

Innovative Profession and Women Entrepreneurs: A Study on Women Entrepreneurs engaged in Home Delivery Catering Services in Salt Lake Area, Kolkata, West Bengal

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In the present century, two significant developments are taking place in the global economy. One is women-owned businesses and the second is international trade. Women constitute half of the world's human resources. They are starting businesses at a rate twice than that of men both in traditional and the new ventures. In this perspective, a study was conducted on women entrepreneurs who are engaged in home delivery catering services in Saltlake area, Kolkata, West Bengal. The area represents middle income groups and the affluent. Moreover, there has been development of a new township in the name of 'Naba Diganta' where IT Park exists. To tap the new found opportunities of supplying homemade and reasonably priced lunch, dinner and tiffin to the employees of this IT industry and to utilize the opportunities of supplying homemade holiday and busy day meals to the inhabitants of this area, housewives particularly Bengali housewives started this innovative venture. This service has become a fast developing profession in this area. Mainly, Bengali housewives have come out of their traditional habits to tap this opportunity in the changed perspective. Educated Bengali housewives are quickly adapting to this profession as a source of income and as a source of pleasure to utilize their leisure time after having given adequate time for upbringing of their children and family. They are successfully running businesses with small capital from family and with a few helping hands and few delivery boys. They are the supervisors of their own businesses the prospects of which they think are bright. They are gaining popularity because of their value added services which they render at reasonable prices compared to the prevailing market price.

Introduction

In the present century, two significant developments are taking place in the global economy. One is women-owned businesses and the second is international trade. Women constitute half of the world's human resources. They are starting businesses at a rate twice than men both at traditional and the new global e-business markets. Women-owned American businesses alone account for 9.1 million. They employ 27.5 million people and contribute nearly \$4 trillion annually to the economy and growing at a rate twice that of the national average. Between one quarter and one third of the world's businesses are owned by women now. Women own 30% of the businesses that export half of their products to the world markets (Laurel Delaney, 2002). There is increasing evidence that more and more women are becoming interested in business ownership and/or starting up in businesses. Moreover, rates of self-employed among women are increasing in several countries. Although there are no official statistics relating business to the gender of owner/manager, there is good deal of evidence to suggest a significant increase in female entrepreneurship. It is obvious that women are a relatively new group of entrepreneurs compared with men. A key issue, therefore, is that whether Women Entrepreneurs face specific problems in setting up business that are different from those faced by male-owned businesses. Women may have specific problems in raising finance and may have less opportunity than most men to accumulate the confidence, skills and contacts necessary to start and run a successful business. In addition, gender discrimination by finance and support providers; customers and employees may be an issue. Research results have suggested that women face problems in raising start up and recurrent business finance than men and encounter credibility problems while dealing with the bankers (Carter and Cannon, 1992). Recent evidence shows that the female entrepreneurs use substantially less capital at start up than male owners and gender is one of the variables affecting the business financing process (Carter and Rosa, 1998).

Objectives of the Study

Saltlake in Kolkata, West Bengal is officially known as Bidhannagar and falls under the Bidhannagar Municipality. The city of Bidhannagar at present is a combination of post independence planned city (Area - 10.2 sq km) with middle / upper class dwellers on one hand and the economically weaker section of people of the added area on the other. This sharp distinction in the society has given uniqueness in the character of this municipal area. Bidhannagar was basically conceived as a planned township of five sectors - I, II, III, IV & V. Later an added area of 20.98 sq km has been added to it in 1995. This area is remarkable for its vast wet land resource with pockets of habitable land within. In 2006 Sector V which is the industrial sector (2.28 sq km approx) is separated from Bidhannagar and a new municipal area "Naba-Diganta Industrial Township" has been formed. The Bidhannagar Municipality has 23 wards. More than half of them have their own office buildings. In consonance with the spirit of the 74th Amendment to the constitution of India, the Municipal authorities have decentralized their functions. The ward committee and through them, the local people participate in the development process. Bidhannagar (Saltlake) has total population of 164,221 of which 81,001 is female population according to 2001 Census. Female population in this city accounts for 18.88% of total population which is much lower than the State percentage i.e. 49.32%. Of 81,001 female population in Saltlake, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe female population represents 10,176 (6.2%) and 1,143 (0.7%) respectively. Though we find parity in female population percentage both in national (48.26%) and state (48.28%) level, but in Saltlake this percentage is a bit higher than them (Census, 2001). Hence, it was decided to conduct the study on this area. Moreover, there has been development of a new township in the name of 'Naba Diganta' where IT Park exists. To tap the new found opportunities of supplying homemade and reasonably priced lunch, dinner and tiffin to the employees of this IT industry and to utilize the opportunities of supplying homemade holiday and busy day meals to the inhabitants of this area,

housewives particularly Bengali housewives started this innovative venture. This service has become a fast developing profession in this area.

