

Pathways to Empowerment: Tribal Women and Entrepreneurship- A Systematic Review

S. Dhivya Devi¹, S. Thilagavathy², G. Lakshmi³, Jose Joy Thoppan⁴, K. Merudhuleswari⁵

- ¹Assistant professor, Faculty of management, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai- 603203, India.
- ²Assistant professor, Faculty of Management, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai—603203, India.
- ³Assistant professor, Faculty of Management, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai—603203, India.
- ⁴Professor & Associate Dean, Department of Business Administration, Saintgits Institute of Management, Kottayam, Kerala- 686532.
- ⁵Research Associate, ICSSR Project.

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Tribal women, Entrepreneur, Empowerment, Tribal community, Agriculture income.	Indigenous tribal people live close to nature and have a very basic and simple way of life. They have an incredible cultural heritage yet are socio-economically underprivileged and frequently overlooked and ignored. Thus, forming the marginalised section of the country, deprived of opportunities concerning education, occupation, healthcare, housing and even basic amenities. Tribal development is a significant component of the country's economic advancement. In comparison to tribal men, tribal women endure higher deprivations and marginalisation. Women are valuable assets concerning human resources, making substantial contributions to economic development. Moreover, entrepreneurship offers significant opportunities for individuals and the country's development. There are numerous opportunities for tribal women to start their own entrepreneurial ventures in art, crafts, doll making, bag making, domestication, etc., which are highly appreciated both within and across countries. The entrepreneurial initiative fosters financial independence for tribal women, enhances family welfare, and contributes to the broader socio-economic advancement of the nation. The current research intends to conduct a literature review on entrepreneurship concerning tribal women. Identify the significant gaps in the existing literature and suggest potential directions for future research in this field.

1. INTRODUCTION

To achieve faster, more inclusive, and sustainable economic development, the Indian government has made significant efforts during the past decades. Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognise that some parts of society are either excluded or unable to gain adequately from continuous development, leading to growing gaps within and between urban and rural areas, as well as between various social group identities. Certain socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged groups, such as Scheduled Tribes (STs), face several forms of discrimination in relation to their access to jobs, resources, healthcare, housing, basic amenities, and other public services (Sahu, 2021). The ST group is not homogeneous and is geographically scattered throughout Indian states. There are around 635 different tribal communities and subgroups in India, 73 of which are referred to as "primitive tribes." These groups comprise about 8.2% of the country's population (Satapathy, 2023). For many tribes, woods have always been essential to their existence and financial security (Sahu, 2021). Today, they confront the dilemma of uncertain livelihoods irrespective of their long traditional employment owing to the substantial destruction of their environment (Debnath & Biswas, 2021). Many indigenous tribes have been driven to the outskirts due to relentless and unplanned development, placing them in a vulnerable state of survival amid enormous losses (Satapathy, 2023). Diversifying their revenue streams through employment and entrepreneurial possibilities will be necessary to include them in a larger development discourse (Sahu, 2021). Tribes' livelihoods depend on natural vegetation and the environment. Clothing, wood



and wood products, lumber and wood products, traditional and healthy beverages, tobacco and its byproducts, cotton toys, honey manufacturing, and agricultural items are a few of the many goods the tribal groups produce (Sahu, 2021). Therefore, if the tribal peoples are encouraged to participate in entrepreneurial activities, this will eventually lead to better livelihoods and standards of living. Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in developing different geographic units, from small villages to larger regions and even entire nations, by facilitating the creation of employment and economic growth (Landstrom et al., 2012). Indigenous entrepreneurs have notably enhanced employment opportunities and improved access to immediate work and sustainable livelihoods for marginalized low-skilled individuals. (Sarangi et al., 2022).

Empowering women is fundamental to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), impacting families, communities, and nations (Williams et al., 2022). This empowerment provides women with essential knowledge and skills to enhance their participation, control, and decision-making (Akhter & Cheng, 2020). Women's involvement in business fosters asset ownership, business cycle management, and income generation (Andriamahery & Qamruzzaman, 2022). However, tribal women in India face significant obstacles, including food insecurity, lack of education, domestic violence, and inadequate healthcare, which hinder their entrepreneurial potential (Maiti et al., 2005). The prevailing conditions of underdevelopment and economic instability, compounded by limited access to funding, education, and resources, significantly reduce the profitability and effectiveness of their business endeavors compared to other communities.

