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## Prospects & challenges of women entrepreneurs in tourism industry of Meghalaya

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### Abstract

Prior to the covid-19 pandemic the travel and tourism industry were considered the fastest growing industry and this sector has colossal potentials for economic development and reformations at the global context. Entrepreneurship paves the path of not only self-development but also inclusive economic growth of nations, especially the developing nations. Women throughout the ages, have contributed immensely to the tourism industry as an employee at various capacities however, women entrepreneurship in this sector has played and can play a pivotal role in self-development and empowerment in the developing economies. Meghalaya a picturesque state of the north-eastern part of India and its unique traditional customary laws has become a popular area of study for many researchers. The state following the matrilineal society norms, makes it easy for the women from the major tribes, namely the Khasis and the Garos to empower themselves and be successful entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. With the lifting of the travel restriction due to the pandemic, the recent trends have shown increase of tourist foot fall in the state hence resulting in more women participation in the tourism sector and donning the role of entrepreneurs as tourism stake holders of the state. The study was conducted to understand the role of women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector and to highlight the challenges faced by them along with focussing on women empowerment through entrepreneurial practices and thereby influencing and motivating other women to participate actively in the tourism industry and be self-sustained.

**Keywords:** Self-development, empowerment, matrilineal, entrepreneurship, participation

### Introduction

The concept of entrepreneurs is not a recent phenomenon, but dates to early 18<sup>th</sup> century, where an Irish French economist by the name of Richard Canutillo was the first to coin and define the term entrepreneur. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, at global context entrepreneurs are transforming economies and thereby contributing to the economic growth and nation building.

Entrepreneur is an individual with innovative business ideas who uses his/her time, energy, and resources to create a new business, thereby bearing most of the risks and enjoying most of the rewards. Government of India has defined women entrepreneurs as an enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of employment generated in the enterprise to women.

The tourism industry has become an important engine for economic growth especially in the developing economies and majority of the workforce is females. Woman being the most marginalised in society at global levels have indeed excelled in the Tourism and Hospitality sector both as an employee and as an employer being part of various tourism stake holders.

The North-Eastern region of India is unique in terms of its Indigenous populations, strong cultural practices, and traditional trading background especially by women (Sangma 2006) <sup>[1]</sup>. Meghalaya being a picturesque north-eastern state of India and has tremendous tourism potential. The state of Meghalaya commonly referred as the ' Abode of Clouds', primarily inhabited by two major tribes namely the Khasis and the Garo's. The state classified into twelve districts and 6026 villages and almost 80% of the population residing in the rural areas has great scope of Rural Tourism initiatives which can support the state for community development and poverty alleviation especially in the rural areas and provide an alternate form of tourism for the tourist and visitors to have an enriching experience. The state of Meghalaya following the matrilineal society norms, makes it easy for the women from the major tribes, namely the Khasis and the Garo's to empower themselves and be successful entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.

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Since the attainment of statehood in 1972, successive Governments along with various Government departments have always tried to boost tourism and local entrepreneurship. But 50 years hence of statehood, the tourism of the state has blossomed and increase number of local tourism stake holders but not up to expectation, hence there is tremendous potentials yet to be tapped especially in rural belts and more so for the woman entrepreneurship, so that women residing in these rural circuits could be empowered and influence other marginalised women to come to mainstream. Though many women from Meghalaya have set up and managed their tourism related businesses but it had been a difficult task for these women to succeed and overcome barriers to eventually be successful in their ventures. Women in general not only in Meghalaya despite being a matrilineal society had to deal with inequality and withstand scepticism from society and had to put in a lot more effort than men to prove their credibility and be successful.

### Literature review

Entrepreneurship today is considered in global context as a driving force for economic development. Entrepreneurs with their unique creativity and innovations create new forms of business which creates value for customers and benefit the entrepreneurs monetarily. Entrepreneurial activities have been shown to influence economic development and growth (Naude, 2008) <sup>[10]</sup>.

They also create new opportunities and seize them with the willpower and energy essential to overcome the resistance that the social, cultural, political, and economic environments offer (Morrison et al., 2003) <sup>[12]</sup>. Entrepreneurship has also been viewed as a creative and innovative response to the environment and an ability to recognize, initiate and exploit an economic opportunity (Prasad, 88).

