and private sector initiatives, but there are still gaps. To establish an environment that not only supports women starting and growing their enterprises but also ensures their long-term success and influence on women's empowerment, policymakers, investors, and society as a whole must work together.

Keywords- *Women empowerment, startups, women entrepreneurs, gender equality, India, entrepreneurship.*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is the creative courage of an individual to create riches, jobs, and social benefit. The transformation of industry and the eradication of different social problems like unemployment and women's exploitation depend critically on the success of women entrepreneurs. Even though there are now at least two or three women in every family, attitudes about women are still largely the same as they were before independence. Policymakers shouldn't dismiss the growing economic influence of women entrepreneurs. Both genders must participate in the current democratic economy of the world. Women have traditionally participated in the economy on a regular basis. It has taken millennia for women's roles to evolve through several transitions to reach their current state. Indian women entrepreneurs in India have investigated a new economic contribution ethic by taking part in various industries and controlling them. Due to a number of push and pull reasons, including a male-dominated society, financial difficulties, movement restrictions, legal requirements, middlemen's exploitation, under appreciation, and a lack of knowledge about available resources, women in India entered the sector. Various women have demonstrated their independence and success as entrepreneurs while facing various obstacles. The rise of female entrepreneurs and their significant contributions to the country are evident, and these startups are set up for long-term growth potential.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the current situation of Indian women entrepreneurs.
2. To study the initiatives made by government to support women entrepreneurs.
3. To evaluate critically the difficulties faced by female entrepreneurs.
4. Offering important suggestions for the formulation of successful policies to support female entrepreneurs.

Research Methodology

The secondary data used in this research study was gathered from books, Reports, magazines, journals, and other published sources.

Indian Women's Current Entrepreneurial Condition in Startups

In India, 18% of startups include at least one female founder or co-founder, according to a survey released by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom) and Zinnov. According to the survey, women-founded start-ups have an equal chance of success with their male counterparts at all phases of growth because of their participation in the ecosystem. The percentage of businesses founded in emerging locales increased from 34% in 2021 to 39% in 2022, according to the research. With at least 25,000–27,000 active tech firms, India continues to play a significant role, claiming third place globally. In October 2022, President Droupadi Murmu launched "herSTART," a platform to support female entrepreneurs. A 20,000 rupee monthly subsidy for up to a year has also been introduced by the Indian government for women-led companies. The adage "Behind every successful man, there's a woman" is no longer true; women nowadays are successful in their own right. According to a report in the publication The Times of India, by 2026, there would be 90% more women-owned enterprises in India. Only one in five of the enterprises in the nation are run by women, according to government statistics, and India is ranked 57th out of 65 countries on the MasterCard Index of Women Entrepreneurs. However, one of the biggest obstacles for female entrepreneurs is the unequal access to money. Women entrepreneurs are more likely to be turned down by investors when they do approach them for funding. Many small businesses in India rely on family support or self-financing, both of which are more challenging for female business owners. According to a survey by Bain & Company and Google, 43% of women claimed they needed funding from others since their family and spouses did not support their businesses. Only 0.3% of India's venture capital financing in 2021 went to companies with female founders. According to a poll conducted in 2022 by the nonprofit Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust (BYST), more than 85% of women business owners encountered difficulties in getting loans from public sector banks. A research by the Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWAAGE) shows that although the Indian government offers financial support programmes for female-led businesses, just 3.4% of all female entrepreneurs have profited from them. However, there are always exceptions. While seeking capital, some businesswomen experience a smooth entrepreneurial

path. Ritambara Das, co-founder of Better Beauty, was lucky enough to experience significantly less fundraising hurdles than others because she grew up in an entrepreneurial family. Because many venture capitalists in today's world are motivated to promote women entrepreneurs, female entrepreneurs should actively seek out funding sources that expressly target their industry.

The Top 15 Indian Women Entrepreneurs-

- **Kiran Mazumdar Shaw – Biocon India**

It made history in 2001 when it became the first Indian business to receive FDA approval for producing a chemical that lowers cholesterol. Profits increased 43% just in 2003. Kiran became India's richest woman after Biocon's IPO, which greatly increased the company's market value. The world's first orally ingested insulin product was tested and developed by Biocon, a business that kept up its excellent job.