Many definitions of entrepreneurship have been proposed by academics (Landstrom et al., 2012). Entrepreneurship is the scholarly study of how, by whom, and with what consequences the possibility of generating future products and services is identified, appraised, and exploited (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). According to these authors, the processes of identifying, scrutinising, and seizing chances are all part of entrepreneurship. Prior researchers have conducted several literature reviews concerning entrepreneurship with regard to general entrepreneurship (Audretsch, 2012), trends in entrepreneurship (Luor et al., 2014), entrepreneurship definition (Conway Dato-on & Kalakay, 2016), gender differences (Sullivan & Meek, 2012), across sectors (Campbell & Mitchell, 2012), Entrepreneurship and ethics (Hannafey, 2003), Entrepreneurship and unemployment (Musa & Semasinghe, 2013), entrepreneurship and institutional environment (Bhat & Khan, 2014), value of entrepreneurship (Van Praag & Versloot, 2007), entrepreneurial competencies (Mitchellmore & Rowley, 2010), entrepreneurial opportunity recognition (Mary George et al., 2016), artisan entrepreneurship (Pret & Cogan, 2019), entrepreneurship and crises (Doern et al., 2019), entrepreneurship education (Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Sirelkhatim & Gangi, 2015; Thomassen et al., 2020), resilience and entrepreneurship (Korber & McNaughton, 2018), woman entrepreneurship (Garg & Agarwal, 2017), Entrepreneurship in agriculture (Fitz-Koch et al., 2018; Condor, 2020), The relationships between social media and entrepreneurship (Olanrewaju et al., 2020), the effects of entrepreneurship on economic, social, and environmental welfare (Neumann, 2021), the concept of corporate entrepreneurship (Urbano et al., 2022), the dynamics of small businesses and entrepreneurship (Kraus et al., 2023), and the phenomenon of serial entrepreneurship (Dabić et al., 2023) have all been explored in recent studies. Therefore, the literature search made known the fact that despite numerous systematic reviews concerning entrepreneurship, only one review has focused on women's entrepreneurship. So far, no literature reviews have been conducted to enhance our knowledge concerning entrepreneurship's impact on tribal women. Thus, the present research intends to conduct a literature search pertaining to research contributing to entrepreneurship among tribal women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of entrepreneurship has been extensively explored across various socioeconomic contexts, but minimal research has been carried out on indigenous women's entrepreneurial activity. This literature review synthesises existing research on Indigenous women entrepreneurs, including their hindering factors causing challenges, facilitating factors, and the socioeconomic effect of their entrepreneurial activity on their standard of life and livelihood.

Entrepreneurial Propensities of tribal women

Empowering women in tribal communities through entrepreneurship enhances their economic and social viability. Evidence indicates that after starting their businesses, women experience positive changes in empowerment, which subsequently influences their decision-making within the family (Naveen et al., 2023).

Tribal women exhibit unique entrepreneurial tendencies that are influenced by their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and resource availability (Das & Das, 2021). Studies indicate that their participation in entrepreneurship is often driven by necessity rather than opportunity, with many engaging in handicrafts, agriculture, and forest-based businesses (Sarma & Borah, 2020). According to Patel and Mehta (2019), tribal women in India, Africa, and Southeast Asia demonstrate resilience and adaptability in their business ventures, leveraging indigenous skills and local market opportunities.

Factors Influencing Entrepreneurship Among Tribal Women

Several socio-economic, cultural, and policy-driven factors shape the entrepreneurial journey of tribal women.

Socio-Economic Factors

Economic necessity remains a key driver of tribal women's entrepreneurship. Many tribal women start businesses as a means of financial sustenance due to limited employment opportunities (Sharma, 2020). Research indicates that microfinance



institutions are crucial in supporting entrepreneurial endeavors by supplying essential capital (Rao & Sinha, 2018). Additionally, financial literacy programs have been shown to improve entrepreneurs' capacity to effectively manage their business finances (Das et al., 2019).

Cultural and Social Norms

Cultural traditions often shape the entrepreneurial activities of tribal women. According to Chakraborty (2017), traditional handicrafts and indigenous art forms provide a significant source of income for tribal entrepreneurs. However, patriarchal norms and family responsibilities sometimes restrict their entrepreneurial ambitions (Singh & Kaur, 2022). Research highlights that community support is crucial in promoting entrepreneurship among tribal women (Borah, 2021).

Policy and Institutional Support

Government interventions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and cooperative movements have played a crucial role in supporting tribal women entrepreneurs (Mishra & Das, 2020). Various skill development programs and subsidies have been introduced to facilitate their entry into the market (Patil & Jadhav, 2019). However, research suggests that the effectiveness of these programs varies depending on implementation efficiency and accessibility (Reddy & Rao, 2021).

