



## ENDEAVOUR OF TRIBAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN TEA PLANTATION: A STUDY IN LOHIT DISTRICT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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### Abstract

*Tribal women play a significant yet often under recognized role in the economic development of rural and plantation-based regions of India. The present study examines the entrepreneurial endeavors of tribal women engaged in tea plantation activities in the Arunachal Pradesh. The research aims to analyze their participation in tea-based entrepreneurship, assess socio-economic impacts, and identify the challenges and opportunities influencing their entrepreneurial growth. Using a descriptive research design, the study draws upon primary data collected through structured interviews and questionnaires administered to tribal women entrepreneurs working in tea plantations, supplemented by secondary sources such as government reports and existing literature. The findings reveal that tea plantation entrepreneurship has contributed to income generation, employment opportunities, and enhanced decision-making power among tribal women. However, constraints such as limited access to finance, lack of technical training, market linkages, and infrastructural challenges continue to hinder their full entrepreneurial potential. The study highlights the need for targeted policy interventions, capacity-building programs, and institutional support to strengthen tribal women entrepreneurship in the tea sector. The paper concludes that empowering tribal women entrepreneurs in tea plantations can serve as a catalyst for sustainable rural development and inclusive economic growth in the region.*

**Key Words:** Tribal women, economic development, tea plantation activities, entrepreneurship

### Introduction:

OECD (2004) observes that women entrepreneurship needs to be studied separately for two main reasons. The first reason is that women's entrepreneurship has been recognized during the last decade as an important untapped source of economic growth. Women entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others and by being different also provide society with different solutions to management, organization and business problems as well as to the exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities.



However, they still represent a minority of all entrepreneurs. Thus there exists a market failure discriminating against women's possibility to become entrepreneurs and their possibility to become successful entrepreneurs. The second reason is that the topic of women in entrepreneurship has been largely neglected both in society in general and in the social sciences. Not only have women lower participation rates in entrepreneurship than men but they also generally choose to start and manage firms in different industries than men tend to do. The industries (primarily retail, education and other service industries) chosen by women are often perceived as being less important to economic development and growth than high-technology and manufacturing.

The financial contribution (both accounted and unaccounted) by Indian women for the betterment of their families is very significant. In the post independence era their participation in economic activities of the country has grown very considerably as the process of industrialization has received its momentum. On one hand, this increased participation of women in economic activities has helped them to lessening the gap between their needs and resources; it has given rise to a number of interlinked problems on their socio-economic conditions on the other.

Development of entrepreneurship among women is a major step to increase women participation in the process of economic development. It will speed up economic growth, and provide employment opportunities for women resulted in improving the economic independence. Provision of economic opportunities for women can also improve the social, educational and health status of women and their families (Rao et.al, 2011).

In India, women constitute almost half of the population of the nation. The socio-economic condition of women is one of the important factors that will determine the overall growth and development of the country. Manickaval (1997), in one of his studies shows that 56% of Indian women are unemployed. Hence, development of women entrepreneurship is essential to provide economic opportunities to women. Entrepreneurship is a concept assumed to be sex neutral (Sindhu and Geethakutty, 2003). Even then, in India, women entrepreneurship is still in its infancy. This is because women entrepreneurs are not easily accepted by Indian society (Moitra, 2001). During 1990s, many women entered in the field of entrepreneurship to avail economic competence and independence, but many of them are observed to be not succeeding well as they had planned (Sindhu and Geethakutty, 2003).

#### **Agriculture and Plantation Crop in India:**

In India about 70 per cent of the work force is employed in the agriculture sector. Though the share of agriculture in Gross Domestic Product is coming down in the recent years, still agriculture is the dominant sector of the economy. Plantation is a part of agriculture and it directly employs more than 2 million workers in the country. Plantation



plays a very crucial role in the export of agricultural produce. About 15 per cent of the total export earnings of agriculture products come from crops like tea, coffee and rubber, although these plantations occupy only one per cent of the total cropped area (GOI, 2009).

