INTRODUCTION

We are now living in an era that compels every country to stay competitive in a globalized world. It is possible only through economic growth, sustained economic growth. This presupposes all round growth which encompasses social, political, cultural and other dimensions of development. A major task, therefore, is to stimulate the people to undertake productive economic activity. Every able – bodied individual has to be brought into the main stream of development, instead of just providing a livelihood. Thus, the concepts of self-employment and entrepreneurship have been thought of as the backbone of national reconstruction, progress and prosperity. In this context, well – guided entrepreneurship assumes supreme importance through public sector undertakings, creating a single door economy. This concept involves the process of transforming creative ideas into commercially viable business. Successful entrepreneurship is a cohesive process of creativity, risk taking, and planning. Germination of entrepreneurship largely depends on the prevailing culture of the society. The creation of a positive entrepreneurial culture is possible only if there is adequate social, political, economical and physical infrastructural support. Good entrepreneurs can work wonders. They hold the potential to transform a backward, decadent economy into a most flourishing state. Hence the golden adage- “an economy is the effect for which entrepreneurship is the cause.”

Entrepreneurial activity is widely seen as an engine of economic growth. It can contribute to the creation of wealth and jobs, may foster innovation, and provides autonomy and a sense of personal accomplishment to the individual. Women are even now kept away from participating in entrepreneurial activities. However currently there is a growing recognition that development can be significantly accelerated if more women could be encouraged to become entrepreneurs. But the fact remains that woman as entrepreneurs need to be supported. Women, while still a minority in the business world, have in them inherent entrepreneurial potential and are, or can be, an important resource for economic growth and, by implication, for job creation. Women’s entrepreneurship appears to be an ‘untapped source of economic growth’\(^1\). Despite the fact that women represent more than half of the world population and are very large source of human capital with huge potential,\(^2\) they account for only less than half of their male counterparts in the field of business initiation.
and promotion. However, women are starting small business in record numbers. Although women’s participation in entrepreneurial activity is increasing all over the world, their activity is still undervalued and underplayed. Women-owned businesses are generally less profitable than men’s, their size remains small in terms of revenues and number of employees owing to the limitations of the spheres where they develop their businesses: retail and services.