The Study humbly attempts to:

- i) to prepare a list of women entrepreneurs and investigate into the present status of these women entrepreneurs engaged in home delivery catering services in Saltlake area, Kolkata;
- ii) to know the problems faced by these women entrepreneurs;
- iii) to develop a data bank on this subject.

Methodology

The study is empirical in nature. Area selected for the study is Saltlake, Kolkata. Addresses /phone numbers of the women entrepreneurs engaged in home delivery catering services in this area were collected from acquaintances, local news papers and local cable TV. These women entrepreneurs were interviewed with the help of a pre-prepared interview schedule. This interview schedule was prepared and finalized in consultation with the University teachers and teachers of a renowned college known as experts on the subject. Total sample size selected for interview is 40. Period of study is 2004-2006. Women entrepreneurs for interview were conveniently selected. Data collected from these women entrepreneurs were analyzed with the help of range and percentage. The limitation of the study is that the sample size covered for interview is small and the area covered represents mainly the middle income groups and affluent.

Indian Scenario

Compared to different foreign countries in the world, India is not lagging far behind in this respect. The role of women in productive activities in India has been increasing over the years, though total number of enterprises run by them is very small. Their participation in the workforce is around 28% of the female population and 13.6% of the total population (Vinze, Medha D, 1987). From

1970s Indian women moulded themselves in industrial entrepreneurship specially in Engineering, Electronics, Handicrafts, Plastics soap, Ceramics, Knitting, Jewellery design, Sweetmeat etc. In 1980 - 89 Women Entrepreneurs touched the number of more than 1, 53,280 which accounts for 9.01% of total entrepreneurs (Mukherjee Sumit, 2004). In February 1984, the Women Wing of the National Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs in India organised the third international conference of Women Entrepreneurs which was attended by 700 Women Entrepreneurs from different parts of the world. Moreover, in India there are 50,000 Women Entrepreneurs who are engaged from Hotel Management to garment manufacturing, food processing etc. (Mitra Joyati, 1999, 136). Indian Women Entrepreneurs are sometimes outclassing their male counterparts in different areas. They are showing and proving their skills in cooking, knitting, and running shipping and transport concerns and hotels despite economic and social barriers. Different Organizations in India are trying their level best to help the Women Entrepreneurs for their self sufficiency. Among them worth mentioning is The Centre for Entrepreneurship Development; The Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India; All India Handicrafts Board; The Central Social Welfare Board; The Director General of Employment Training; The Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka; and The Indian Council of Women Entrepreneurs of Delhi etc. There are a few who are contributing in the noble mission of educating and helping Women Entrepreneurs in India.

Findings of the study

Total number of women entrepreneurs interviewed is 40 (100%): Area covered is SaltLake, Kolkata, West Bengal. Period of study is 2006-07. These women entrepreneurs have adopted a fast emerging profession by tapping a newly developed opportunity with value added services. Middle class and affluent Bengali families are fast becoming habituated to outdoor meals on holidays and busy days. But, their preferences centre around home made meals having traditional popular Bengali menu. Moreover, nowadays a large number of

