# Role of women entreprenureship in N.E.I

# Woman Entrepreneur, in general terms, can be defined as any individual woman or a group of women, who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise. Government of India has defined women entrepreneurship as an enterprise owned and controlled by a women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of employment generated in the enterprise to women.

Entrepreneurship is a difficult undertaking as it calls for innovative ideas, risk –taking, strong business acumen and effective leadership in all aspects of business. It’s a challenging role for a woman but growing sensitivity towards the role of a thinking individual and increasing economic independence has made it possible today for several women to don the entrepreneur’s hat.

The modern concept of women entrepreneurship took shape in this region of the country on from the eighties. Contrary to the popular notion that women from the north east are still backward, they have come a long way now and have established themselves as successful and thriving entrepreneurs not only in the region but also beyond the boundaries of the nation.

Like most women entrepreneurs in India, these women from the NE region have also embarked on their entrepreneurial journey in a relatively smaller scale, mostly based out of their homes. They began with traditionally women-oriented business like beauty and well-being, garments, fashion, handloom and handicrafts etc, mostly without any formal training or a rigid business framework.

Entrepreneurship has always intrigued researchers over the years as it is hard to define. It has generally been assumed, however, that the entrepreneur is male. Historically and traditionally, women have been confined to the private sphere of the household, doing the daily chores and tending to her family’s needs. Therefore, they have been denied access to the requisite resources for entrepreneurial entry--access to capital, business and technical education, and prior management experience.

It is a truth that there are gender prejudices almost everywhere. She is seen as a woman first and then as an entrepreneur. There is also constant competition and antagonistic approach from their male counterparts that make things more difficult for them. It is not an easy path to tread upon but there are several women entrepreneurs in India who have made their mark against all heavy odds, social pressures and cultural shackles.

Great people like Mahatma Gandhi also actively encouraged women’s participation in public life as he said, “Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the activities of man….” But, at the same time, he also said, “I do not believe in women working for a living or undertaking commercial enterprise.”

In the North Eastern region of India, designed and methodical efforts in entrepreneurship development began in the 70’s and Assam is the pioneer in this field. In 1973, Assam started a novel experiment on entrepreneurship development by setting up district level agencies known as entrepreneurial motivational training centres (EMTC) to identify, select, and train prospective entrepreneurs and provide them all support services to start and run their enterprises. The name Lalita Devi Jain, fondly known as Madhu by the people of Guwahati, Assam has shaped her own destiny in the entrepreneurial arena. She created her own brand ‘Madhushree’ and has marched her way forward to carve a niche in the global market. She started with five looms and over the period of last more than 25 years, she has built up 50 looms. Almost 200 women are employed and they all have become the part of the family to create the brand of Madhushree.

In this regard, Kos Zhasa of Nagaland, a woman in her early thirties is worth mentioning. She is keen to redefine and redesign handloom and handicraft products so that they are in tune with today's world. Zhasa made a significant mark in the recently concluded India International Trade Fair (IITF) in New Delhi. A product of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) Delhi, she started out on her own as a fashion designer. The clothes that she designs reflect her thinking. Her idea is to create an all-India niche for products of the North East.

Women of the North East are now playing a proactive role in all walks of life but in the field of business, it has not been a very easy journey for them to enter the threshold of a man’s arena. Nevertheless, Assamese women like Jahnabi Phookan, owner of Jungle Travels India are successfully combating long-standing prejudices and are mounting the steps of triumph and accomplishment in the tourism industry. Along with her husband Ashish Phookan, Jahnabi has successfully established her position in the tourism industry not only in Assam but also in the whole North Eastern region.

An enterprise need not be overwhelming so as to awe everyone else with a grand brand image. But sometimes the best enterprises are those done quietly on a small scale like entrepreneur and innovator Ningombam ningol Khumujam Ongbi Jina.

Today, North Eastern women have also move beyond the known and have ventured into the less traversed sectors in entrepreneurship. Saroj Khemka from Assam is an entrepreneur who dons several hats in the world of business. She is the Proprietor of M/s Meghalaya Hume Pipe Industries,

One of the most eco-friendly sites in the map of India, North East is perhaps the most untapped minefield of potential resources. This isolated and mysterious land of natural abundance, have a host wonders to offer for entrepreneurs.

In Assam, industries like tea, cane and bamboo, teracotta, pottery, metal works of brass and bell, wood carvings, weaving and toys have immense prospects. The work of making Japi is also popular in Assam. Furniture pieces of cane and bamboo are exclusive to Assam and are exported. The skill of Terracotta makes everything including idols of Gods and mythological creatures and the pottery tradition in Assam results in wonderful items like earthen pot and pitchers, plates, incense stick holders and earthen lamps. Assam also fashions many types of toys like clay toys, pith, wooden and bamboo toys, cloth toys, cloth-and-mud toys. Besides, Cotton, ‘Eri’, ‘Pat’ and ‘Muga’ Silk are the weaving heritages of the region.

Agro and food processing industry is another area for entrepreneurship in the NE region, specially mushroom cultivation which is flourishing in the area. Moreover, entrepreneurs can venture into areas like agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, poultry, animal husbandry and forest which would improve value addition in the agricultural produce, employment generation in the region.

Entrepreneurship is all about innovation and risk - taking and with abundant opportunities offered by the land, North East India can be a haven for entrepreneurs.

No doubt, women entrepreneurs are taking great advantage of the plethora of resources and opportunities available and glass ceilings are being shattered by women entrepreneurs today.