Investment in women’s entrepreneurship is an important way for countries to exponentially increase the impact of new venture creation. Ignoring the proven potential of women’s entrepreneurial activity means that countries put themselves at a disadvantage and disuse an important opportunity tool for achieving economic growth. For this reason, finding ways to empower women’s participation and success in entrepreneurship is critical for ensuring sustained and successful economic development in all countries.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Kerala is the only state in India where women outnumber men. No other state in the country has attained such a level of physical quality of life index (PQL), lower infant mortality, higher life expectancy as Kerala has. Despite these advantages, the role of women in the economic field is at a low ebb and their contribution towards industrial development is meagre. One reason that could be attributed for the slow pace of progress of women with particular reference to the industrial sector is the lack of 'entrepreneurship' warranting qualities such as desire, determination and courage. Women of Kerala lag behind in these areas resulting in their marginalization in the task of boosting the industrial economy of the state. The condition is much better in most other states in the country. The dearth of women in the public domain of Kerala, despite the commendable improvement in their educational and health status presents a paradox that has drawn considerable public attention during the recent years. The realization that women can make substantial contributions to the economy has led social scientists, policy makers and administers to devise ways of developing planned Entrepreneurship with particular emphasis on women. The government in its efforts to create Entrepreneurship in the underdeveloped regions has started creating conditions for women participation, including infrastructural facilities, easy access to raw materials, finance and assistance in marketing the products. Other incentives are also given in the form of providing raw materials, capital and subsidies. With this thrust in view, the state government has instituted various agencies to cater to the different needs of women entrepreneurs. The governmental efforts, incentives and
benefits are being extensively advertised. All these are likely to attract those women competent to assume the role of entrepreneurs and enable them to establish their own industrial units. Furthermore, some special institutions have been created to provide well developed sites for locating industries and there are agencies, attending to entrepreneurs’ problems. Of course, such efforts are necessary to make up for the limitations of the small entrepreneurs. But in spite of these incentives the participation of women in the wealth creation process is far from satisfactory. The main reason seems to be the lack of success. By and large, the pronouncements in this regard have turned out to be mere political rhetoric. Much remains to be done. However, government has introduced several new programmes for boosting women Entrepreneurship in the state. A critical evaluation of the existing governmental and nongovernmental efforts indicates that training and technical assistance offered are not geared to suit the individual needs. They are only “capsule” inputs focusing on the vested interests of individual trainers and considering the training as an “end” in itself. In the light of institutional and financial support offered to the women entrepreneurs from different sources in the recent times, an extensive survey and intensive assessment of women enterprises and women entrepreneurship promotional programmes in the state of Kerala are of utmost importance, even an imperative necessity. All these important reasons embolden the researcher to make a probe in this direction. The present study is a survey and analysis of the development measures, adopted by the government and various other financial institutions in Kerala, in the promotion of women entrepreneurship. It is necessary to evaluate the performance and the problems of all the available entrepreneurs. Efforts are to be made to find out as to whether or not the women are the beneficiaries of the facilities and incentives provided by the different agencies for the development of entrepreneurship. It also includes profiles of most of the key agencies involved in promoting women's entrepreneurship and specific recommendations for policy-makers aimed at enhancing the economic empowerment of women throughout the country. Since women entrepreneurs are predominantly found in the small scale sector, a review of the development of women in this sector which will provide a vivid picture of their status in the entrepreneurial scenario will form an important part of this research.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the centuries, the words of ‘Entrepreneur’ and ‘Entrepreneurship’ have been used in various senses. Conventionally entrepreneurship has been considered as an inborn trait of the individual. In the middle ages ‘entrepreneur’ was used to denote a person who
was active and got things done’. The term ‘Entrepreneur’ is rooted in the French word, ‘Entreprendre’, which means ‘to undertake’. In the earlier 16th century it was applied to those who were engaged in military expeditions. In the 17th century the term was used to mark civil engineering activities such as construction and fortification. It was first introduced into fiscal science by the early 18th century French economist Richard Cantillon. In his writings he defines the entrepreneur as the ‘agent who buys means of production at certain prices in order to combine them’ into a new product. His definition propounded the uncertainty-bearing function. Cantillon saw the entrepreneur as the individual who handles ‘venture capital’ and takes on the risk of decision-making. Essential to this opinion is the uncertainty of the market. He portrayed an entrepreneur as one discharging the function of direction and speculation. By enlarging its scope, he stated that ‘Anybody engaged in economic activity was an entrepreneur’. An entrepreneur is one who takes risks and starts something new. He is the artist of the business world. “In any developing country industrial development does not occur automatically, but is a result of the constant striving of human agencies, that agencies have been termed as “Entrepreneurship”.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS THE CONCEPT

“To fail to pay attention to women’s economic activities is both morally indefensible and economically absurd.”

A general definition of entrepreneur can be described as ‘an individual or group of individuals, who creates something new, unites various factors of production, and bears risk in the operation of a business enterprise.’ Entrepreneurship is assumed to be sex neutral. No definition of entrepreneurship has a sex bias and hence, it encompassed women entrepreneurs without any reservations. The European Commission’s Best Project defines a female entrepreneur as: ‘a woman who has created a business in which she has a majority shareholding and who takes an active interest in the decision-making, risk-taking and daytodaymanagement’ The OECD analysis defines entrepreneurial activity by women as:’ the establishment, management, growth and death of independent firms’.

The Central and State Governments have always been giving preferential treatment to women by encouraging, equipping and facilitating them to become entrepreneurs, ultimately engaging them in productive industrial sector for self-employment, and generating additional employment in the state. In this context, the Central Government has given a specific definition for women Industrial units as follows;
“A Small scale industrial unit/industry related service or business enterprise, managed by one or more women entrepreneurs in proprietary concerns, or in which she/they individually have a share capital of not less than 51% as partners/share holders/directors of private limited company/members of co-operating society and with not less than 80% women employees”.