There have been several studies on the importance and contribution of women entrepreneurship more so from developed countries as compared to developing and underdeveloped countries. The powerful role women can play in this process has been the theme of much entrepreneurial research, mostly from developed nations (Shane, 1997) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Women entrepreneurs are the women or a group of women who initiate, organize, and operate a business enterprise (Haridoss and Fredrick, 2009) <sup>[5]</sup>. Women primarily seek self-employment primarily because they can have a work life balance (Ufuk and Ozgen, 2001) <sup>[9]</sup>.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century primarily due to globalization and gender equality women like men have entrepreneurial traits and are successfully able to contribute to wealth creation, self-employment and developing their businesses, however the entrepreneurial potentials are not fully tapped due to various challenges faced by women entrepreneurs (Hanson, 2009) <sup>[3]</sup>. The arrivals and achievement of women entrepreneurs are very significant due to the various challenges they face and overcome (Starr and Yudkin, 1996) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Various studies have proven that women entrepreneurs started their enterprises on their own initiative to become independent and to establish their own identity (Ghosh, 2004) <sup>[6]</sup> and it has been observed that most women are more motivated than men by non-economic goals, like personal fulfilment and independence (Burke et al, 2002; Orhan) <sup>[2]</sup>.

In India's context the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs are very unique and not only confined to businesses dynamics but also the social structures like lack of education, male dominated society, lack of entrepreneurial aptitude, legal bottlenecks, exploitation by intermediaries etc. (Sharma, 2013) <sup>[7]</sup>.

### Objectives

This paper is based on the following main objectives.

1. Study the factors that motivates women from the state of Meghalaya to become entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.
2. To be aware of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the state of Meghalaya.

### Research Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature with elements of primary and secondary data with both quantitative and qualitative approach. The primary data is collected through an in-depth interview method with the help of a well-structured questionnaire. A total of 130 women entrepreneurs engaged in the tourism business was contacted in the 5 districts (tourism centric) of the state of Meghalaya namely the East Khasi Hills, West Garo Hills, West Jaintia Hills, Ri Bhoi and West Khasi Hills. The Socio-Economic structure of the 130 women entrepreneurs from the tourism sector is displayed in the table below.

The secondary research was done by reviewing journals, research papers, newspapers articles and related books. Some data has been furnished from the websites of the Government of Meghalaya, Tourism and Agriculture directorates.

### Limitation of the study

All the twelve districts of the state could not be visited primarily due to paucity of time and financial constraints.

### Discussions and Findings

Meghalaya is a land of myriad opportunities and challenges. It is a land-locked North-Eastern state located between Bangladesh on the South and West and Assam on the North and East. The State's population is predominantly tribal (85.9 percent as per the 2011 census), with the Khasis, Garos and Jaintias being the major tribes. The Khasi, Garo and Jaintia societies follow a matrilineal system, where the line of descent is from the women. The population of the State is 29.7 lakh. The main economy of the state is primarily agrarian and about 80% of the population lives in rural areas and is dependent on agriculture and allied activities for their livelihoods.

Meghalaya one of the picturesque states of the Northeast of India commonly referred as "Abode of the Clouds" and has abundant natural tourism resources with tremendous potential for economic gains and providing gainful employment for many educated unemployed youths of the state. Since the attainment of the statehood in 1972 the successive governments along with tourism stake holders have been aggressively trying to promote tourism and tourism related entrepreneurship, especially women entrepreneurs.

Some of the key initiatives for development of entrepreneurial eco systems in Meghalaya are (Planning Department Government of Meghalaya 2020-2025):-

- a. The development of the Meghalaya Entrepreneurship Promotion Strategy is a big step from our side in developing and promoting entrepreneurship for the citizens of Meghalaya.
- b. Establishing institutes like the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) and the Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE) as the nodal knowledge and capacity building institutions for enterprise development.
- c. Setting of Enterprise Facilitation Centres (EFC) in every block (46 blocks) as hubs for promotion of business development services.
- d. Bringing up the State Start Up policy that provides incentives for Start Ups and for setting up of business incubators.