families fall under double income groups. They find little time to prepare their meals before going to office. Both shortage of time and increased purchasing power have made them dependent on outside meals. These women entrepreneurs also cater to the needs and preferences of their customers. In every step from receiving order to the final stage of delivery of foods, they are adding value to their services but maintaining the price reasonable rather cheap compared to the market price of similar services. These apart, employees of newly developed IT Park (Information Technology) are regular customers of these entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs start their journey in the morning by going out for marketing of vegetables, fish, meat etc. In most cases, they themselves go for marketing with the help of their domestic help to have strict control on the quality of the materials. For rice, atta, cooking oil, spices etc. they generally make monthly/weekly purchase. After coming back from morning marketing they receive calls from the customers up to 9 a.m. and record them in small separate sheets. Thereafter, they generally concentrate on cooking or supervise cooking. After having completed cooking, quality of the cooked items checked, if found not up to the mark, the item is rejected and replaced with other one. The menu is generally fixed the day before and it is regularly changed with traditional popular items depending on the season. Now, food items are packed in cleanly washed Tiffin carriers according to the recorded sheets for delivery to the customers. Deliveries are made by cycle delivery boys on time as per the time recorded in the sheets. Strict timing is maintained keeping in mind the time requirement of the customers. Even the delivery boys are provided with requisite coins so that the customers do not face the problem of change while making payment. Before the year 2000, there was few and far between women entrepreneurs engaged in this type home delivery catering services in this area, now their number is fast increasing to tap this newly discovered opportunity. Average daily call of these entrepreneurs is around 20 meals which mean Rs. 1000/- per day income @ Rs. 50/- per meal resulting in monthly income of Rs. 30,000/-. The value added services these entrepreneurs are providing to their customers is helping them

to grow their income at a fast growing rate and helping them to increase their marketing audience and marketing border at faster rate. They create values for their customers through a series of activities which are known as value chain. The value chain is a systematic approach to examining the development of competitive advantage. The chain consists of a series of activities that create value. They culminate in the total value delivered by an organization. The value chain of these entrepreneurs is exhibited below.

EXHIBIT-1: Value Chain of Home Delivery Catering Services run by Women Entrepreneurs

Individual Women Entrepreneur's Infrastructure of House Space, Finance, Cooking Instruments etc					M A R G I N
Individual Women Entrepreneur's Human Resource Management of Helping Hands, Cooks and Delivery boys					
Technology Development by Individual Women Entrepreneur in the form usage of Modern Cooking Device, preservation and delivery system					
Procurement Capacity of different materials by Individual Women Entrepreneur					
Stage-I	Stage-II	Stage-III	Stage-IV	Stage-V	Stage-VI
Selection of menu; it varies regularly depending on season and taste of the customers	Purchase of materials- rice, atta, vegetable, fish, meat, cooking oil, spices etc.; self purchase or purchase under strict personal supervision	Cooking of food; self cooking or cooking under strict personal supervision with a home made touch	Quality control; through testing of item; if any item is found not up to the mark, it is rejected and replaced with a new item	Packing of food; item wise according to the recorded sheet in the cleanly washed Tiffin carriers	Delivery on time; by cycle delivery boys according to recorded customer's timing

VA \Rightarrow VA \Rightarrow VA \Rightarrow VA \Rightarrow VA \Rightarrow VA

Margin

Note: VA - Value Addition.

Survey Response of women entrepreneurs (compiled)

<i>Age</i>	No.	%
Up to 40 years	12	30
Above 40 years	28	70
<i>Academic Qualification</i>		
Below Graduate	4	10
Above Graduate	36	90
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	40	100
Unmarried	0	0
<i>Family Members</i>		
Up to three	20	50
Above three	20	50
<i>Experience</i>		
Up to five years	30	75
Above five years	10	25
<i>Monthly Family Income</i>		
Up to Rs. 10000	8	20
Above Rs. 10000	32	80

Data in the form of replies to the questions asked to the women entrepreneurs:

Q - Question.

A - Answer.

Q.	Purpose of entering into the home delivery catering services	
A.	Source of pleasure and source of income.	100%
Q.	Customer base	
A.	Only Salt Lake	50%
	Salt Lake and outskirt	50%
Q.	Whether regular or occasional customers	
A.	Both regular and occasional	100%
Q.	How is customer satisfaction measured?	
A.	Through repeated purchase or admiration over phone.	100%
Q.	Means of attracting new customers.	
A.	Advertising particularly in local newspaper / cable TV.	100%
Q.	Method of Home Delivery	
A.	Cycle delivery boys	90%
	Self delivery	10%
Q.	Location of business	
A.	Home	100%
Q.	Whether they have formal training	
A.	No formal training.	100%
Q.	How many employees are recruited?	
A.	Up to five employees	50%
	Above five employees	50%
Q.	Remuneration of employees	
A.	Up to Rs. 500/- p.m. per employee	50%
	Above Rs. 500/- p.m. per employee	50%
Q.	Maintenance of accounts	

