



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PASSION AND POTENTIAL IN FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDIES OF ARTISAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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Abstract

The exploration of artisan entrepreneurship as a means of fostering inclusive growth and community development is an area that has garnered increasing attention. This study delves into analyzing the passion, potential, and impact of artisan women entrepreneurs and their ecosystems within the context of promoting progress and prosperity. Utilizing a qualitative multiple case study approach, the research investigates the business models, processes, and contributions of artisan enterprises in Sikkim, located in the northeastern region of India. Drawing from interviews and interactions with artisan women entrepreneurs, the study presents four compelling case studies. Through these cases, the researchers shed light on the artisan entrepreneurial ecosystem, the challenges faced, and the significant contributions made in terms of empowering women, promoting financial inclusion, driving social upliftment, and fostering sustainable growth and development.

Keywords: Artisan Women Entrepreneurs, Women Empowerment, Financial Inclusion, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Women deserve equal opportunities and respect, advocating for a vision that transcends physical appearances to celebrate the multifaceted roles women play. In Sikkim, despite a commendable women's literacy rate of 75%, there remains a noticeable gap in women's participation in politics. Amidst discussions on women's empowerment, a subtle yet substantial glass ceiling hinders their societal advancement. The need for empowerment is critical in this region, where patriarchal norms are prevalent. Women are often seen through a distorted lens, restricting their roles as leaders or business owners. This perspective fosters an environment where women are underestimated and sometimes exploited for others' gains. The perpetuation of double standards underscores ongoing gender discrimination, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive society. The concentration of power among a few also raises questions about equitable power distribution.

This shift reveals the significant strides made by women entrepreneurs in rural areas, who exemplify resilience and financial acumen. By taking and repaying loans, these women demonstrate financial responsibility and resilience. Their decision-making capacity empowers them individually and lays the groundwork for societal change. As these women participate in financial decisions, breaking traditional norms, it boosts both their economic standing and their credibility as decision-makers within their households. The daughters of these empowered women become advocates for a more inclusive future, having seen empowerment in action at home.



This transformative experience opens doors for women in political spheres, where their proven leadership and decision-making skills in economic realms naturally progress toward breaking political barriers. As these empowered women enter politics, they bring new perspectives that challenge the existing status quo. The community, already positively impacted by women's empowerment at home, becomes more receptive to their participation in all areas.

Furthermore, these women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) align with the government's vision of fostering entrepreneurship in every household. For SHGs to fully realize their potential, the government must invest in their upskilling with a market-based approach, providing the necessary tools to succeed in a dynamic business environment. The empowerment of these groups is not just about economic self-sufficiency; it is pivotal in addressing and dismantling economic gender discrimination in rural settings. Strategic collaboration between the government and SHGs is crucial, going beyond mere support to integrating these groups into broader or niche markets. This partnership is envisioned as a catalyst for bridging rural and urban economic divides, promoting economic equality and inclusive growth.

Freeing society from stereotypical norms requires a collective effort at individual, household, and community levels. Society should facilitate rather than hinder women's aspirations, recognizing and valuing their contributions in all settings. Empowerment extends beyond literacy and professional employment to encompass all roles women undertake, including domestic ones. The multitasking abilities inherent in women should be acknowledged and celebrated rather than undervalued. While Sikkim offers ample opportunities, the full potential of women's political reservation remains underutilized, with male dominance still evident. True empowerment involves removing barriers to women's decision-making, not just offering symbolic representation. This transformation fosters a more inclusive, egalitarian, and empowered Sikkim, where former barriers are replaced with opportunities for growth and leadership. As Sikkim moves towards true empowerment, embracing this comprehensive approach becomes a catalyst for real societal change, ensuring that women's choices and ambitions are supported and celebrated beyond mere rhetoric and token gestures.

Women entrepreneurship is quite important for the development of the world rationally, economically and in all spheres (S.Rithwik, M.Latabhavan, 2022). Artisan entrepreneurs find creative ways to discover and exploit opportunities (Bruni and Perrotta, 2014; Ramadani *et al.*, In Press), which often involves turning their hobbies and passions into sustainable businesses (Biraglia and Kadile, 2017; Danson *et al.*, 2015). Artisan entrepreneurship makes significant contributions to the economy and society (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015; Luckman, 2015). Artisan entrepreneurs also create social value through work in the-community and engaging in prosocial business practices (Cater *et al.*, 2017; Pret and Carter, 2017). the importance of artisanal products (Barlow *et al.*, In Press; Ranganathan, In Press; Verhaal *et al.*, 2015) and their impacts on regional competitiveness and tourism development (Ramachandran *et al.*, 2012; Teixeira and Ferreira, Thomas *et al.*, 2013). The motives and goals of artisan entrepreneurs are diverse (Fillis, 2004; Tregear, 2005) and that their practice scan vary significantly depending on the contexts in which they are embedded (Drakopoulou Dodd *et al.*, Pret *et al.*, 2016).