- **Falguni Nayar -Nykaa**

When the managing director of Kotak Mahindra Bank left her lucrative position to start her own business, everyone was in awe. With 10.68 crore from her own cash, 50-year-old Falguni Nayar decided to create Nykaa, a domestic beauty and wellness brand. Cut to 2022, and Nykaa is a stunning success story that is now a publicly traded corporation. The business expanded 345% last year.

- **Aditi Gupta – Menstrupedia**

In an effort to alter societal perceptions of menstruation, Aditi Gupta founded Menstrupedia in November 2012. Menstrupedia creates comic books that make understanding menstruation easier. She personally had to deal with the stereotypes that have an impact on women and girls' lives all over India. Together with her spouse Tuhin Patel, she made the decision to take the lead and launch Menstrupedia. The health of women and sanitation are among topics covered in the cartoons.

- **Radhika Ghai Aggarwal – ShopClues.com**

ShopClues.com, which Radhika Ghai Aggarwal and her husband, Sandeep Aggarwal, co-founded in 2011, has her as its chief business officer. In 2016, her business became the first in India to have a female co-founder and join the exclusive unicorn club. A planned IPO for ShopClues.com was thwarted by disagreements between the co-founders. The business was eventually acquired by Qoo10 in an all-stock deal. In September 2021, Radhika launched the online marketplace Kindlife.

- **Vani Kola – Kalaari Capital**

In India, Vani is referred to as the Mother of Venture Capital Investing. In 1996, she started her first company, an e-procurement firm called RightWorks. In 2011, Vani and Kaur changed the company's name to Kalaari Capital. In terms of assets handled, Kalaari was formerly the largest venture capital company ever led by a woman and the second-largest venture capital business in India. India-based early-stage firms with a technology focus are the main focus of Kalaari Capital.

- **Ghazal Alagh- Mamaearth**

A D2C (direct-to-consumer) brand, Mamaearth generates income of 700 crores currently. An industry-leading manufacturer of infant items was created in 2016 as a result of parental stress. The Alaghs had trouble treating their child's skin problem because the remedies were toxic and generic. At the time, they were able to order the right supplies from the US, but it was inconvenient, which inspired them to start Mamaearth. Six natural and toxic-free infant goods were the first things they prepared. Mamaearth's success was largely attributed to its consumer-first strategy and innovation that was informed by user feedback.

- **Vineeta Singh- SUGAR Cosmetics**

In 2015, Vineeta Singh launched the online cosmetics store SUGAR Cosmetics. In 2012, Vineeta launched the cosmetics company FAB BAG. The larger conglomerate Velvete Lifestyles Pvt

Ltd, which operates in the beauty and cosmetics sector, owns both SUGAR and FAB BAG. As of August 2023, SUGAR Cosmetics' YouTube channel had more over 10 lakh subscribers.

- **Namita Thapar- Emcure Pharmaceuticals**

Satish Mehta established Emcure Pharmaceuticals in 1981. In 2007, his daughter Namita took control. Namita is a fervent advocate for youth entrepreneurship and women's health. She hosted a chat show on YouTube called "Uncondition Yourself with Namita" in order to address the taboos and stereotypes around women's health. She also established Incredible Ventures Ltd to teach kids between the ages of 11 and 18 about entrepreneurship.

- **Chitra Gurnani Daga- Thrillophilia**

She launched Thrillophilia Tours Pvt. Ltd. in 2009 following much investigation and debate. Abhishek Daga, her husband, shared Chitra's concept of the ideal career, and together they set out to pursue it. Chitra and Abhishek have both previously worked for some of Bangalore's largest multinational corporations. India's largest site for arranging vacation experiences is now called Thrillophilia. With three million customers, it offered services for 12,500 different activities at more than 125 different locations.

- **Upasana Taku- MobiKwik**

In 2008, Upasana Taku met her future husband Bipin while working on a project. Bipin was employed for a Noida-based chip business. In 2009, she began assisting him with various business-related tasks, and the two of them co-founded Mobikwik. What first served as a platform for recharge eventually evolved into the public face of mobile wallets. Upasana swears by the motto, "Kick up a storm or die trying," which has kept her centred when things have been challenging.

