

Inclusive Vocational Education: Key to Women Empowerment and Sustainable Livelihoods: A Case study of Home Based Zardozi Women Artisans of Bhopal

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the role of Vocational Education in women empowerment and also making it more inclusive especially for home based women artisans. VET is critical for economic growth and social development. However for reaping its full benefits it needs to be more inclusive. Studies on Artisans in India range through a variety of perspectives and disciplines, such as Development-oriented studies, Surveys, Sociological studies, Anthropological and Ethnographic accounts. But there is a gap in studies on vocational education for inclusion of home based women artisans in the mainstream economy. Also whatever studies have been undertaken contemporary attempt to review the scholarly literature on the status and position of home based women artisans is deeply missing. Thus the present study was undertaken with a view of to find out the factors that would enhance the inclusion of women through vocational education specifically the home based women artisans. Review of literature, observation and case study methods with purposive sampling were used for data collection. The findings revealed that for vocational education to be more inclusive and beneficial it has to address the socio-cultural, economic and personal barriers which limit the extent to which women can reap its benefits.

Keyword: Inclusive, Vocational Education, Home based Women Artisans, Women Empowerment, Sustainable Livelihoods

Introduction

Changing Role of Women in Society

The role of women in family and society has undergone vast changes, more so in the last decade. Today they are emerging as self-reliant individuals with equality of status in all spheres of activity. Many laws have been enacted to prevent them from exploitation. Educational opportunities have been enlarged to improve their literacy. They are experiencing an increasing urge for economic independence towards emancipation in the real sense. The society is becoming greatly aware of the imperative need to bring them into the main stream of socio-economic activity. *Access of Women and Girls to Technical Education in India. (1991).*

The emerging trends in technology and world of work indicate great scope for large scale employment of women, particular/y in the skill-intensive and knowledge-intensive modern sectors. There is a pressing need to release the more than 60 per cent of women engaged in

agriculture and home-based occupations from the drudgery and long hours of work as well as to improve their productivity and wage earning capacity.

As in many other countries, religious traditions, social structures, cultural norms and value systems had created wide variations and inequalities among people in India also. These factors had adversely affected the social status of many sections of the society and restricted their opportunities for effective participation in socio-economic activities. Among them, women were the worst hit. The inequalities heaped on them for many centuries have however started receding due to the untiring efforts of many social reformers during the past 150 years. 4 In the present context, women are increasingly becoming aware of their role in the nation building processes and activities, particularly relating to socio-economic development for which technical and vocational education has become critical and crucial. Moreover, transformations taking place in the society in terms of increasing consciousness for equal status of women, growing legislation for removal of discrimination against them, changing societal perceptions for their amelioration, widening educational opportunities for With the advent of industrialization, urbanization and formal educational system, men started moving away from their occupations, hitherto confined to agriculture and village-based crafts, to urban and wage-based vocations. Alongside men, many women also had migrated to nearby towns and cities and joined the work force as unskilled laborers accepting wages lower than those paid to men - a beginning which eventually led to the practice of discrimination against women in employment and payment of wages. ***Access of Women and Girls to Technical Education in India. (1991).***

The economic pressures experienced in the later part of the twentieth century due to increasing cost of living prompted women to look at education as a means of livelihood, employment, career growth and opportunity for advancement. Still female education lags behind then their male counterparts. The level of participation in formal education continues to remain lower for women than for men. **(Diwakar, N. Ahamad, T. 2015)**

Home Based Women Artisans

In India, women play a significant role in shaping the nation's economy. A large number of women are particularly employed in the MSME (medium, small and micro enterprises) and cottage industries. **(Gangopadhyay et.al. 2020)** Many of these women artisans work from home especially in the handicraft and handloom sector (hereafter called home based women artisans).

Though Home based work gives the freedom of economic independence to women with simultaneously looking after their household duties more so in the lower economic strata of the society, it also comes with its cons. They accept dual work burden of home and livelihood, low wages, un-ergonomic working conditions and long working hours. Lack of education in these home based women artisans has made the matters worse. Home-based businesses are often considered as a hobby or artisan type of businesses run on a part time basis mostly by women. **Walker, E. (2003).** In the recent decades there has been a considerable rise in the job opportunities in the Indian craft and design sector yet the presence of Indian women remains seriously undervalued and unrecognized. **Sharma, P. (2020).**

In India, a large section of the artisan population in-general and Southern Indian in particular, lacks formal education and is illiterate. This lack of education along with poverty makes them more vulnerable. **Sruthi, C. H., & Ramesh, T. R. (2015).**

In traditional, pre-industrialization and pre-globalisation society the skill education took place in family as most of the occupations were ancestral and passed down orally from generation to generation. However, many events such as industrialization, globalization, urbanization led to migration of people from rural to urban areas and transformation of joint families into nuclear families.

This led to women confined at home for taking care of children and other household duties. However economic pressures of a city life required extra income which led to women stepping into home based work such as stitching, bangle-making, embroidery and other such occupations.