The development of women entrepreneurs in developing countries, has the potential to become the primary driver of empowering women and social transformation, which in turn has a positive impact on the level of the country's economy (Koeswandiet al., 2021). The creation of women entrepreneurs contributes to the growth of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), increases gross domestic product (GDP) and generates sustainable economic growth (Anggadwita et al., 2017). Ratten (2016a) suggests that women entrepreneurs are influenced by customer knowledge, risk aversion, polychronic and collectivism when deciding



to start an informal business. Women entrepreneurs have several inherent characteristics when taking advantage of opportunities to create value in the economic system (Ramadani et al., 2013), including motivation to achieve performance, followed by affiliation, autonomy, and dominance (Indarti and Wulandaru, 2003). One study by Indarti et al. (2019) on women participation in economic sector found that women face some structural problems such as perceptions of roles between husband (as decision maker) and wife (as primary caregiver), complexities in accessing financial options, mobility challenges and societal norms challenges concerning women's roles.

Women entrepreneurs are female individuals who take part in innovative business activity (Minniti and Naude, 2010). Increasingly women are engaging in entrepreneurship to solve social problems through innovative thinking (Ojong et al., 2021). This article examines the increasing trend of artisan entrepreneurship in the North-Eastern states of India, focusing on several successful women artisan entrepreneurs from Sikkim. The study explores the ecosystem surrounding women artisan entrepreneurs and the social and commercial goals driving their businesses. It aims to analyze the impact of these women entrepreneurs on the development of their localities, the state, and the region, as well as the challenges they have faced over time.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurship refers to a set of behaviours that include the exploration of opportunities, innovation, and value creation (Sharma, Venkataraman,2000). While artisan entrepreneurs being a type of community entrepreneur, depend on their regional environment for their cultural heritage (Ratten et.al, 2018) and doing something that is novel and creative, which normally involves the hands (Heying, 2010). This research paper tries to explore following background while study and understand the inception and role artisan women entrepreneurs in the Northeastern Region of India.

1. Justify passion and sense of accomplishment: The entrepreneurship intention can be described as the start of the business (Krueger et al., 2000) or an accomplishment to complete an act (Linan and Fayolle,2015). Entrepreneurial passion is considered indispensable and important for entrepreneurial success (Wei Hue et al.). Entrepreneurial passion is an emotional meta-experience that influences three key drivers of entrepreneurial effectiveness: Problem-solving, Persistence and Absorption (Cardon.s. Melissa .et.,2017). Studies have revealed that individuals with entrepreneurial passions are more concerned about the entrepreneurial activities they are involved with, and their attention to entrepreneurial goals is increased by enhancing their skills and knowledge through hard work. (Vallerand, et, al.2010). In the field of entrepreneurial research, entrepreneurial passion positively affects the entrepreneurial process and entrepreneurial success (Bird, 1989, Corden et al., 2005). Entrepreneurs with positive emotions can continue to achieve success in the long run (Samuelson,2009). Passion is the driving force that drives entrepreneurs to continue pursuing their goals when encountering difficulties (cardo and Kirk,2005). Muller et al. (2017) proposed that entrepreneurial passion can enable entrepreneurs to persevere in the face of difficulties and challenges to achieve entrepreneurial success further. Research shows that artisan women entrepreneurs use their creativity to explore and uncover opportunities (Brooni and Perotta,2014, Ramdani. et al.,2017), which tells the story of converting their passion into accomplished enterprises. (Biragila and kadli,2017, Danson et.al,2015). The importance of interaction between place and passion as a source of ideas and persistence and interestingly



sure that artisan entrepreneurs may minimize the significance of place to protect their passion (Downey et al.,2024)

2. Women Empowerment: Empowerment of women means when a woman has economic liberty and financial decision-making authority (B. Gargi,2019). Economic and societal development are strongly correlated with women's empowerment through women's entrepreneurship (M. Banihani,2020). Several countries have found a strong correlation between women's positions in societies and economic development (Doepke and Tertilt, 2009; Dufflo, 2012; Sarfaraz et al., 2014; Shabana et al., 2017). A relationship between women's empowerment and countries' economic development; the participation of women in the economy is part of the solution to financing and economic problems in these countries.(Shabana et al., 2017).Women's entrepreneurship development has a tremendous potential to empower women and transform society (Tambunan, 2009).Women Artisan entrepreneurs create social value by engaging in community business practices,the motives of artisan entrepreneurs differ based on the way they are embedded in society (Ratten, V,2022).