A.	Self maintained with the help of Husband	90%
	By employee	10%
Q.	Whether they can attend bulk order	
A.	Yes	50%
	No	50%
Q.	How quality is controlled?	
A.	Through personal supervision	100%
Q.	Main problem of the business	
A.	Employee / delivery boys	100%
Q.	Prospect of business	
A.	Bright	90%
	Not at all bright	10%

Concluding Remarks

Data on personal profile of Women Entrepreneurs disclose some important and interesting information. Age profile of Women Entrepreneurs reveals that 70% of them have entered the business at the age above 40 years. This means that at the early age of marriage they have concentrated in their family and upbringing of children. It can be safely assumed that after giving sufficient time for family and self sufficiency of children; when they feel relatively free and find sufficient time, they have started their businesses. This exposes the traditional Bengali mentality to give priority to the family and then other ventures. 100% of the Women Entrepreneurs are married and 90% of them have education qualification of graduation or above. This indicates that housewives are showing courage for starting such ventures taking full support of their families. Educated Bengali Women are no shyers to business ventures. They are ready even to take risk for their economic freedom. It is also fact that all of them do not have nuclear families, rather 50% of them have to manage large families along with their businesses. Women are very recently taking this as their occupation since 75% of them have fewer 5 years of experience whereas 25% have been running for more than 5 years. Since Salt Lake represents

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middle income groups and affluent, 80% of Women Entrepreneurs' family income exceeds Rs. 10,000 p.m., whereas 20% i.e. four women entrepreneurs belong less than Rs. 10,000 p.m. and one among them at the age 66 years is running this business simply to support her family, since her family does not have any other family income. All the Women Entrepreneurs take this profession as a pleasure as well as a source of income to supplement their family income. Most of them have customer base within Salt Lake area and in few cases their customer base goes even to the outskirts of Salt Lake. All of them have customers comprising both regular and occasional customers. Repeated orders and praise over phones are the yard sticks for customer satisfaction for all of them and they all take the shelter of advertisement in the local newspapers and cable TV to attract the new customers beyond the means through the satisfied customer. 90% of the Women Entrepreneurs appoint cycle delivery boy for delivery of foods while (10%) takes the path of self delivery to serve the customers. Common to all of them is that they run their business from their home or quarters and they do not have any formal training for running such business. 50% of the Women Entrepreneurs run their businesses in very small scale which is reflected from their recruitment of employees. They appoint only 5 employees each. In another 50% cases their businesses are a bit large since their recruitment raises beyond 6. One of them has really a big business and along with this she is also running separate catering services for different occasions in a large scale. The Women Entrepreneur of this business is a post graduate and has been running this type business for a long period of time. She has accountant for keeping her accounts and she is a service holder too. In other 90% cases their accounts are maintained by themselves with the help of their husbands. 50% of the Women Entrepreneurs can tackle bulk order (for 50 people or more) while others cannot because they do not have the infrastructure. All of them control the quality of their products through their own personal supervision. Majority of them can make emergency supply within ½ an hour of the order even some of them can meet it simply within 15 minutes. Everyone reported that their main

problems are employees and delivery boys. One of them even reported that she does not receive order unless she is confirmed of delivery boys. Such acute is the problem. Every one of them opined that the prospect of this business is bright except one who does not find it bright. In the growing competition from eateries and restaurants the Women Entrepreneurs, by and large, admit and feel a competitive touch, but in general they are satisfied and enthusiastic about their businesses and positive for their bright prospect.

Measures Recommended

- i) Regular education and training should be imparted to these women entrepreneurs;
- ii) Arrangement for adequate financial support from the Govt/s both in the form of low cost loan and subsidy (when needed) should be made;
- iii) A common platform should be formed to sort out their common problems like shortage/ untimely turn up of delivery boys etc and to develop a network to serve the nearest customer though order was received by another network partner and also to increase the list of items by forming a pool to serve the customers' needs fast & better;
- iv) Appointment of a common quality & hygienic condition controller from a reliable outside agency.

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