Three major tribes prominently inhabit Meghalaya namely the *Khasis, Jaintias Garos* and the state is not only bestowed with scenic beauty and landscapes but also with very rich and vibrant tribal culture and folklore. The state of Meghalaya covering an area of 22,429 sq. km and is divided into 11 districts and is the wettest place in the world and about 70% of the total area is of forest and wetland region

and as per the 2011 census, the state’s population was about 29.67 lakh with 20.07% of the population residing in urban areas (16 towns) and the rest 79.95% (6026 villages) residing in the rural areas.

Since in most of the developing economies, MSMEs are considered as the backbone of economic growth and job creation. In Meghalaya, jobs in formal sector and government are not sufficient to employ all the educated youths hence, it is imperative for entrepreneurship and growth of small businesses to become a key lever in delivering social and economic growth. Meghalaya despite being known as a store house of natural and mineral resources is considered an industrially backward state as compared with other states of the country.

The state of Meghalaya, where matrilineal norms are followed in society and with rich traditional customary laws, it becomes easy for women to involve in development process in an active way. The involvement of women in economic activities has dual benefits like contributing to the economy and also facilitates women empowerment. Women empowerment means decision making capability and economic freedom which helps in raising the decision-making power of women. (Limbu and Bordoloi, 2015)<sup>[13]</sup>.

**Table 1:** Socio-Economic profile of the respondents

Variable	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Tribe & Cast of Women Entrepreneurs	Khasi-ST	55	42.30
	Jaintia-ST	38	29.23
	Garo-ST	25	19.23
	OBC	07	5.38
	General	05	3.84
Age	22 - 32	25	19.23
	33 - 43	37	28.46
	44 - 54	44	33.84
	Above 55	24	18.46
Educational Qualification	10 <sup>th</sup> Pass	06	4.61
	12 <sup>th</sup> Pass	09	6.92
	Graduate	69	53.07
	Postgraduate	46	35.38
Marital Status	Unmarried	18	13.84
	Married	79	60.76
	widow	33	25.39
Family Structure	Joint Family	38	29.23
	Nuclear Family	92	70.77
Monthly Income	Less than Rs 50,000	12	9.23
	Rs 50,000 to Rs 100,000	19	14.61
	Rs 100,000 to Rs 200,000	56	43.08
	Above Rs 200,000	43	33.08
Location of Enterprise	Urban	71	54.62
	Semi-Urban	23	17.69
	Rural	36	27.69
Size of Enterprise	Small	49	37.69
	Medium	58	44.62
	Large	23	17.69
Origin of Business	Inherited	33	25.39
	Self- created	79	60.76
	Bought	18	13.85

Source: Primary Data

**From the above Table 1 the following observation came to Light**

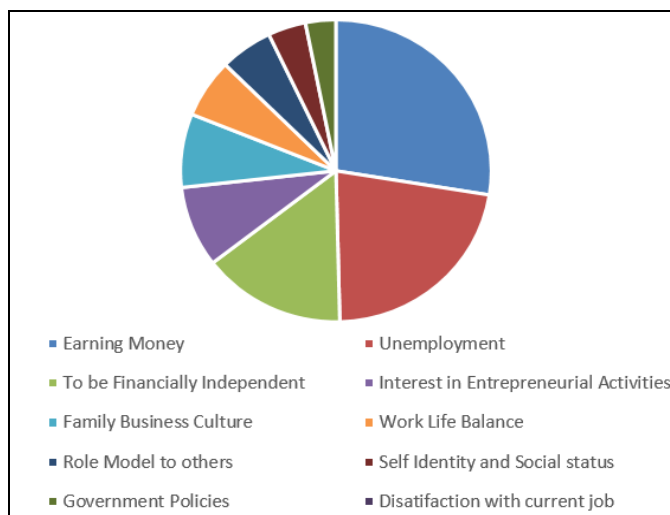
- a. The Khasi tribe had maximum women entrepreneurs, followed by the Jaintia and the Garo tribe and most of the enterprises are self-created.
- b. The age bracket for maximum number of entrepreneurs were from 44 to 54 years and the least were from the above 55 years.
- c. The educational qualification of the maximum number of the respondents were graduates and closely followed by postgraduate, which equates to that the women respondents have the required education and the necessary traits to be involve in entrepreneurial activities.
- d. Most of the respondents were married and also maximum of the respondents are from the nuclear family structure that means women entrepreneurs are being able to balance their family and professional life.
- e. The sizes of the enterprises of the respondents are from medium to small and mostly located in urban areas.