3. Financial Inclusion and Women Entrepreneurship: Women face greater obstacles than men in accessing financing and information making it more difficult for them to engage in entrepreneurship (Yang,Xiaolon.et al.,2022). Most women business owners largely depend on self-financing during the startup period of their business (Zogning, F,2022). Lack of financial inclusion is detrimental to entrepreneurial decisions (Sena et al.,2012)

Financial inclusion is positively linked with entrepreneurship, and it can open economic opportunities for women entrepreneurs (Fareed.f et al,2017). Entrepreneurial abilities among women in developing countries aiming towards accessing of financial services leading to financial inclusion (Lyons.A, S. Cantares,2017). The development of financial inclusion is often beneficial to the formation of entrepreneurs in sectors with lower entry barriers. (Fam.Z et.al,2017)

A WORD ON METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

The article is based on qualitative multi-case-based research aimed at understanding the business model, complexities, objectives, and contributions of artisan women entrepreneurs (Sandeep et al., 2020). Artisan entrepreneurs are individuals in a creative pursuit seeking financial gain (Ratten et al., 2022). They are entrepreneurs with specialized skills, innovation, and competitiveness, striving to achieve commercial goals. The research took place in Sikkim, one of the Northeastern states and is considered as one of the least populated states of India. The study utilized an exploratory research design by selecting multiple cases of artisan women entrepreneurs from different parts of Sikkim. Exploratory research is suitable for understanding real-life phenomena (Angadwita et al.) and gaining insight into the artisan entrepreneurial ecosystem, the motivation factors and contributions as social entrepreneurs (Charles, 2019).

The research started with an intensive literature review and identifying some research gaps addressed in the research setting. After this exercise, the four most relevant cases are selected through the convenience sampling method for data collection and in-depth analysis. All these chosen cases meet the following criteria of artisan entrepreneurs along with the willingness to participate and ready to reveal the requisite information as per the research requirement (Charles, 2019). In addition, the reference & recommendation of the expert committee has also been considered in this case. The interviewees are female age between 21 to 50 years, and they are founders and owners of the ventures. They used their unique skill set to design & develop

a unique set of products with a certain degree of handmade in the process. Based on these pre-designed criteria authors identified 19 small entrepreneurs from the state of Sikkim. After the first round of interviews, only 4 have given consent to participate and share the data required for research purposes. So accessibility became another criterion in selecting respondents (Saiyed et.al., 2023).

Data collection:

The research was based on the social context (Grisna et. al., 2022) therefore data was collected through observation and semi-structured interviews conducted in person either offline in the respondent’s place or online through the Zoom platform. Interviewees were free to express their opinions in their own choice without any interruption. During the interview, the researcher let the story run, in a natural flow without any prior list of questions and designed the interview completely open. To accelerate the process of interaction and prompt the interviewee for more detailed information the researcher asked further questions whenever necessary, as per the order of the research. The interviewer takes notes in between with the due permission of the interviewee used as a supporting document in the research process.

All the interviews are conducted between August 2022 to June 2023 with prior appointments looking into the convenient schedule of both researchers & respondents. The interview is conducted for 1- 2 hours for each respondent and the language used in the interview process is English, Hindi and Nepali based on the convenience and language proficiency of the respondents. In addition, the respondents took some more time for a casual and private conversation and understood the researcher’s motive and expectations. The interviews are all recorded with the due permission of the interviewees for retrieval and transcription in future.

The interview and interaction of respondents has continued until a stage of theoretical saturation is reached in terms of outcomes & results (Sandeep, et. al. 2020). Saturation can be defined as reaching a point of diminishing return where the interviews will no longer add value or any fresh insights to the understanding of research concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table: 1 highlights the sample list of women artisan entrepreneurs with their demographic profile for a systematic understanding of the research sample.

Table 1: Demographics of the Entrepreneurs under study

Sl. No.	Entrepreneur Pseudo Name	Qualification	Field of Operation	Year of Establishment	No. of Employees
1	Sony	Graduate	Designer Candle	2012	30 nos.
2	Rita	Interior Designer & trained nursery teacher	Handmade clay Pottery & decorative	2005	5 Full-time and 30 part-time
3	Sania	Graduate	Hand woven products	2019	9 Full-time and 10 part-time
4	Chini	Fashion designer from NIFT	All variety of bamboo made items	2016	14 Nos. full time

Author’s compilation:

The data collected through the interview was transcribed and verified by the researchers individually. The data were reviewed and edited by both researchers individually to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data by removing not-so-relevant information from the accomplished data set. The respondents have been given pseudonyms at all points of reference to ensure anonymity and safeguard the ethical aspect. After collecting requisite information through an extensive interview process the researchers have converted these interactions into



the form of a case, as the case study method is well applicable to a small geographical area and limited sample size (Agarwal and Lenka, 2016). The multiple case study method is used to investigate and elaborate on the real life of artisan women entrepreneurs and their relationship with various environmental factors (Zainal, 2007). To realize the objective of the study, a qualitative thematic analysis has been done (Barun & Clarke, 2006) to generate themes through a systematic coding process and noting each piece of information (Darbi, Knott, 2016) related to artisan women's entrepreneurial concepts and practices in the state of Sikkim. The authors read & reread the transcript to identify the initial code, and the transcript was categorized into meaningful groups to address the research questions. In the next phase, basic themes were developed by establishing the relationship between the codes and counting the patterns of the data set. Finally, the researcher reviewed the themes independently to merge similar themes and eliminate irrelevant themes (Batala & Slevitch, 2023) with the objective that the identified theme is the accurate reflection of the content of the data set (Barun & Clarke, 2006). A meeting with the respondents was organized to discuss and validate key observations and empirical themes from the result (Charles, 2019).

Description of Cases:

CASE: 1

Sony, born and raised in Sikkim, India, embarked on a transformative journey to empower semi-literate rural women through entrepreneurship. Despite managing a business at "Purono Namchi" called "Flavours Restaurant," Smita launched a designer candle enterprise with twenty women to pursue her passion and achieve more than just commercial success. Her efforts as an artisan entrepreneur have made a significant impact on societal and community development, particularly in enhancing the financial independence and empowerment of rural women.

With no prior experience but driven by a keen interest, Smita entered the candle-making industry with support from the Northeastern Development Financial Institution (NEDFI), which conducts CSR projects across northeastern states. Assistance from NEDFI and IDBI included training in candle making, financial support for initial investments, and ongoing mentorship. This support, spanning three years and including funding, training, and opportunities to participate in various exhibitions and fairs, enabled her to establish her business successfully.

Smita focused on discovering and fostering the latent talents of rural women, providing them with skills in crafting and marketing designer candles. The result was the creation of "Namchi Designer Candle," which grew to a team of 30 members, gaining significant orders nationwide through their creative participation in exhibitions and fairs. The candles, customized and tailored to specific occasions, featured unique designs incorporating hand painting and local materials like herbs, ferns, petals, and leaves from Sikkim, enhancing their appeal and exclusivity.

Despite facing challenges like funding constraints for large orders and sourcing raw materials at affordable prices, the business has thrived, promoting financial independence among rural women. The profits, after covering costs, are distributed equally among the workers, reflecting their contributions. Currently, Smita is focusing on sourcing sustainable materials and securing accessible financing to transition to eco-friendly beeswax, aiming for a more sustainable and prosperous future for her enterprise and its beneficiaries.



CASE: 2

An interior designer & kinder garden teacher Rita has always had a special inclination for art, craft, and design. Teaching was always her passion, and teaching kids was very fulfilling, but a sense of purpose was always missing. She always wanted to contribute towards society and the life of people in one way or another, and that passion drove her. When she was engrossed with her interior designing business, the idea & concept of pottery business struck her mind. In the work process, she used a lot of fancy, creative & designer products that had been imported from outside of India, particularly from China, even though they were not up to the expected quality and incurred high costs. So, her creative bent of mind wanted to foray into something that could revive the traditional art form of Sikkim and provide a livelihood to the semiliterate & underprivileged female segment of her locality & state. Motivated by her passion, she explored the handmade pottery industry, which was further prompted by the upswing of the Creative, Manufacturing and Handmade sectors worldwide. Complementing to her decision Nathula Trade Border opened in the year 2005 and one of the items on the trade list was China clay, a significant ingredient of Pot making. With this opportunity, she moved towards specific skill-based pottery-making training and registered in CVPI (Central Village and Pottery) in Belgaum, Karnataka. Then she extended her training in pot painting in Goa to give complete form to her skill set before landing in the pottery industry. With this, she moved ahead to start the pottery movement in Sikkim or bring a revolutionary change in people's perception and buying patterns related to designer and creative products.

As a skilled entrepreneur, she framed the target market for her product as a key success factor for any business. She targeted the residents of Sikkim who are keen to use crockery & designer clay products but so far managed with Chinese crockery and melamine products imported from Thailand as a replacement. In addition, she also tried to garner the prospective tourist market of Sikkim to scale up her business. To catch hold of the customer sentiment, she marketed her product under the brand name "MATTO", which means 'mati' or earth, and communicated it to customers with a twofold interpretation. For the people of Sikkim, it can be very well connected as they produce something from their earth, and for outsiders, she developed fliers with the jargon like "Take a piece of Sikkim with you" to directly connect with the heart and soul of the customer.