Issues and Challenges of Home based Artisans

Previous studies in various home based artisans have revealed the following issues and challenges

- Dual burden of household and work
- Not able to take more work due to household responsibilities
- Not enough time to rest and exercise
- Neglecting health for household duties and work
- Poor work conditions leading to poor posture and associated health risks
- Dependency on middle men for work and payments Less wages
- No direct contact with customer

Vocational Education as a Means for Women Empowerment and Sustainable Livelihood Creation

Vocational Education can be defined as the education that is based on occupation and employment. Vocational Education is also known as career and technical education (CTE) or technical and vocational education and training (TVET). It prepares people for specific trades, crafts and careers at various levels in all spheres of life. It involves various practical activities. It is sometimes referred as technical education because the trainee directly develops expertise in a particular group of techniques. It is related to the age-old apprenticeship system of learning. In other words Vocational Education may be classified as teaching procedural knowledge. It consists basically of practical courses through which one gains skills and experience directly linked to a career in future. It helps students to be skilled and in turn, offers better employment opportunities. **Gupta, J., & Alam, S. (n.d.).**

VET is an important drive to address poverty reduction by improving employability, productivity, and helping sustainable development and inclusive growth for women empowerment. It facilitates a cycle of high productivity, increased employment opportunities, income growth and development. On the other hand from a development perspective, investing in the education and training of females has the highest rate of return of any possible investment in developing countries; educated mothers having fewer children invest more in the health & education of each child thereby raising the productivity of future generations, increasing their income, and generating sustainable growth. **Hussain, M.R 2018**

Understanding needs of Home Based Women Artisans for inclusive vocational education

Vocational courses are typically more practical and skills-based than academic degrees, but they are often taught at universities as well as colleges and technical institutes. **Gupta, J., & Alam, S. (n.d.).**

In a study on kaamdani home based women artisans in Awadh it was found that these women face two prominent difficulties which prevents them from entering formal or higher-paying informal employment. One is lack of mobility owing to child care and second is the burden of unpaid housework. Their economic condition doesn't allow them to afford house help or crèches. **Shimmers in a Dull Room: Experiences of Home-Based Women Artisans in the Kaamdani Craft. (2022).**

In the present socio-economic set up, self-employment of women requires much more than training in a particular vocation. Agencies in charge of women's welfare, both governmental and voluntary, have emphasized informal training to improve women's earning capacity, especially in the lower income groups. **Gupta, J., & Alam, S. (n.d.).**

Enrollment of Women in Vocational education programmes is low (**Kapur, R. 2018**)

VET not only provide self-employment opportunity to the women but also trigger capability to exercise to control over their personal and family life, make choices to improve well beings and take active role in decision making. Women's access to education and training can have a major impact on their potential to access and benefit from income generating opportunities and improve their overall well-being. There are variety of Vocation Training Programs are run by Government of India and other Non-Governmental Organisations to fulfil the need of Women Empowerment **Hussain M.R. 2018**

There are problems and barriers that normally occur in the course of acquiring education and training such as financial problems, family problems, fear of failure, pressure, stress and so forth. **Kapur, R. 2018.**

Most of the vocational education programmes require women to step out of the house, the home based women artisans were unwilling to leave their homes to seek training and employment. Most employment opportunities are often available in factories in cities where it is difficult to work for long hours.

Specific training approaches and support activities should be developed through feasibility studies to increase the number of women in the training courses . **Kapur, R. 2018.**

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is imperative for nation building. Unless the needs and interest of women are taken into account holistically development cannot take place since women constitute half of the population. In fact, a nation and its progress are strengthened by empowered women.

Since development means improvement in the living conditions of the society, as a whole it is logical to expect that this also mean improved status for women. Accordingly empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems.

Empowerment of women is empowering the whole of family, household and in turn of development of a nation. It also means recognizing women's contribution and their knowledge. It means helping women fight their own fears and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority It means women enhancing their self-respect and self-dignity. It means women controlling their own bodies. It means women becoming economically independent and self-reliant. It means women controlling resources like land and property. It means reducing women's burden of work, especially at home. It means creating and strengthening women's group and organisation. **Hussain, M.R. 2018**

Methodology

The present study is based on both secondary and primary data. The secondary data were collected from research papers, blogs, government reports, conference proceedings and the primary data were collected through observation and case study method. 6 home based women artisans were selected purposively for the present study. A qualitative approach was used for the study and researchers collected the data through observation and interview method. The interviews were kept unstructured to get the perceptions and experiences of the respondents. These were recorded and then analysed for the results.

Results and Discussion

Case I:

Razia, 36 years and mother of three children, works as a part-time zardozi artisan from her home. Her husband works as mechanic and brings home about 15,000 Rs. a month which is not sufficient for the family's needs. They also have to send money back home to their old parents who stay in a nearby village and don't want to shift to the city in their last days. Thus, Razia started taking orders for batua making at home to support her family. Many other ladies in her locality also take orders for zardozi and beadwork batuas which are Bhopal's identity right from the days of Begums' rule. Her day starts at 5:00 am in the morning for making Tiffin for her children and husband and ends at 11:00 pm at night after feeding her husband who also works as a part time waiter at a local eatery after his regular mechanic duties. She is able to take out time for batua making from 10:00 am after winding all her household duties of cooking, cleaning and sits till one pm when her children return from school. After feeding her children and some other household work she sits again at around three pm for two hours till 5 pm when its time for her to cook evening meals and prepare for next days tiffin. Educated only till 10th she is not able to find decent work and needs to be at home for taking care of her children. Thus she is forced to work for meagre payments. She is not savvy with social media and banking also which further restricts her entrepreneurial capabilities also. She earns around 4000 rs from her zardozi and bead work embroidery which is mostly spent in supporting her families requirements.