OBJECTIVE

The broad objective of the study was to find out the efficacy of the various women entrepreneurship promotional measures, being promoted by the government and financial institutions in the state and to identify the insufficiencies and flaws. The specific objectives of the study were;

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To spot the reasons for the slow growth of women entrepreneurship in Kerala.
2. To find out the motivational factors behind women entrepreneurship and to know the type of supports, received by the entrepreneurs from the government, financial institutions and family members.
3. To inquire into the specific problems confronting the women entrepreneurs in the state and also to study the performance of women entrepreneurs
4. To suggest appropriate measures to overcome the common problems and issues faced by the women entrepreneurs in the state.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference between women entrepreneurs from various districts on the awareness of governmental agencies. (Chi square)
2. There is no significant difference in the entrepreneurs belonging to different districts with respect to training programmes attended. (Chi square)
3. There is no significant difference between the amounts availed from entrepreneurship development promotional agencies and success rate.(Chi square)
4. There is no significant difference between trained and non- trained entrepreneurs in terms of success rate.(ANOVA)
5. There is no significant difference between the skills developed before and after attending the training programmes. (wilcoxon matched paired test)
6. There is no significant difference in the business performance indicators of the entrepreneurs before and after attending training programmes. (Wilcoxon matched paired test)
7. There is no significant difference between the success rates of entrepreneurs with respect to experience before the establishment of the enterprise. (ANOVA)
8. There is no significant difference in success rate of entrepreneurs with respect to business awareness. (ANOVA)
9. There is no significant difference in success rate with respect to the district to which they belong. (ANOVA)
10. There is no significant difference in success rate with respect to age category of the respondents. (ANOVA)
11. There is no significant difference in success rate with respect to education. (ANOVA)
12. There is no significant difference in success rate with respect to reasons for entering entrepreneurship. (ANOVA)
13. There is no significant difference in success rate of respondents with respect to the nature of enterprise. (ANOVA)

**VARIABLES USED IN THE STUDY**

To identify the socio-economic and business profile of women entrepreneurs.

1. Age
2. Education
3. Marital status
4. Religion
5. Marital status
6. Place of birth
7. Family background
8. Family occupation
9. Family size
10. Reasons for entrepreneurial career
11. Nature of unit
12. Year of establishment
13. Mode of starting
14. Location of business
15. Initial investment made
16. Management of the business
17. Source of funds
18. Marketing and promotional strategies
19. Fixing of selling price
20. Mode of sales
21. Nature of help from family members
22. Conflict between domestic and entrepreneurial role

To identify the role of Government and Financial institutions in the development of women entrepreneurship

1. Awareness of government agencies
2. Government agencies approached
3. Availing of the schemes of assistance
4. Training programmes attended
5. Type of training attended
6. Skills developed through training (before and after training)
7. Business performance indicators (before and after training)
8. Development/support services utilized
9. Response regarding general services
10. Awareness of financial institutions
11. Financial institutions approached
12. Lending schemes utilized
13. Sufficiency of the borrowed fund
14. Time lag between application and sanctioning of loan
15. Problems faced while availing assistance
16. Awareness of associations meant for women entrepreneur
17. Attitude towards support organizations
18. Perception of the officers of Government and Financial institutions about the performance of the women entrepreneurs

To calculate Entrepreneurship Success Index (ESI),

1. Profitability
2. Social recognition
3. Consumer satisfaction
4. Brand recognition
5. Quality of products
6. Capacity utilization
7. Diversification of products
8. Level of satisfaction

For identifying the problems of women entrepreneurs
1. Financial problems
2. Marketing problems
3. Socio-personal problems
4. Production problems
5. Labour problems
6. Technical problems

RESEARCH DESIGN

Survey research design has been used in carrying out in the present study as the study aimed at finding out the profile of women entrepreneurs with respect to socio-economic characteristics, entrepreneurial performance, the support received from government and financial institutions involved in the promotion of women entrepreneurship, extent of satisfaction of supports received and the current problems and constraints faced by the entrepreneurs.