Like many other enterprises, her business was not challenge-free; rather, in the initial days, it was hard-pressed for desired skilled workers to run the show. As pottery making needs some specialized skill set & training, she selected a group of interested people, basically women and carried out six months of training on pottery making with the support of the commerce and industry department. As said by Reena Rai, *"I always prefer to work with and create opportunity for rural women as they are deprived of the scope for education, earning a livelihood, focusing on career and many such basic requirements of a balanced society. I am always eager to make them financially independent and take care of their self-needs and support their family without compromising on dignity. Looking into that, I gave them a flexible and comfortable work environment so that they can manage their career with a proper work-life balance."*

Her challenges were not limited to the scarcity of skilled workers. Rather unavailability and inaccessibility of proper packaging units for fragile products and the logistic facility have restricted the acceleration of the business in many ways. This also restricts online sales expansion to domestic and international markets as well. However, she tried to turn towards the highly potential tourist market of Sikkim with the sea of possibilities. She eventually tried to convert her native "Namchibum" into a pottery village, a place for tourist attractions and



activities. As her pottery unit is already a place for tourist attractions, she is keen to convert it into a place for tourist fascination, where travellers can spend a day exposed to the pottery world and experience the rich and diverse culture that Sikkim hosts along with the magic of mist & mountains. Irrespective of plans, strategy, and the stages of the business cycle, the need for funds is compulsory. To avoid the critical and complicated process of fund acquisition, compel her to rely on self-financing. She has established a creative-led business, which is intensive labour & skill sensitive and gradually foray into the concept of cultural tourism. So, this needs to be recognized and supported to deliver strong economic outcomes and greater social inclusion.

CASE: 3

Sania an inspiring women entrepreneur, established a viable enterprise named “Standy Waves” by her hard work, passion, and dedication amidst several roadblocks on her path. She strived to find the covert opportunity in the rich handicraft and weaving culture of India to enable livelihood through artisanship. Looking into the steady decline of the rich weaving culture in Sikkim and the diversion of craftsmen, especially the younger generation towards job opportunities, Sania decided to take a leap into entrepreneurship and bring back the age-old glory in the hand-woven and handcrafted products. She began by establishing her organization “Standy Weaves” in one room, with one loom and one co-weaver to produce and provide entirely hand-woven products like Dhaka sarees, shawls, Kurtis, jackets, which dragged customer attention & interest and created a healthy demand for both in the national and international market. To sharpen her skill, in her focused area she has undergone a training of 6 months in Dhaka weaving in Nepal, a place well known for hand-woven and handicraft products. She is not only determined to revive the weaving culture but also empower the underprivileged women segment by making them financially independent. To achieve her mission, she worked with the unemployed and semiliterate women of her locality and community by imparting training in hand weaving and hand crafting to bring a remarkable change in their lives and livelihood. She takes care of the personal needs of women employees and arranges for the loom and other weaving facilities in their place to help them continue their jobs. **As quoted by Sandhya,** *“I always take care of my workers and try my level best to provide them time to time training to enhance their skill set, make payment as per their contribution, even more than that and take them for outing and for other recreational activities to maintain their motivation level.”* Because of her relentless effort in imparting training, she can be able to employ 9 permanent weavers and 10 temporary weavers with an appropriate skill set to largely meet the market demand.

She takes care of the whole set of activities starting from the procurement of raw materials from places called Assam, Delhi, and Nepal, to sketching the design and reaching out to the target audience at the local to international level is never less than a challenge for Sania as a small-town entrepreneur. The D2C brand “Standy Waves” leverages Instagram as a major channel option to connect with the target audience in addition to a shop in her locality and with some wholesalers, who have shown their interest to be involved in product marketing. Irrespective of an uninterrupted demand condition and growth perspective, she was unable to accelerate the growth of her enterprise due to the high employee turnover rate and lack of availability of skilled weavers. It is one of the major challenges in addition to poor and expensive logistics facilities, is a major obstruction in large-scale distribution and marketing of the product.

She claims her venture is a for-profit social enterprise, that is working intending to skill women as well as rural youth and providing them with job opportunities that can help in financial &



social inclusion. In addition, she also aims at preserving the traditional and exclusive handicrafts of our country, having enormous demand across the world. To realize its vision and achieve its true potential she needs support extended from different Government & Non-Government organizations in the form of affordable logistic facilities, and vocational training to ensure the flow of a skilled labour force that can be able to create a win-win situation and develop a sustainable business model.