- **Shradha Sharma – YourStory**

YourStory, a digital media platform devoted to business owners and startups, was established in 2008. Shradha believed that fantastic things were being built by individuals all across the world, but that these tales weren't being told in the media. She spent time writing about successful people and posting their biographies on her blog. It rapidly attracted interest and developed popularity. Well-known businessmen including Ratan Tata, Karthee Madasamy, Vani Kola, and T.V. Mohandas Pai invested in YourStory. The most successful online media company in India for startups and business owners is now YourStory. It has over 10 million active readers and has published over 40,000 tales.

- **Suchi Mukherjee – LimeRoad**

In 2012, Suchi Mukherjee, Prashant Malik, and Ankush Mehra created LimeRoad together. Suchi's extreme frustration led to the creation of LimeRoad, a website dedicated to women's fashion and clothing. Suchi, who was 39 at the time, was on maternity leave in 2012 after the birth of her second child. She was looking through a magazine when she fell in love with a stunning piece of jewellery. But to her utter dismay, Suchi discovered that the item was only physically accessible, in a tiny shop in Mumbai. She came to the realisation that there was no app, portal, or website where she could find intriguing and attractive items. Additionally, there was no platform for listing accessories that were made to be sold outside of India. This served as LimeRoad's source of inspiration. Today, LimeRoad is regarded as one of India's top female-founded fashion companies.

- **Pranshu Patni -Hello English**

Hello English is an online language learning platform that Pranshu established in 2012. It now has over 50 million users and is one of India's top educational apps. The platform received honors like Google's Best of 2016 Apps and India's Best Mobile App, and Pranshu was named one of Forbes' 30 Under 30. Pranshu has also received a Women Transforming India award from the UN for her contributions to education and enhancing English proficiency in India.

- **Rajoshi Ghosh- Hasura**

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Hasura was founded in 2017 as a result of Rajoshi Ghosh, the COO and founder, realizing that "building and deploying an application was more painful than it needed to be". Hasura, a SaaS-based firm, that recently become a unicorn, offers an open-source platform to develop web applications more quickly. In the Series C fundraising round, it raised \$100 million, valuing the firm at \$1 billion.

- **Dr. Garima Sawhney- Pristyn Care**

With Pristyn Care, Dr. Garima Sawhney makes the surgical process easier for the patient. The health-tech firm was founded in 2018, and as of right now, it includes a network of 100 clinics and 700 affiliated hospitals. Pristyn Care plans to add 300 hospitals and 100 clinics as part of its expansion. The business was valued at \$1.4 billion in 2021, during the Series E investment, making it an Indian unicorn startup.

Steps taken by the Government to support Female Entrepreneurs

Women's empowerment has been a government goal ever since independence. Early on in the 1980s, the focus was always on employment, education, and health. In all fields, women are given preference. The government and other organizations have consistently worked to enhance the participation of women in industrial and self-employment activities.

Some welfare programmes for women were launched under the First Five-Year Plan (1951–1956), including the Community Development Programmes (CDP), Mahila-Mandals, and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB).

The policies for women's empowerment and the programmes for agricultural development were closely related during the second Five-Year Plan (1956–1961).

Encouraged female education as a main welfare strategy in the Third and Fourth Five-Year Plans (1961–66 & 1969–74).

The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974–1979) gave women's training priority because they needed safety and income. The Women's Welfare and Development Bureau (WWDB), a division of the Ministry of Social Welfare, was established in 1976.

Women's growth was judged to be weak in the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980–1985) due to a shortage of resources and a switch from welfare to development.

The necessity of gender equality and women's empowerment was noted in the Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985–1990). The development of awareness and confidence through skill development training was emphasized.

Panchayati Raj Institutions, which were geared on empowering women at the grassroots level, were introduced in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-97).

The Ninth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) followed a concept known as the Women's Component Plan, wherein not less than 30% of funds/benefits were set aside for sectors relating to women.

The National Policy for Women Empowerment (2001) was implemented in the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) with the goal of empowering women and ensuring their survival, security, and development.

The government discovered that women and girl children made up at least 33% of all beneficiaries of all government programmes between 2007 and 2012. Support for the Women's Training & Employment Programme in the traditional industries of agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, Khadi and village industries, and sericulture, STEP offers training for skill development to weak and assetless women.