Challenges Faced by Tribal Women Entrepreneurs

Despite their entrepreneurial spirit, tribal women encounter numerous challenges that hinder business growth and sustainability.

Financial Constraints

Access to finance remains a major barrier for tribal women entrepreneurs. Studies highlight that despite the presence of microfinance institutions, many tribal women struggle to obtain loans due to lack of collateral and financial literacy (Sarma & Gupta, 2021). Limited banking infrastructure in tribal regions further exacerbates the problem (Banerjee et al., 2020).

Market Access and Infrastructure

Limited market access is another critical challenge. According to Sharma and Verma (2018), tribal women entrepreneurs often struggle to reach broader markets due to inadequate transportation and digital connectivity. Additionally, competition from large-scale commercial enterprises reduces their market share (Kumar & Meena, 2021).

Education and Skill Development

A lack of formal education and entrepreneurial training hampers the business success of tribal women. Research indicates that targeted educational interventions can significantly improve their business management skills (Nayak & Mohanty, 2020). According to a study by Das (2019), digital literacy and marketing training have empowered many tribal women to expand their businesses online.

Social Isolation

Despite numerous initiatives by international organizations and government bodies aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs, particularly tribal women, these individuals often experience isolation due to their distinct language and lifestyle. This isolation hinders their business growth and competitive capacity, ultimately affecting their decision-making abilities (Naveen et al., 2023). In India, tribal women dedicate much of their time to educational responsibilities while contending with significant challenges such as food insecurity, lack of education, domestic violence, and inadequate healthcare (Maiti et al., 2005). Thus, entrepreneurship remains a challenging pursuit in a context marked by underdevelopment and economic instability.

Strategies for Enhancing Tribal Women's Entrepreneurship

To address these challenges, researchers suggest various strategies that can enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of tribal women.

Capacity Building and Skill Development

Empowerment through education and training is a widely recommended strategy. According to Mishra (2021), integrating entrepreneurship education with traditional skills can enhance the productivity of tribal women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, skill development initiatives tailored to indigenous industries can provide practical business solutions (Kumar & Singh, 2019).

Financial Inclusion and Support

Increasing financial access through specialized banking services for tribal entrepreneurs has been advocated by researchers (Patil et al., 2020). Microfinance institutions should develop customized lending models that address the unique challenges faced by tribal women (Rao, 2019).



Policy Interventions

Government policies should focus on creating inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems for tribal women. According to Sharma (2021), policies promoting cooperative societies and self-help groups have proven effective in sustaining tribal women's businesses. Furthermore, digital and infrastructural support can enhance their market reach and business efficiency (Verma & Reddy, 2020).

Research Gaps

Despite extensive studies on tribal women entrepreneurs, several research gaps persist. Firstly, while financial constraints have been widely documented, limited research explores the effectiveness of different financial models tailored specifically to tribal women's unique socio-economic conditions (Banerjee et al., 2020). Additionally, studies lack empirical evidence on the long-term impact of microfinance and financial literacy programs (Das et al., 2019).

Secondly, while cultural influences on tribal women's entrepreneurship have been acknowledged (Chakraborty, 2017), there is a dearth of research analyzing how cultural shifts and modernization affect traditional entrepreneurial practices. Moreover, the intersectionality of gender, culture, and entrepreneurship remains underexplored (Singh & Kaur, 2022).

Another research gap exists in the study of policy interventions. While numerous government initiatives have been introduced, limited studies provide a comprehensive impact assessment of these programs (Mishra & Das, 2020). Research is also lacking on how digital tools can bridge the market access gap for tribal women (Das, 2019).

Furthermore, studies on skill development have not sufficiently examined the effectiveness of integrating indigenous knowledge with modern business training (Das & Das, 2021). Future research should explore how digital literacy programs can be customized to benefit tribal entrepreneurs (Mishra, 2021).

Finally, while community support has been identified as a key enabler (Borah, 2021), There is a lack of comprehensive research examining how cooperative societies and social enterprises contribute to the sustainability of tribal women entrepreneurs (Sharma, 2021).

3. CONCLUSION

The literature highlights that tribal women entrepreneurs exhibit resilience and innovation despite facing multiple challenges. Financial inclusion, skill development, market access, and supportive policies are crucial for their success. Future research should investigate the lasting effects of entrepreneurial initiatives on tribal women's socio-economic status through longitudinal research.

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