CASE: 4

Chini, A NIFT, Kolkata alumnus and fashion designer by profession choose to follow her passion and transformed it into her profession in the due course of time. She proved her mettle as an artisan women entrepreneur. She established her enterprise in such a way that environmental and social responsibility go hand in hand in running a profitable business. She not only contributed to the life and livelihood of many but also to the environment by making sustainability the major mission and motto of her business. After a prospective career in the glamorous fashion world, Chini returned to her hometown, East Sikkim, and worked on handicrafts and sustainable eco-friendly products that she had always cherished. She left her job to live her passion and focused on wood carving as one of her expertise and interest areas. To explore more, she has carried out research about this field, interacted with artisans, and indulged in some formal training in the Ministry of Textiles and govt. of India. With all these exposures and with an environmentally conscious mindset set she forayed into the bamboo craft area to replace various environmentally hazardous products with bamboo-made items and objects. Sikkim is one of the well-known nature tourism spots in India as nature is awe-inspiring in this state. To give a complete look and feel of nature to the visitors, she moved ahead to bring bamboo-made infrastructures as a better alternative & replacement for the concrete jungle. She worked towards replacing concrete buildings with bamboo columns and structures, particularly tourist places & spots.

She has established two enterprises related to bamboo craft named “Luxol Studio and Thrash Collectives.” Luxol Studio, which is more into product designing and innovations, is focused on replacing plastic and nylon with innovative & natural bamboo items like bags, water bottles, purses, home decor, sustainable fashion materials, bamboo furniture etc. The other unit “Thrash Collectives” is a larger B2B business specializing in waste management, focused on using the waste generated from developing & producing bamboo products, which has a high demand in the skin and beauty care industry. In addition to contributing towards a sustainable future, her ventures also become a key element for greater financial and social inclusion by creating employment opportunities for the youth of her locality and the state has brought a remarkable change in their life and livelihood as well.

For Chini, market and demand are never a challenge, as she realizes a continuous flow of demand for her creative, contemporary, and eco-friendly products. Chini’s effort towards establishing sustainable business reflected a unique growth trajectory and serves as a distinctive model that demonstrates how sustainable and socially inclusive businesses can drive profitability. But she must overcome and deal with issues & hurdles like plain land accumulation to set up manufacturing units, affordable logistic & packaging facilities, scarcity of skilled workforce, etc. are some of the critical success factors for a business.

FINDINGS

Referring to various other studies, the researcher derived and interpreted the findings into two phases and subsections: one is the motto and motivation driving these women's enterprises and



how substantially they contribute to society & community.

The motto & motivation of artisan women enterprises:

Through the process of thematic analysis researchers have derived 3 themes and various subthemes based on their frequency of occurrence (Batala & Slevitch, 2023) to align with the motto and motivation of women enterprises. The following sections discuss the frequently mentioned themes and sub-themes in detail. (Full details of the themes, subthemes and corresponding research objectives are presented in a framework as mentioned in Figure 1)

Justify the Passion:

Three sub-themes to follow my dream, explore my creativity, and move beyond conventional job life were identified from the analysis of the cases under the concept of justifying passion as a major motive to establish the enterprise.

Passion is considered an indispensable and important element that contributes to any entrepreneur's success and sustainability. The women entrepreneurs considered in this research have initiated the ventures not because of commercial intention but to live the passion. The entrepreneur in case-1 producing designer candle expressed that, *“I prefer to move towards my dream by doing something of my own, where I can explore my creativity & earn for myself. Similarly, the entrepreneur in case-3 said that “although I did not have any formal training in that direction, but my passion propelled me to work in this direction to create opportunities for young artisans. In addition, according to case-4, “I was not very happy with the glamorous sort of thing, I was doing. I believe in myself and my capability that I may do much more to contribute to my society, locality & environment”.*

In these cases, it has been reflected that even having a stable source of income in hand these entrepreneurs struggle hard to establish an independent venture simply out of passion by exploring their creativity and skill set.

Realize a sense of accomplishment:

The data extracted from the interview process reflected that some artisan women entrepreneurs diverted and focused on building an enterprise to realize a sense of purpose, with an ambition to contribute to humanity, society, and the environment much beyond a simple source of income. To justify this the entrepreneur in case -2 highlighted that, *“Even though teaching was always my passion and teaching kids was always fulfilling but somehow, I find a sense of purpose and accomplishment was missing which is to contribute to the life of people and society in anyway”.* Similarly, Case-1 highlighted that, *“Though I had a restaurant business, but I can say the real entrepreneur journey started with my designer candle business, where I can explore my creativity, trained myself which helps me to contribute to the life of my people particularly women by helping them to earn a livelihood “According to Case-3, if I can able to manage the livelihood for youth in my locality and revive the age old weaving culture of my state, in addition to self-employment a real sense of purpose will be achieved.”*

As a result of all these comments & statements, the study concludes that enthusiasm and sense of purpose is a common drivers for women entrepreneurs which motivates them to turn towards choosing entrepreneurship as a career alternative.