Tea Plantations are predominantly located in hills and interior areas of North-Eastern states of India. Assam and West Bengal in the north east and east, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the south are the major tea producing states of the country. Some other Indian States like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Bihar and Orissa are also producing tea but to a small extent. In tea plantation, a huge chunk of the workers constitute women. But women as entrepreneur in the tea plantation are not common. Interestingly, in Arunachal Pradesh it is seen that tribal women are endeavoring as entrepreneurs in the tea plantation in the recent years. This paper tries to examine some of the economic aspect of the small and medium women tea growers in Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh.

#### **Methodology:**

The study is primarily empirical in nature though available literature on women entrepreneurship is also cited. For collection of data, purposive sampling technique is adopted. This technique is adopted because we wanted to know the economic opportunities and problems perceived by the women tea growers in the region. Altogether ten entrepreneurs from three administrative circles namely, Chongkham, Namsai and Tezu were selected and interviewed with a structured questionnaire.

#### **Objectives:**

The main objectives behind the study are:

1. To see the level of education of the entrepreneurs.
2. To see the size of plantation area of the women entrepreneurs.
3. To examine the level of employment generated by the women entrepreneurs.
4. To see the level of initial investment made by the entrepreneurs.
5. To examine the role of banking sector in augmenting women entrepreneurship in tea plantation.
6. To assess the income and expenditure of the entrepreneurs.

#### **Results and Discussion:**

Based on the surveyed women entrepreneurs some interesting results were found which are discussed below.

#### **Literacy and level of Education of the surveyed entrepreneurs:**

Education is indispensable for skill development and fundamental to Entrepreneurship and innovation (National Knowledge Commission, 2008). Further, education makes a man aware about his/her social responsibilities and thus awakens about their space in the society. In order to assess the level of education among the



selected entrepreneurs of this study, they have been categorized into: (i) Literate, and (ii) Illiterate and their years of schooling were also collected. Almost eighty nine per cent (88.89%) of the surveyed entrepreneurs were literate out of which twenty five per cent are having five years of schooling, another twenty five per cent are having ten years of schooling and remaining fifty per cent are having above fifteen years of schooling.

#### **Area of the Garden:**

In Schumpeterian sense, the entrepreneur who implements 'new combinations of means of production' plays a crucial role in disturbing the status quo through innovation or 'creative destruction' and thereby becomes an agent of change. Therefore, the surveyed entrepreneurs are truly entrepreneurs as they have utilised those land as productive resources which were normally not used for the traditional and indigenous crop rather remained barren or unexplored. During the survey it was tried to calculate the area of the tea gardens possessed by the entrepreneurs which is presented in table: 1.

**Table: 1: Area (in acres) of the Tea Garden**

Area (in acres)	Entrepreneurs (in %)
Less than 05 acres	44.44
05 to 10 acres	22.22
Above 10 acres	33.34
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Survey Data, March, 2023.

From the table it is clear that the size of majority of the gardens is below five acres (44.44%) of land. Almost twenty two per cent (22.22%) gardens are within the size of five to ten acres of land and the remaining gardens (33.34 %) are above ten acres in its land size.

#### **Employment Generation in the Surveyed Gardens:**

Entrepreneurship enhances an economy significantly by creating wealth and generating employment. Therefore, it was tried to find the average number of employment generated in the surveyed tea gardens where it was found that the average number of regular workers is 10.7 who are employed throughout the year. On the other hand, the average number of temporary workers engaged in the garden is 23 who are getting average workdays of 118 days in a year.

#### **Sources of Capital and Initial amount of Investment**

The area of land used for plantation of tea by the entrepreneurs surveyed is their ancestral land which was lying barren or unexplored. Therefore, land was not at all a problem to the entrepreneurs. The other important factor for establishing a tea garden is capital. Therefore, attempt was made to collect information about the amount of initial capital invested and the sources of capital for establishing the tea garden during the



survey of the entrepreneurs. For which we categorised the sources of initial capital into five different categories namely, a) Bank Loan; b) Moneylenders; c) Friends and relatives; d) Own capital and e) Any other. Interestingly, it was found that majority of the surveyed entrepreneurs (88.89%) started the tea garden with own capital and only 11.11 per cent entrepreneurs started the tea garden with bank loans. The amount of initial investment made by the entrepreneurs is presented in the following table (Table: 2).