SELECTION OF SAMPLE

The respondents of the study consist of women entrepreneurs, employees of government and financial institutions. The study involved collection of required information from women entrepreneurs. Sampling of the districts in which the study was to be carried out and of women entrepreneurs was, therefore needed. It was not possible to conduct the study so as to cover the whole of Kerala. Six revenue districts of Kerala state constitute the universe for the study. (Trivandrum, Idukki, Alappuzha, Ernakulum, Thrissur, and Kottayam) these six districts were selected at random. The list of the names and addresses of registered unit was collected from the District Industries Centers (DIC). The women entrepreneurs who registered their units on or before 31st March 2006 were selected, because it should be a running unit for at least 3 years and have overcome its initial teething troubles. According to the Data of the industrial records, there were 53204 units registered in the name of women as on 31st March, 2006. And the total numbers of units in these six districts are 29969 as on 31-03-2006. A uniform sample of 50 women entrepreneurs per district was taken. So the sample number for the study constitutes 300 units.
The researcher had tried to collect the list of women entrepreneurs from the financial institutions, but it was a hectic task. There was no separate list of women entrepreneurs available with these agencies; even if a list was there it was clubbed with those who had borrowed for agricultural purposes, gold loans. So the sample women entrepreneurs were taken from the records of district Industries Centre, i.e. those who have registered their units with DIC. The collection of data was a hectic task, as the list available from the District Industries Centers did not tally with the existing women entrepreneurs. It was found that only half of this number is actually functioning. Others were closed down or could not be traced either because the firms had gone out of existence /changed name, ownership, location or were only paper organization and had never been in the field. Moreover, half of the functioning units were found to be managed by men in the family. The proportion of jointly managed units was equally high. Very few units were run entirely by women. Another problem faced was that while the entrepreneurs and the addresses remain unchanged, the type of enterprise and even its name had changed. It was found that half of the selected units were defunct or not functioning in the reported premises. There were also units which were registered but were never started because the loan they applied did not come through. And many of the units were unwilling to give the details, were not available in spite of repeated visits, and were angry about too many official visits. It seems that they were afraid that it was a sort of follow up from the government agencies. Obstacles faced during the data collection phase were important and still exist for future researches. As most of the units are not functioning or difficult to locate; stratification of enterprises belonging to different product lines was not possible. In the case of units found not functioning, or not traceable and those units which are registered in the names of women but have no role to play, then the next unit from the list was taken. Repeat visits were needed in most cases. Care was taken to ensure that women entrepreneurs were taken from all the product groups.

**TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION**

The study is based on a field level investigation done among the women entrepreneurs. The research instrument used for data collection was interview schedule. The interview schedule was standardized after conducting a pilot study. The researcher personally contacted the respondents in their houses/workplaces and persuaded them to respond with the queries in the schedule. Each question was explained to them and maximum care was taken to collect as much information as possible.
SOURCES OF DATA

Data will be gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from women entrepreneurs and the various officials in Government and non-government sector engaged in the development of women entrepreneurship activity.

The secondary data has been mainly drawn from various records and publications of Directorate of industries and commerce, State Planning Board, District Industries Centers, Khadi and Village Industries Board, Kerala Financial Corporation, Small Industries Service Institute, Kerala State Women’s Development Corporation, Periodical and websites of Government and Non government organizations and Data from financial and other records of enterprises run by women. The reports of various commissions and committees have been of immense help in the study.

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS

The data collected were classified in order and suitably analyzed keeping in view the objectives set for the study. For the purpose of analysis, the statistical tools such as averages, percentages, ratios, weighted average, Chi-square, ANOVA, Student T Test and Wilcoxon paired T test were used. Entrepreneurship success index was calculated to evaluate the level of success achieved by women entrepreneurs. Eight dimensions were selected. And the scores achieved were calculated on a hedonic scale. On the basis of that woman entrepreneurs were divided into four levels of success.

FUTURE RESEARCH SCOPE

The scope for future research based on the findings of the study includes; Research to be undertaken about the women entrepreneurs in the unregistered sector who are performing extremely well compared to the registered units with the DIC.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations which influenced the study are listed below. The study has been made on the basis of secondary and primary data.

1. The secondary data has been obtained mainly from the report and publications of the government departments. Therefore the accuracy of the study based on secondary data depends upon the reliability of data obtained from these sources.

2. The co-operation of respondents is very much required for a survey based research. The co-operation of few respondents did not come up to the expectations.
3. As most of the women enterprises are SSI units with limited capital investment, the study is mainly confined to assessing their socio economic status, problems, etc. this may not be the situation of large sized women managed enterprises with high capital investment.

4. Since the government machinery does not maintain relevant records of women entrepreneurs, the study assumes that the data supplied by the respondents are reliable and correct.