Self-employment & financial inclusion:

During the interview process, the artisan women entrepreneurs highlighted that self-employment is another motto for starting an enterprise. It is the way to explore their creativity, and skill set & earn a livelihood considered more comfortable & exciting than 9 to 5



conventional job life. During the interview interactions the subthemes like a source of income, livelihood, earning purpose, and self-employment are derived based on their frequency of occurrence. The entrepreneur in case-4 is a fashion designer & bamboo product manufacturer shared that, *“it is the best & foremost option for me to earn, enjoy and maintain work-life balance by staying in my hometown and contributing to the life of my people”*. The owner of Case-2 revealed that *“the prospective tourist market of Sikkim is a major target group to scale up my business and profit as it is the prime source of income for me and my workers”*. Similarly, the case-3 claimed that *“my business is a for-profit social enterprise working with the objective of community development and a source of livelihood through self-employment”*

After analyzing the above statements by the respondents, it is concluded that in addition to certain social objectives artisan women entrepreneurs also strived to achieve commercial objectives like, profit, livelihood & self-employment through the endeavour.

The Role & Contribution of Artisan Women Enterprises:

The process of thematic analysis helped to extract 12 subthemes categorized under 4 themes highlighted the contribution of artisan women entrepreneurs to justify one of the major research objectives.

Socio-community upliftment:

Society & community as a major stakeholder in any business has a lot of relevance. The contribution of any enterprise is not only counted in terms of profit, but also the overall social development is quite an expected outcome through the meticulous and insightful business operation & process. The contribution of all the artisan women entrepreneurs considered in this study is quite prominent as a business process outcome. As stated by case-1, *“It’s absolutely a social & non-profit business and I don’t take a single penny from the profit, instead, it’s equally distributed among the ladies (workers) leading to improvement of their economic and social conditions as well”*. Similarly, case -2 highlighted, *“Eventually, I am trying to convert my village Namchibum into a pottery village & applying for various Govt. schemes like gov. Kumhar Sakti Karan Yojana, Spoorthi Yojana to train people and set up the community furnace. Here I can engage more people & help them to earn more in their free time in addition to their primary occupation. Also, portray it as a place of tourist attraction to generate revenue that contributes to their standard of living and overall development of community & society”*. The entrepreneur in case- 3 added, *I trained myself and semiliterate women, poor rural artisans of my community to engage them & earn a livelihood. Weavers employed in my unit can be able to earn Rs. 18,000 to 20,000 per month with the hope that it will increase further. (...). I ensure that they get a good amount which helps them to support their family & maintain a certain standard of living.*

By taking into consideration the repeated occurrence of words & terms in the interview processes the researchers have developed sub-themes like better standard of living, development of society, and upliftment of community directing to generate the theme of socio-community development as a major outcome of these enterprises.

Conserve cultural heritage:

The microenterprises in this study put special emphasis on restoring culture & traditional art forms, be it in terms of painting, weaving, or wood carving by generating interest and nurturing skill sets among various interest groups in a different manner. The extracted subthemes are based on the commonly mentioned points like reviving rich culture and reviving traditional art forms, to justify the contribution of women entrepreneurs towards sustaining cultural heritage.



The entrepreneur in case 3 revealed that *“Sikkim had a rich weaving and handloom culture. Gradually the young artisans and craftsmen diverted towards job opportunities leading to the decline in rich cultural heritage. So, the establishment of this enterprise is an attempt to bring back the age-old glory and revive the hand-woven culture of my state & country”*. Similarly, case 4 specialized on the production of bamboo products and highlighted that, *“Sikkim is a place radiant with impressive handicrafts and wood carving is a famous one among them. As wood carving is one of my specialized areas, I wanted to strengthen and preserve this traditional art form through bamboo carving and producing varieties of bamboo made items”*.

These comments infer that, the protection and promotion of exquisite traditional art and craft is a major agenda of these women entrepreneurs.

Women engagement and empowerment:

Women's empowerment is all about making themselves able and entitled to make decisions with financial ability and social strength. Based on the interview results all the artisan women entrepreneurs, facilitate women in one or another way as the prominent agenda of their business. The data collected in this research reflected certain frequently occurring terms that facilitated the researchers to derive sub-themes like livelihood for women, empowering women, and skilling women, categorized under the prime theme of women engagement and empowerment. The entrepreneur in case-1 followed a socially responsible approach to appoint only women workers in her manufacturing unit and highlighted that, *“As a woman I faced many hardships in life that encouraged me to take the step. All my workers are women and from very rural backgrounds, they can't speak out, are not expressive, and don't have financial independence. I helped them to earn, support their family, contribute to family income and give them a purpose in life to empower them in a real sense”*. According to case 2, *“In rural areas, women lead a measurable life as most of them are drop out, no access to a job, no source of income. I found such categories in my area and locality trained them, skilled them, and employed them in pottery-making units with flexible working hours. However, it helped them in getting a source of income, financial stability, boost in their confidence and dignity in family and community.”* In addition to this Case-3 showed clarity on contribution to women's empowerment by explaining that, *“I am always keen in working with the semiliterate and underprivileged women of my locality & community by giving them training and enhancing their skill set. I used to take care of the personal needs of women employees and arrange for the loom and other weaving facilities in their place to help them continue their job irrespective of other responsibilities & social barriers. I intend to make them financially independent to get a better position in community & society”*.

