
A STUDY ON WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA: ROLE OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (IKS)

Mr. Nilesh Shukla

Assistant Professor, Department of Bachelors of Commerce (Banking & Insurance) Chandrabhan Sharma College, Powai Vihar

ABSTRACT

Women entrepreneurship in India has witnessed significant growth over the past decade, contributing substantially to economic development, employment generation, and social transformation. However, women entrepreneurs continue to face structural, financial, and socio-cultural challenges. Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), rooted in indigenous traditions, cultural practices, and community-based knowledge, offer a sustainable and culturally aligned framework to support women-led enterprises. This study explores the role of IKS in empowering women entrepreneurs in India by examining its influence on skill development, community networks, sustainability practices, and cultural branding. The research highlights how integrating traditional knowledge with modern entrepreneurial strategies can enhance inclusive economic growth and recommends policy interventions to strengthen this synergy.

Keywords: *Women Entrepreneurship, Indian Knowledge Systems, Empowerment, MSMEs, Indigenous Knowledge, Sustainable Development*

INTRODUCTION

Women entrepreneurship in India has emerged as a critical driver of economic development, social transformation, and empowerment. Despite challenges like socio-cultural barriers, access to finance, education gaps, and mobility constraints, Indian women are increasingly establishing micro, small, and medium enterprises across sectors such as technology, agriculture, handicrafts, services, and social enterprises.

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to the body of traditional wisdom, practices, philosophies, cultural values, and indigenous technologies that have evolved over centuries within India's diverse cultures. These include:

- Traditional community practices
- Folk knowledge in arts, crafts, agriculture, health
- Indigenous business practices
- Cultural norms, social support systems
- Value systems like *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Dharma, Seva* etc.

IKS provides context-specific frameworks rooted in Indian social fabric — often more accessible to women at grassroots levels.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**To examine the current status of women entrepreneurs in India**

This objective aims to analyze the level of participation of women in various sectors such as MSMEs, agriculture, services, handicrafts, and startups. It studies their economic contribution, employment generation, and growth trends in recent years.

To assess the sectoral and regional distribution of women-owned enterprises

This includes understanding whether women entrepreneurs are concentrated in specific industries (like handloom, food processing, retail) and identifying differences between rural and urban entrepreneurship patterns.

To identify the major financial challenges faced by women entrepreneurs

The study examines issues such as limited access to credit, lack of collateral, dependence on informal finance, and difficulties in securing institutional funding.

To analyze socio-cultural and institutional barriers affecting women entrepreneurship

This objective focuses on challenges such as gender bias, household responsibilities, mobility restrictions, lack of networking opportunities, and limited awareness of government schemes.

To study the role of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in skill development and enterprise creation

This includes examining how traditional skills like weaving, handicrafts, herbal medicine, food preservation, and indigenous agricultural practices help women establish and sustain businesses.

To evaluate the contribution of community-based models rooted in IKS

The study explores the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), cooperatives, and traditional collective systems in providing financial support, peer learning, and market access for women entrepreneurs.

To suggest policy recommendations for integrating IKS into entrepreneurship development programs

This objective aims to propose strategies such as incorporating traditional knowledge into skill training, improving digital literacy, strengthening financial inclusion, and promoting certification and branding of indigenous products.

CHALLENGES FACED WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN INDIA

Financial Constraints: Many women entrepreneurs experienced reduced cash flow and difficulty accessing capital. Traditional financing routes became more restrictive, and many lacked collateral for loans.

Supply Chain Disruptions: Lockdowns and restrictions disrupted supply chains, affecting the availability of raw materials and the ability to deliver products.

Market Access: Physical marketplaces were closed or had reduced operations, impacting sales. Many women-led businesses were not digitally equipped to transition to online sales quickly.

Domestic Responsibilities: The pandemic increased domestic responsibilities for women, including childcare and eldercare, limiting the time and energy they could devote to their businesses.

Technology Gap: A significant number of women entrepreneurs faced challenges in adopting digital tools due to lack of skills, infrastructure, or awareness.

OPPORTUNITIES AND POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Digital Transformation: The necessity of going online accelerated digital adoption. Many women entrepreneurs began leveraging social media, e-commerce platforms, and digital payment systems.

Innovative Business Models: Some women pivoted their business models to adapt to the new normal, such as producing masks, sanitizers, and other pandemic-related products.

Government and NGO Support: Initiatives like the “Atmanirbhar Bharat” (Self-Reliant India) campaign and various NGO programs provided financial support, training, and resources to women entrepreneurs.

Networking and Collaboration: Virtual networking events and collaboration opportunities increased, allowing women entrepreneurs to connect, share resources, and support each other.

ROLE OF IKS IN EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT AND CONFIDENCE

IKS reinforces: Pride in traditional skills, Cultural identity as a business asset, Local crafts as unique market propositions

Skill and Knowledge Base: Many women entrepreneurs: Use indigenous craft skills passed down through generations & Convert home-based cultural knowledge into business models

Example: Traditional embroidery (Fashion business)

Community Support Networks -In many Indian societies:

- Women’s groups (*self-help groups, Mahila Mandals, sanghams*) are community-centric
- Promote collective learning, savings, credit circles, and shared marketing

These are practical expressions of IKS values of cooperation and mutual upliftment.

Sustainable and Inclusive Models: IKS supports sustainable business practices- Organic farming, Eco-friendly products, Low-capital, high-value enterprises. This fits well with women who balance household and business roles, making enterprises resilient and socially impactful.