Women in Meghalaya today are taking active part in entrepreneurial activities in the Tourism sector primarily due to the tremendous boom of this sector in Meghalaya and also due to urbanization, high female literacy and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Following table shows the motivating factors of women entrepreneurs in the study area of Meghalaya.

**Table 2:** The motivating factors of women tourism entrepreneurs in the study area of Meghalaya.

SL. No.	Variables	Total	
		No.	Percentage
1	Earning Money	35	26.92
2	Unemployment	28	21.54
3	To be financially independent	19	14.62
4	Interest in entrepreneurial activities	11	8.46
5	Family business culture	10	7.69
6	Work Life balance	08	6.15
7	Role model to others	07	5.38
8	Self-identity and social status	05	3.85
9	Government Policies	04	3.08
10	Dissatisfaction with current jobs	03	2.31
	TOTAL	130	100%

Source: Primary data



**Fig 1:** Motivating Factors

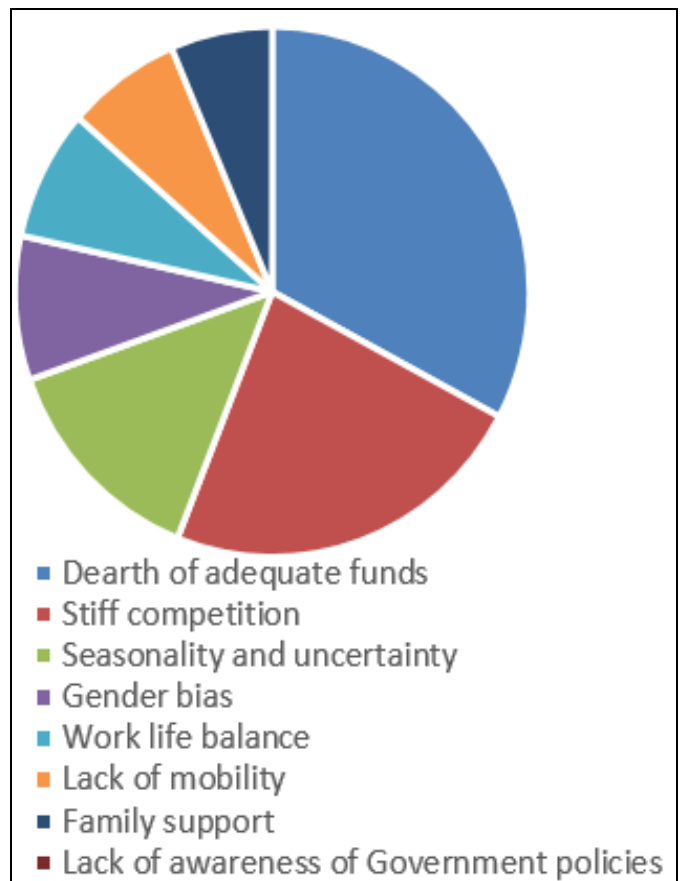
From the above table-2 the various motivating factor has come to light. Since 80% of the population of the state of Meghalaya is depended in agriculture and allied activities due to absence of large industries and low entrepreneurship development. Field survey reveals that the main motivating factor is to earn more money, dearth of jobs in the organised sector, to be financially independent, interest in entrepreneurial activities, family business culture, work life balance, dissatisfaction with current job, self-identity and favourable Government support and policies.

In most of the developing and undeveloped countries being a woman is mission in itself and to survive with numerous challenges coming up in the shape of stereotyping, hypocrisy, societal structure of conduct and many more is also a challenge in itself. Translation of the term entrepreneur in French relates to being an adventurer and when a woman embarks on this adventure in modern world of business, the challenges can be huge.

