

Entrepreneurship and Self Reliance among the Female Senior Citizens Uniquely Women's Market (IMA Keithek) In Imphal, Manipur

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The progress of women in a country portrays the development of the country on the whole. Making our own women excel, helps our nation excel (Juliana Catherine, 2017). Women today have acquired their own place and role in the growth and development of an economy

Women, the most beautiful creation of God is moulded primarily with feminine aspect of God; caring and loving. Even after five thousand years of history, women confined to be a richness still to be fully revealed. As a result, they are prevented from playing a full and equal role in society. Women of the past were shut up in the kitchen and limited to bearing children. Their unique power to give birth – a source of life in all meanings, might have caused a kind of jealousy to women forever. Then patriarchy closed the door of knowledge – education and played their game against women, since men wanted to have dominion over them. The worst happened when they disqualified her for any leadership by allocating some innate impurity in her physically (Vimala Chenginimattam, 2017).

Today, throughout the world, the sphere of women is stained by violence and injustice. In every community and religion, men dominate and decide for women and as a consequence, the women suffer abuse, attacks, rejection, injustice, denial of their fundamental right.

The socio economic status of women plays a very vital role in both individual and community life as women constitute half of the society. Human resources and social developments are interdependent. Women constitute major portion of our human resource. They have always played a significant role in the production of social life as well. Women have been active both in domestic and market economies.

The contributions that women make to the economic, social and political lives of their nations, communities, families and the next generation make them key actors in effective development. Today, majority of the women are active world wide – in agriculture, small and micro – enterprise, and increasingly, in the export processing industries that drive globalisation.

For the upliftment of women work force, it is absolutely essential that women should be fully empowered with proper education, skill and training. Empowerment is a process whereby women are able to organise themselves to enhance self-reliance and to assert their independent right to make choice and control resources, both of which will help in challenging their subordination. It means giving voice to the voiceless. Empowerment is seen as a precondition for the attainment of social, cultural and political emancipation, it is the main necessity for a change in the existing imbalance in power relations and for gaining greater control over the source power.

In any economy, women play a prominent role at various levels. In recent years, women have been taking increasing interest in entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurship is a process where women take lead and organise a business or industry and provide employment opportunities to others. Its development enables society to understand and appreciate their abilities. It also enhances their status and leads to integration of women in nation building and economic development.

According to the Government of India, a woman entrepreneur is defined as an enterprise owned and controlled by women and having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least of the employment generated in the enterprise to women. Entrepreneurship is now recognised both in the developed and the developing societies as an essential resource in the development process. It has acquired special significance in the

context of economic growth in a rapidly changing socio-economic and socio-cultural climate, particularly in women.

The women entrepreneurship in Manipur has been recognised as an essential ingredient of economic development and an integral part of socio-economic transformation of the State. The women in Manipur have been known for their valour, skill, and active involvement in many social, economic, political and cultural activities. She takes care of the family as a daughter-in-law and mother.

Manipur at a glance

Manipur, one of the eight sisters of North East Region of India is isolated hill grit between 92°58'E TO 94°45'E longitudes and 23°50'N TO 25°42'N latitudes. It is a charming place encircled by nine hill ranges on all sides with a small and beautiful oval shaped valley at the centre. The state has nine districts and has 352 kilometres of international border with Myanmar. The valley which consists of two districts is occupied by the Hindus known as the Meiteis of Manipuris and the hill districts consist of the tribals and there are around 23 tribes in Manipur. The main characteristics of all the groups are sense of great optimism, cheerfulness, of temper, self reliance and courage, having a sense of decoration, colours of rhythm, which gets reflected in their textiles and other crafts along with the art of dance.

The literacy rate of Manipur has been upward and is 79.21% as per population census and of that, male literacy stands at 86.6% while female literacy is at 71.73%. There is a high girl dropout rate which is mainly due to household responsibilities and the high cost of education. This has barred girls from attending schools. The educational status of girls is far from satisfactory.

Status and Role of Women in Manipur

Women in Manipur, enjoy a unique status in society. They perform domestic work, contribute to the family's economy and also meet the socio-cultural obligations of the family along with their counterparts. Historically women in the region have played a major role in the affairs of governance, the economy and in civil society. In recent times, their activism has been demonstrated in social movements to combat drug abuse, alcoholism and human rights violation etc.

Nish-Bandh (1970) and Meira Paibis (1980) are the two famous Women's Movements in Manipur which give us clear understanding of women's acute participation in curbing social evils in their society. Nisha Bandh was due to the rise of the sale of liquor and the menace created by the drunkard husbands to their wives. Meira Paibis emerged spontaneously to safeguard the youth from atrocities by the security forces like arrest without issue of any warrant, killing and beating up for unknown reason. Women feel the need to bring into an end such a kind of human right violation.

Entrepreneurship and Self Reliance among the Senior Female Citizens

Run entirely by women, Ima Keithel (Mothers' Market) represents the life and ethos of Manipur, a state where women have long been at the forefront of commerce and socio-political protests. A unique cultural experience, this market matriarch's continues to be a beautiful example of entrepreneurship and self reliance. Ima Keithel which literally means mothers' market is the oldest in Asia, run by only women. The first of its kind, the market houses as many as 5000 women shopkeepers. Of late, the three markets in Khwairamband Bazaar are called as Ima Market, Laxmi Bazaar and Linthoinganbi Bazaar.

History and Origin of Ima Keithel

It is believed that the Mothers' Market dates back to the 16th century. The market's female-only work force originated as a result of the *Lallup-Kaba*, an ancient forced labour system in Manipur that sent the men to cultivate faraway land and fight wars. The women stayed back

in the villages, working in their own fields, taking care of their household and selling their farm products in improvised market where women played the central role. Only married women are allowed to trade and run the stalls in this multi ethnic market, a privilege that is passed on from one generation to the next.

The Goods Sold in Ima Keithel

Ima Keithel displays local culture, tradition and biodiversity. Products sold here are mostly local products. A wide range of merchandise including vegetable, fruits, fish, dry fish, meat, herbs, handmade jewellery, hand loom and handicraft products pots knives, shawls and puppets.

Being run by women the market exudes a homely exuberance. It gives a strong sense of community. Among the shopkeepers 65% are senior citizens. They are a powerful lot during emergencies. The senior women of Manipur strive to work for gender equality in all developmental approach, which encompasses the social, economic, political and cultural forces that determine the role and responsibilities of men and women, their access and control and their power relation.

The contribution of senior women in the economic sphere is large in Manipur. Whether in the organised or unorganised sector, they have been making their presence felt everywhere. The senior women, who do not own a stall in the Mothers' Market, run pan shops, tea and snack stalls in the town in order to contribute to the financial back-up of the family. They are also of the view that in the evenings of their life to be economically independent even if they are living with their children who are employed. Thus these senior women of Manipur contribute substantially to the economic development of the state. The vendors are backed by strong organisations, which protect them from any harassment by the police authorities.

The senior women are emerging as a good potential source of entrepreneurship. They continue to their leadership role in empowering the young women folks of the society to contribute their share in enriching the economy. Thus these young women are taught to be independent in their living situation.

Conclusion

The amazing Mothers' Market of Manipur will remain a unique historic symbol of women empowerment and women leadership in economic development. This is something the policy makers of any country, regions can think of as a model for women entrepreneurship, women empowerment and gender justice Swami Vivekananda has observed that if we can really bring about a balanced society with equal opportunities to both men and women, it would not be long to usher our great country into a golden era. Very soon we will find Indian women undertaking all activities right from perceiving of a profitable opportunity.

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