Leveraging Digital Platforms with IKS Knowledge: Women are using online platforms to- Sell traditional art & crafts, Market regional foods and wellness products & Build brand stories around cultural heritage

Thus IKS becomes a brand differentiator in global markets.

CASE EXAMPLES & STATISTICS

Entrepreneur	Traditional Knowledge	Business Outcome
Women craft collective, Rajasthan	Block printing & weaving	Export success via digital marketplace
Herbal wellness startup, Kerala	Ayurvedic remedies	Local and international clientele
SHG in Odisha	Bamboo products	Government support + urban retail supply

These examples show how traditional knowledge becomes economic opportunity.

1. Women’s Participation in Entrepreneurship (National)

Indicator	Value	Source
Women entrepreneurs share of total entrepreneurs	13.76% (8.05 million out of 58.5 million)	(Startup India)
Employment provided by female-led enterprises	13.45 million jobs	(Startup India)
Women-owned MSMEs	22% of total MSMEs	(The Economic Times)
Share of women in corporate senior management	18.3%	(Startup India)
Early-stage entrepreneurial activity (average for women)	2.6%	(NITI AAYOG)
Women entrepreneurs could create 150–170 million jobs if accelerated	30+ million enterprises potential	(NITI AAYOG)

2. Start-up Ecosystem Statistics

Startup Metric	Value	Source
Startups with at least one woman director (Dec 2024)	73,000+ (~48%)	(Inventiva)
Female-led startups share of total startups ecosystem	~18% in 2022	(The Times of India)
Women entrepreneurs in ecosystem (SetuBridge estimate)	15.7 million	(setubridgesolutions.co.in)
Jobs generated by women-led businesses	22 million+	(setubridgesolutions.co.in)

3. Sector-Specific Trends

Sector	Women Proportion	Source
artisans in crafts & handloom (women majority)	>50%	(The Economic Times)
women in sericulture	>50%	(The Economic Times)
women in handloom activities	72%	(The Economic Times)
Ownership in MSME drops with enterprise size: micro (22%) → medium (7%)	<i>Trend</i>	(The Economic Times)

POLICY SUPPORT & GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

India has launched several government initiatives to promote women entrepreneurship and inclusive economic development. These programs provide financial assistance, skill development, market access, and institutional support, helping women establish and expand enterprises.

The **Stand-Up India Scheme** aims to promote entrepreneurship among women and marginalized communities by facilitating bank loans between ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore for setting up greenfield enterprises in manufacturing, services, or trading sectors. This scheme reduces entry barriers and encourages first-time women entrepreneurs to formalize their businesses.

The **Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (MUDRA Loans)** provides micro-credit to small businesses under three categories—Shishu, Kishor, and Tarun—based on the stage of business development. A significant proportion of MUDRA loans are availed by women, particularly those operating micro and home-based enterprises rooted in traditional skills.

The **National SC/ST Hub** supports entrepreneurs from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes by providing capacity building, financial support, and market linkages. Women from marginalized communities benefit from this initiative, especially those engaged in traditional and indigenous occupations.

Women's Self-Help Group (SHG) Programs, especially under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), play a transformative role in rural entrepreneurship. SHGs promote savings, microfinance, collective production, and community-based enterprises. These groups reflect traditional cooperative systems deeply embedded in Indian social structures.

The **Skill India Mission** focuses on enhancing employability through structured training programs. It provides vocational training in sectors including textiles, handicrafts, food processing, and digital services, enabling women to upgrade their skills.

Similarly, **Digital India initiatives** promote digital literacy, online governance, and e-commerce participation. Digital inclusion allows women entrepreneurs to access wider markets, online payment systems, and digital branding tools.

INTEGRATING INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (IKS) WITH GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

While these programs provide structural and financial assistance, integrating Indian Knowledge Systems can significantly expand their impact.

First, introducing **certification standards for indigenous products**, such as Geographical Indication (GI) tagging and quality assurance mechanisms, can enhance credibility and global competitiveness of traditional goods produced by women entrepreneurs.

Second, developing **training modules that combine traditional skills with modern marketing techniques** can bridge the gap between heritage and contemporary business practices. For example, artisans trained in digital branding, packaging, and online selling can transform local crafts into scalable enterprises.

Third, providing **support for digital commerce and export facilitation** enables women to access national and international markets. Linking SHGs and traditional enterprises to e-commerce platforms and export councils can create sustainable income streams.

By aligning government initiatives with culturally rooted knowledge systems, India can create a more inclusive, sustainable, and self-reliant entrepreneurial ecosystem. The integration of IKS ensures that women entrepreneurs not only receive financial assistance but also leverage their traditional strengths to build resilient and competitive enterprises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Skill Development:** Combine traditional craft training with business and digital literacy
- **Market Linkages:** Government & NGOs to create stronger market channels & E-commerce support specifically for IKS products
- **Financial Access:** MicroFIN & credit models tailored to IKS-based enterprises
- **IKS Documentation:** Promote research and documentation to preserve indigenous skills, making them easier to scale
- **Mentorship & Networks:** Peer mentoring platforms for women entrepreneurs rooted in local cultural contexts

CONCLUSION

The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with women entrepreneurship provides a culturally grounded, sustainable, and inclusive model of economic empowerment. By recognizing and institutionalizing traditional knowledge within entrepreneurial ecosystems, India can unlock vast potential — especially among women in rural and semi-urban contexts. IKS is not just heritage; it is a living foundation for innovation, identity-led business, and community prosperity.

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