The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP), a National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) sub-component, was established to address the unique needs of women farmers and assist them in achieving social, legal, economic, and technical empowerment as part of the formulation of policies and schemes for the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–17).

The following are some of the programmes and actions the Indian government has made to support women business owners in India:

Stand-Up India Scheme: The Stand-Up India Scheme provides bank loans to establish new, greenfield businesses in the manufacturing, service, or trading sectors with the goal of encouraging entrepreneurship among women, members of Scheduled Castes (SC), and members of Scheduled Tribes (ST). The programme offers financial assistance and aids in the establishment of new businesses.

MUDRA Yojana: The Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) offers a variety of credit packages to micro and small businesses, particularly those run by women. It aids female entrepreneurs in beginning and growing their businesses.

Mahila Coir Yojana: This programme promotes women to work in the coir industry. It offers funding for training, marketing help, and equipment purchases for female business owners in the coir sector.

Udyogini Scheme: The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) introduced the Udyogini Scheme, which provides financial support to female entrepreneurs beginning new businesses in the small-scale industry.

Annapurna Scheme: This Scheme targets female entrepreneurs who seek to open food catering units, canteens, and related establishments. It offers loans to buy kitchen appliances and other resources.

Support for the STEP (Women's Employment and Training Programme): This programme seeks to give women the knowledge and training they need to launch their own businesses or obtain jobs across a range of industries. Both skill development and capacity building are supported.

Bharatiya Mahila Bank: Though it has merged with the State Bank of India (SBI), Bharatiya Mahila Bank (BMB) was initially created to meet the banking and financial requirements of women. By giving them access to financial services, it aimed to economically empower women.

Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP): Although not a government programme, the NITI Aayog created the WEP to give women business owners a dedicated online space for networking, information sharing, and resource access.

Startup India Initiative: This programme promotes entrepreneurship in general and is not just for women. It offers entrepreneurs a number of advantages, including as streamlined regulatory procedures, capital accessibility, and mentorship. This effort can also help women business owners.

Rewards and Reservations: To encourage women entrepreneurs' involvement in commercial operations, certain Indian states have offered rewards, subsidies, and reservations in a variety of areas.

Dena Shakti Plan: Dena Shakti Scheme is a programme that offers loans to female business owners in the following industries: Firm Partnership Business, Retail outlets, sector of manufacturing, micro lending institutions, Housing, Education.

Mahila Udyam Nidhi Programme: The Punjab National Bank introduced the Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme, which is designed to aid Small Scale Industries (SSI). By offering hassle-free loans, the programme seeks to encourage modernization and technological improvement in these small-scale enterprises. The most that can be borrowed under this programme is ten lakhs rupees. Like SBI, numerous other banks also provide such programmes.

Depending on variables including geographic area, industry, and individual circumstances, these programs' efficacy can change.

Our **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** said recently in ministerial conference - For us in India, women-led development has been a top focus. Women have received over 70% of the loans under the PM Mudra Yojana. These are loans for micro level units of up to Rs 1 million. In a same vein, women make up 80% of those who benefit from the government programme Stand Up India. A development strategy led by women is the most efficient way to empower women. India is moving in the right direction. The global economy benefits greatly from the

contributions of female entrepreneurs. He added that the role of female entrepreneurs in India is not new. "In 1959, a small group of Gujarati women in Mumbai founded the cooperative movement Shri Mahila Griha Udyog, which produces lijjat papad. Millions of women's and their families' lives have changed since then.

Challenges addressed by Female Entrepreneurs

In India, female business owners encounter a number of difficulties as they launch and expand their startups. The expectations of society, the state of the economy, and cultural norms frequently impact these difficulties. Several significant issues faced by Indian women business owners include:

- Deep-seated gender biases and preconceptions can prevent female entrepreneurs from receiving adequate assistance and recognition. Women may encounter doubts about their ability to run successful businesses, which can limit their access to capital, alliances, and networking opportunities.
- It might be difficult for female business owners to find sufficient capital for their ventures. Due to biases and misconceptions regarding women's capacity to run and expand successful enterprises, investors may be reluctant to invest in women-led firms.
- Even when female entrepreneurs are successful in obtaining finance, they may encounter difficulties in gaining access to traditional bank loans, angel investment networks, and venture capital. It may be more difficult for them to get financial assistance if they don't have any collateral or credit history.
- Female entrepreneurs in India may find it particularly difficult to juggle work obligations with responsibilities for the home and family. Time limits and additional pressure might be brought on by societal expectations of women's duties and responsibilities.
- Building a strong professional network is essential for business growth, but women in India may have less opportunity to network due to the rarity of gender-specific events and meetings as well as their exclusion from networks that are predominately male.