**Table: 3: Initial amount of Capital Invested by the Entrepreneurs.**

<b>Initial Investment (in Rupees Lakh)</b>	<b>Entrepreneurs (in %)</b>
<b>Below 2</b>	25.00
<b>2 – 5</b>	37.50
<b>Above 5</b>	37.50

Source: Survey Data, March, 2023.

From Table: 2 it is clear that twenty five per cent of the surveyed entrepreneurs started their tea garden with less than Rupees two lakhs as an initial capital. Another 37.50% of the entrepreneurs started with an initial capital ranging from Rupees two lakhs to Rupees five lakhs and an equal portion (37.50%) of entrepreneurs started their tea gardens with an initial capital which was above Rupees five lakhs.

**Expenditure Pattern:**

Entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth (Kuratko and Richard 2001). The incremental wealth will be created only when management of expenditure is properly handled. Therefore, the pattern of expenditure made by sample entrepreneurs was examined during the survey which is presented in the following tables (Table: 3.1 and Table: 3.2)

**Table: 3.1: Annual Expenditure on Workers.**

<b>On Regular Workers</b>		<b>On Temporary Workers</b>	
<b>In Rupees Lakh</b>	<b>Entrepreneurs (in %)</b>	<b>In Rupees Lakh</b>	<b>Entrepreneurs (in %)</b>
<b>Below 1</b>	22.22	<b>Below 1</b>	20.00
<b>1 – 3</b>	22.22	<b>1 – 2</b>	20.00
<b>3 – 5</b>	22.22	<b>2 -3</b>	20.00
<b>Above 5</b>	33.34	<b>Above 3</b>	40.00

Source: Survey Data, March, 2023.



**Table: 3.2: Annual Expenditure on Fertiliser, Pesticide etc.**

On Pesticide		On Fertiliser		Other Expenditure	
Rupees (in '000)	Entrepreneurs (in %)	Rupees (in '000)	Entrepreneurs (in %)	Rupees (in '000)	Entrepreneurs (in %)
<b>Below 10</b>	25.00	<b>Below 10</b>	25.00	<b>Below 10</b>	37.50
<b>10 - 20</b>	00.00	<b>10 - 20</b>	37.50	<b>10 - 20</b>	37.50
<b>20 - 30</b>	25.00	<b>20 - 30</b>	00.00	<b>20 - 30</b>	12.50
<b>30 - 40</b>	12.50	<b>30 - 40</b>	12.50	<b>30 - 40</b>	12.50
<b>Above 40</b>	37.50	<b>Above 40</b>	25.00	<b>Above 40</b>	00.00

Source: Survey Data, March, 2023.

In Table: 3.1 the annual expenditure incurred by the entrepreneurs on the workers employed by them is represented. From the table it is clear that almost sixty seven per cent (66.66%) of the surveyed entrepreneurs pays below Rupees five lakhs to their regular workers which include salaries, medicines, house rent and electricity bills and the remaining (33.34%) entrepreneurs pay above Rupees Five lakhs to their regular workers on the same. Again the table also represents the amount of annual expenditure incurred by the surveyed entrepreneurs on the temporary workers they engage in their tea gardens mainly during the period of plucking the tea leaves. It is observed that sixty per cent (60%) of the surveyed entrepreneurs who hires temporary workers pays less than Rupees three lakhs and forty per cent (40%) pays above Rupees three lakhs as wages on them per annum.