**Table 3:** The challenges faced by women tourism entrepreneurs in the study area of Meghalaya.

SL. No.	Variables	Total	
		No.	Percentage
1	Dearth of adequate funds	41	31.54
2	Stiff competition	29	22.31
3	Seasonality and uncertainty	17	13.08
4	Gender bias	11	8.46
5	Work life balance	10	7.69
6	Lack of mobility	9	6.92
7	Family support	8	6.15
8	Lack of awareness of Government policies	5	3.85
	TOTAL	130	100%

Source: Primary data



**Fig 2:** Challenges faced by women tourism entrepreneurs

### **From the above table-3 the various challenges faced by women entrepreneurs are exhibited**

- The primary challenge faced by the respondents are dearth of funds, when a women entrepreneur wants to start her enterprise, she is faced with lack of funds on two grounds. Since most of the women do not own properties whether land or assets registered in their name, so they are not being able to use them as collateral for obtaining funds from financial institutions hence sourcing extra funds from financial institutions becomes limited. Another aspect is that financial institutes are little hesitant to offer loans to women entrepreneurs as they are stereotyped of being less credit-worthy on the belief that they can wind up their business when the going gets tough.
- During the study, it was observed that the respondents are operating mainly medium and small enterprises in the tourism sector and are not part of large organizational set-ups hence they do not have the excess money for promotional activities hence they have to face stiff competition to promote their products and from their male counterparts. About 22.31 percent respondents suffer from this problem.
- One of the challenges faced by tourism entrepreneurs is the seasonality and uncertainty of this sector. Around 13.08 percent of the respondents suffer in business because of this problem and with the recent Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions and lock downs the travel and tourism industry were the worst hit among all the sectors. However, now with the ease of travel restrictions and opening of the destinations, tourism stake holders are slowly getting back to business.
- In Meghalaya despite following matrilineal society structure, where females are given an upper hand, however male chauvinism is still very dominant in this tiny hill state. Generally, tourism entrepreneurship is male dominated sector and, in the male, dominated Indian society where women is not treated equal to male and thus creating barriers to women entry into tourism business.
- Since women have to also look after their family and also to cater to their children needs and at the same time look after their business affairs so at times there is an imbalance in work life aspects and due to the imbalance, some women entrepreneurs are bound reduce their expansion activities or reduce their business activities. Around 7.69 percent of the respondents are facing this challenge in maintaining a Work Life balance.
- Any business enterprises require for extensive travelling to look for greener pastures for business expansions etc. women entrepreneurs do face this handicap as the cannot travel all the time because of family commitment issues and due to the societal norms, it becomes more difficult for a women entrepreneur to have more mobility as compared to their male counterparts, which does have adverse impact in their businesses. In the study about 6.92 percent of the respondents are facing this problem.
- Since around 71 percent of the respondents are nuclear family set up, hence family support most of the time is non existing. It also has been observed in most of the cases that immediate family members like the children and spouses have extended very less support for the

entrepreneurial activities. Around 6.15 percent of the respondents are facing this problem.

- During the study it has been observed around 3.5 percent of the respondents were not aware of the Government schemes and policies which could help them to grow their enterprises. Since the women entrepreneurs for so engrossed in their business activities and due to paucity of time various capacity building training workshops to promote entrepreneurship development by Government agencies could not reach the targeted audiences and it is also observed that some of the women entrepreneurs were not aware because of lack of publicity efforts from the Government agencies.

### **Conclusion**

The state of Meghalaya with abundant natural tourism resources, human resources, potential for agro-based industries, handloom and handicrafts and rich cultural fabric can easily be the most sought of tourism destination of the northeast. The study area primarily confined to the five districts of the state of Meghalaya being more tourism centric has revealed that there is furthermore scope for women to engage in tourism entrepreneurial activities all is required from the Government and other agencies a little hand handling and constructive support. Women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector face several challenges within and outside the household and awareness on entrepreneurship competencies and traits among them will help them to mitigate business related shortcomings. Infact, the women entrepreneurs should be made competent enough to be able to strive and sustain in the business dynamics and have the correct balance with their family affiliations.

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