- Entrepreneurial pressures can make it challenging to strike a work-life balance, particularly when societal expectations place a higher priority on women's care giving and domestic duties.
- Particularly in conservative places, cultural norms and societal expectations may limit women's mobility, decision-making power, and capacity for enterprise.
- Although navigating complicated legal and regulatory procedures can be tough for any entrepreneur, women may find it to be especially difficult owing to gender-specific legal concerns and a lack of knowledge about the tools that are available.
- In a world that is fast going digital, women business owners would encounter obstacles relating to technology literacy and access to digital tools, which would limit their capacity to effectively use e-commerce and online marketing.
- Women business owners may encounter difficulties entering particular markets or sectors that are dominated by men. Additionally, they can run across prejudice or scepticism from prospective clients.
- For any entrepreneur, growing a tiny startup into a more established, profitable company is a struggle. Due to their limited access to resources and networks that promote success, female entrepreneurs may encounter unique challenges.

Recommendations for creating effective Policies that Promote Female Entrepreneurs

- Introduce measures to help women business owners balance work and family obligations, such as maternity leave, child care centers, and parental leave. Encourage workplaces to have a culture of work-life balance.
- Create and administer programmes for women-specific entrepreneurial training. Incorporate entrepreneurship education into the curriculum through working with educational institutions. Provide business skills, leadership, and networking workshops and seminars.

- Make mentorship programmes that pair together prospective female company owners with seasoned entrepreneurs. Plan conferences and networking events that encourage information exchange and teamwork. Encourage the creation of online forums and communities where female business owners may connect and share ideas.
- Reduce regulatory barriers by streamlining the licensing and registration procedures for businesses. To stop gender bias in business dealings, rigorous anti-discrimination legislation must be enforced. Introduce policies that support flexible work schedules to take into account the obligations of women.
- Organize awareness initiatives to draw attention to the accomplishments and success stories of women business owners. Challenge societal beliefs and assumptions that restrict women's access to business.
- Plan awareness campaigns to highlight the achievements and success tales of women business owners. Challenge cultural presumptions and prejudices that prevent women from entering the professional world.
- Create and support incubators and accelerators that place a strong emphasis on fostering female-led businesses. Give participants in these programmes access to resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities.

Conclusion

India still has a male-dominated society where men dominate decision-making and women have little authority over resources, even after 77 years of independence. Nowadays, women are educated and have professional and technical credentials. The majority of them hold advanced degrees. Many joined their family business as partners on an equal footing. Nursing homes, boutiques, small manufacturing companies, and clothing companies are all started by women. Women establish the business with their own decisions and bravery. However, a lot of people encounter family opposition and don't receive enough support from their families. Gender equality was protected by law after independence, resulting in equal chances in both school and employment. However, only a small percentage of women have benefited from the government-sponsored events. Currently, effective measures are required to offer women entrepreneurial

awareness, orientation, and skill development programmes. At this time, reviving entrepreneurship is necessary, and this can only be done through raising literacy and disseminating knowledge. They should be aware of their abilities, social obligations, and potential for economic growth. According to shifting trends and problems, women entrepreneurs need to be developed with entrepreneurial traits and skills. In order to succeed and strive for greatness in the entrepreneurial sphere, they need be competent. Additionally, it depends on how well-aware each resident is of the crucial function that women play in society. The society's conservative and rigid mental patterns, which are the biggest barrier to the nation's growth, can only be broken through this consciousness. In India, women-led enterprises are fundamentally changing the entrepreneurial landscape of the nation. India can fully utilize the potential of female-led businesses by creating an inclusive and encouraging atmosphere, which would result in a more promising and varied future for the nation's entrepreneurial landscape.

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