5. Unregistered units were excluded from the scope of the study, though they may be as large in number as the registered units.

6. Owing to the non traceability of the wound up units, a study of the same could not be made.

**RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study will be helpful in identifying and strengthening the role of women entrepreneurs in the SSI units thereby helps to contribute towards the development process. It will also help to fulfill the social objectives. The study will thus contribute towards

1. Encouragement of entrepreneurship, particularly among the women entrepreneurship in the state of Kerala.
2. Improvement in the status of women.
3. Economic development through SSI sector.
4. Effective utilization of present and future government assistance schemes to SSI units of women entrepreneurs.

**CHAPTERISATION**

The entire study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is the introductory chapter and the research methodology. The second chapter goes into detail the concepts of entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurship, the status of women entrepreneurs in SSI units in Kerala and India, and also about the various schemes of the central and state government for the development of women entrepreneurship. The third chapter is the review of literature. The fourth chapter is the analysis of data, socio economic profile of women. The fifth chapter is about the assistance sample women entrepreneurs had received from government agencies and financial institutions. The sixth chapter is the various problems faced by women entrepreneurs. And the seventh chapter includes findings, suggestions and conclusion.
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. To overcome the impediments and constraints and to motivate prospective and existing women entrepreneurs in Kerala, different government agencies as well as financial agencies are offering various support measures in terms of financial assistance, providing scarce raw materials, skill development training facilities, marketing supports etc. However, due to unawareness and lack of publicity, most of these incentives and facilities remain unutilized, only a few women entrepreneurs could avail of the services rendered by them. It is pertinent to mention here that even amongst those who were aware of the existence of such schemes, a majority replied that they are not fully aware of all the schemes of assistance. Lack of adequate promotional efforts on the part of support agencies could be the major reason behind ignorance of a big chunk of the respondents regarding the various schemes of assistance. The various agencies for the promotion of entrepreneurship need to establish their credibility in the eyes of potential and existing entrepreneurs and must motivate the entrepreneurs to avail of the benefits provided by them.

2. It is to be noted that though a number of EDP agencies are active in imparting training to the prospective and aspiring entrepreneurs, it appears that much effort is not taken to see whether the objective of EDPs is fulfilled or not. In simple words, there is a need to have a retrospective look into how many participants have actually started their own enterprises after completing the training. This calls for evaluation of EDPs. Most of the respondents in this study stated that the Procedure adopted for the Selection of the Participants should be proper in terms of potential of the participants. Hence, it is suggested to the EDP Organizers to search and adopt potential aspirant Entrepreneurs. To make the EDP effective, the Trainers must be trained in a proper way.

3. In spite of all these developmental measures, the SSI has not been able to play their role to the full extent as envisaged in our plans. Most of them face a number of problems in managing their enterprises. This has been ascribed mainly due to financial and marketing difficulties. Many units get sick during the first two or three years of their inception itself, without making any inroad into developing a market for their products. The rate of growth in the number of sick units is much higher in Kerala than the rest of the country. Most of the units that had been established long ago do not find themselves capable of undertaking expansion and modernization of their
production facilities. While many have closed down, others have fallen sick and are on the verge of closure.

CONCLUSION

It goes without saying that the topic chosen by the researcher for a detailed study is of supreme importance and stupendous magnitude. Women now constitute a decisive force with which the future destiny of the world is inextricably blended. Its natural corollary is that it is most essential to help her throw away the fetters that an inequitable tradition has been using to suppress the enormous potential inherent in womanhood, lest universal peace and harmony should ever remain a distant dream. The best way to realize the man–woman equality and harmony, visualized in the most glorious document- Indian Constitution –is to bring her into the mainstream of economic activity by extending all possible assistance to help her latent capabilities in building up a progressive modern India. The study shows that the present institutional support system is inadequate to support the sustainable development of women entrepreneurship in the state. Most of the women engaged in this trade are discontented and quite unhappy with the support system in existence now. Official harassment and corruption have turned the arena into an Aegean stable. If the government does not step in with stringent measures and an impeccable will to set matters right, the future of women entrepreneurship in Kerala is bleak. The researcher is an optimist. There is still room for hope. Can the researcher hope that her efforts to highlight the pitiable condition of women entrepreneurs in Kerala will not prove a cry in the bewilderness?

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