Case II:

Asthma, 23 years and an MBA drop out, is well versed with mobile phone, social media and banking. She is also able to read and write in English as well as Hindi. However, being recently married, she is not allowed to work outside the confinement of her home. She had to drop out of her studies due to the untimely demise of her father during corona and her brothers were not able to support her education with the meagre agricultural income they had from a small patch of ancestral land owned by them and their daily wages jobs.

Seen as a liability after her father's death, she was forced to drop her studies and marry. She came across a training programme in zardozi and enrolled for it. It has been only an year that she has started working as a zardozi artisan from home. She has attended two government training programmes in two years after moving out to Bhopal in 2021 but is not able to find continuous work. She also opines that the training programmes are a mere formality and focus only on embroidery skills whereas they should also focus on building customer connect and markets for their products. Most of the times, people attend these training for daily remuneration. They are not serious in learning the craft.

Case III:

Asks Rukhsan, all of 27 years and with two young children, If I go outside to work then who would look after my children? This is the reason I sit at home and do the work. I don't have to go to work and commute back home. So this work becomes a little easier for me.” I know I get paltry payment for the articles for which the shopkeeper earns a very hefty profit but I do not have a choice.

Case IV:

Sheeba, 32, works the entire day, including household chores, bringing the kids to and back from school and their coaching. So her entire day passes by with work, and then sitting with zardozi takes the entire day. Despite this she barely makes around 200 -300 Rs a day and some days there is no work too.

Case V:

Razia, 63, has been working as home based artisan since past 33 years now. It helped her pitch in, in constructing their own pukka house and invest in their grandchildren's education. Her granddaughter knows the art of zardozi and helps Razia and her daughter in law in completing the work orders but she chose to complete her MBA and work for a famous multinational company as a work from home employee as not only it pays more but her friends think very high of her due to her job.

Case VI:

Shazia, 48, revealed that she tried to convert her home based work into a self-employment by enrolling for government exhibition stalls however even after signing the papers it was allotted to someone else. She says if she was educated such fraud would not have happened with her. Thus, it was observed that despite training and knowledge of the craft most of the home based women artisans are not able to get consistent work and are unable in starting their own venture.

Most of these women belong to minority community and don't want to step out of the house due to various socio-cultural barriers and some personal barriers created by their own self. Quite a few number of respondents also revealed that though government and non government organizations are doing a lot of work but they are not able to reap the same due to various personal and social factors which range from lack of education, to family restrictions, inability to access these educational schemes due to lot of paper work and long distances.

Some of the artisans were also of the opinion that their requirements and cultural factors should be kept in mind while formulating vocational training programmes and schemes. It was also observed that most of the training programmes required women to travel long distances or for long hours and physical presence. Use of online classes and digital education is still missing from the present vocational education. Most of such programs and policies fail to recognize the marginal position of home based women artisans which results in further marginalization.

Conclusion

“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.”

- Swami Vivekanand

This article begins to build an understanding of the changing role of women in society and specifically throws light on the home based working women, their requirements, issues and challenges. It specifically takes into account the home based women zardozi artisans of Bhopal and their daily struggles. It talks about the needs of home based zardozi artisans of Bhopal, in India by foregrounding their grassroots situation, an aspect that is missing from the contemporary and previous scholarly work. Equipped with the knowledge of these experiences, researchers suggest that for vocational education programmes to be more inclusive it needs to take into consideration the various socio-cultural, economic and personal barriers that these women encounter in their domestic lives and community living. For better implementation and results the vocational education programs for Indian women belonging to lower income groups a more explicit focus is required on their needs, the root cause of these needs, why these needs exist, and how those needs can be met. This paper has four practical implications for the women in consideration. First, there is a requirement of separate vocational education programmed for home based women artisans. Second for vocational education programmes for home based women to be more effective, these must take into account the socio-cultural context and also their traditional knowledge, skills, livelihoods and ways of living. Thirdly, the vocational education programmes for Indian home based women artisans should definitely include the marketing of traditional craft and cultural products. Additionally, government agencies could provide some mechanism for dissemination of information about these programmes as well as credit and banking education and facilities to these marginalized women. Fourthly, self-determination (in economic, cultural and social development) and overcoming various barriers to achieve economic independence and inclusion should be an essential part of any skill development policy; this also means that designing and formulation of vocational education programs for home based women artisans should incorporate their representation through some mechanism.

Lastly, these vocational education programmes especially for the home based women artisans should be linked to sustainable livelihood generation and provide consistent work from the premises of their homes or in the proximity of their homes.

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