Tea among other plantation crops needs comparatively more care as this crop is more prone to pests, insects etc. Therefore, proper care is to be taken by the tea growers from them and they are to make a good amount of expenditure on controlling pest and insects etc. Table: 3.2 represents the expenditure incurred by the surveyed entrepreneurs on fertilizer, pesticides etc. From the survey it is found that fifty per cent (50%) entrepreneurs spends below Rupees thirty thousand on pesticides and remaining fifty per cent (50%) entrepreneurs spend above Rupees thirty thousand on controlling pests and insects. Again in order to enhance production the tea growers also use fertiliser on their tea gardens. When asked about the expenditure they make on fertiliser it was found that almost sixty three per cent (62.50%) tea growers spend below Rupees twenty thousand per annum and almost thirty seven per cent (36.50%) spends above Rupees thirty thousand on fertiliser. In order to maintain growth of the tea plants, tea growers are to make some other expenditure like expenditures on Vitamin, Hormone etc. Therefore, during the survey it was tried to collect the information on this type of expenditure also where it was found that seventy five per cent (75%) of the entrepreneurs spend less than



Rupees twenty thousand and twenty five per cent (25%) entrepreneurs spend within Rupees twenty to thirty thousand per annum on these inputs.

**Income Generated by the Entrepreneurs:**

Indian society at large continues to suffer from various misconceptions (myths) apprehensions and suspicions about women entrepreneurs in business and industry (Rao et al, 2011). But in our study we have observed that the women entrepreneurs apart from giving employment avenues to others thereby generating income to the workers, generate income to themselves also. In the study we found that the total amount of income generated from the tea gardens were much more than the other agricultural income of the family of the entrepreneurs which is represented below (Table: 4).

**Table: 4: Annual Income Generated by the Entrepreneurs**

Income from Tea Garden		Other Agricultural Income	
In Rupees Lakh	Entrepreneurs (in %)	In Rupees Lakh	Entrepreneurs (in %)
Less than 1	25.00	Less than 1	83.33
1 – 5	12.50	Above 1	16.67
5 -10	25.00		
Above 10	37.50		

Source: Survey Data, March, 2023.

In Table: 4 the income generated by the women entrepreneurs from their tea gardens and other agricultural crops they produced is shown separately. It is quite clear from the table that 25% of the surveyed entrepreneurs' income from tea gardens is less than Rupees one lakh, 12.50% entrepreneurs' income from tea gardens ranges from Rupees one lakh to five lakhs, 25.00% entrepreneurs' income from tea garden ranges from Rupees five lakhs to ten lakhs and 37.50% surveyed entrepreneurs' income from tea gardens are above Rupees ten lakhs in a year. On the other hand, among the same entrepreneurs surveyed who are having other agricultural crops also generates much lesser income from those crops as compared to that of the tea gardens. The survey result shows that less than Rupees one lakh is generated by 83.33% and more than Rupees one lakh but less than Rupees two lakhs is generated by 16.67% of the entrepreneurs only from agriculture other than tea. This shows that Plantation of tea is more attractive than other traditional crops to these entrepreneurs.

**Conclusion:**

Women entrepreneurship is normally guided by high motivation and self direction. It is argued that women entrepreneurs possess certain specific characteristics



that promote their creativity and generate new ideas and ways of doing exceptional things. In our study it is found that when women entrepreneurship in India is at a stage of infancy, the tribal women in Arunachal Pradesh has shown a tremendous adventurous job in the field of entrepreneurial skill development. Because from the study, we have found that these women are using the barren or unexplored land in a proper manner which not only shows their consciousness about the resource use but also opens employment avenues to others and generating income for them. But one important thing was observed during the survey that the employment opportunity generated by the women entrepreneurs was mainly taken by outside laborers. Therefore, if proper care and planning is made local skilled and unskilled unemployed people may also be attracted towards these newly emerged employment avenues of the state. Again, since it was observed during the survey that the role of bank finance was very poor in the development of this particular enterprise, policy should be taken for easy and low cost loans for the entrepreneurs so that this enterprise grows at a speedy rate and available idle land of the area are brought under productive uses. Further, government may take initiative to provide training to the existing women entrepreneurs in this sector so that they can run their tea gardens more efficiently and it is also expected that proper training to the entrepreneurs will help them in proper management of their expenditure and maintain the quality of their product.

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