With the above discussion, we have observed that, women empowerment, upliftment, and financial independence is one of the major agendas for these artisan women entrepreneurs in their business process.

Sustainable Development: Sustainability and sustainable development are the areas of growing interest and draw the attention of different countries and business houses around the world. In elaborating on their story, all the women entrepreneurs highlighted the concept of sustainability in various ways like adopting sustainable business practices using natural & organic ingredients, producing eco-friendly products, or developing the place as a sustainable tourist destination. In this context, case-1 emphasized that *“The USP of our product is that it is a completely handmade, handcrafted, hand-painted product without using machinery. In Sikkim, we use local herbs, ferns, and leaves not any artificial or harmful ingredients. (...). I can say paraffin wax is not eco-friendly, but very soon we will be shifting to bee wax candles,*

though not completely to make our products completely sustainable & eco-friendly.” Similarly, case 3 highlighted, “My products are natural and made from all-natural ingredients that do not have any adverse impact on society & environment. I always tried to maintain my cost at a certain level & produce different variety and range of products affordable to different categories of customers and everybody started using it and gradually shifted to clay-made eco-friendly products instead of plastic or any other harmful products.” The entrepreneur-focused exclusively on producing bamboo items and revealed, “The objective of my business is to contribute towards a more sustainable future, where environmental & social responsibility go hand in hand. I always wanted to contribute to society and enhance the quality of life. (...) Sustainability is the core of our business where we attempt to produce eco-friendlier & sustainable products by replacing concrete jungle with bamboo architecture and make Sikkim an eco-tourism destination to meet the tourist expectations. As a concerned citizen, I want to educate people that, we should grow and develop in a sustainable way, which brings a better future for our society & next generation.”

The subthemes like sustainable future, eco-friendly products, and environment-responsible practices are extracted from the highlighted interviews are emphasized and portray the sustainability approach adopted by the considered enterprises aiming towards a better & legitimate future.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In this study, the authors look at the motivation and socio-economic contribution of artisan women entrepreneurs in the North-eastern states of India. By using a qualitative, interpretivism approach (Saiyed et al., 2022) the research has explored that these entrepreneurs are not driven by necessity, but rather by a deep passion and a desire to excel in their craft.

Despite having other sources of income, they devote significant effort to enhancing their skills and then training others in their communities. This ensures the creation of livelihood as well as a steady supply of skilled labour for their businesses. The transformation of their passion into a sustainable business not only leads to personal success but also helps to develop a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Our analysis shows that female entrepreneurs make a significant contribution to economic and social growth. They achieve this by creating employment opportunities for women and youth and preserving traditional crafts and cultural heritage, all of which are crucial for regional development. Research indicates a strong correlation between women's empowerment and broader economic growth. Women's participation in the economy is crucial for resolving financial and economic challenges (Banihani, 2017).

Moreover, the study revealed that businesses owned by women not only seek economic objectives but also strive to accomplish social and environmental goals that are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These entrepreneurs prioritize social justice, ecological sustainability, and inclusive development, thus contributing to a well-rounded and fair economic environment.

Overall, our research underscores the transformative role of artisan women entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurial landscape, highlighting their ability to generate unique insights and drive substantial socio-economic transformation. By embracing both traditional crafts and sustainable practices, these women are not just participants in the economy but are pivotal in shaping an inclusive and sustainable future.



PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Northeastern state of India presents great opportunities and growth potentials for new ventures with rich profitability aspects. These are among the fast-growing states in India, with favourable agro-climatic conditions, which facilitate agriculture, creative artisan, horticulture forestry, and tourism. A state with a rich heritage and respect for women has initiated several innovative schemes toward women empowerment and straightening women's entrepreneurship ecosystem like 'One Family One Entrepreneur'.

The Central Govt. India launched the North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (N.E.I.I.P.), in 2007, abiding by the MSME Development Act to promote women's entrepreneurial activities in the North Eastern Region and bringing them to the mainstream of business by providing Skill Training, offering numerous subsidies and incentives like Excise duty exemption, Income Tax exemption, Capital Investment subsidy, Interest rate subsidy and also promoting their product in pan India as well as in global level.

The research throws light on the artisan women entrepreneurship ecosystem; the major motivational factors and contribution towards the society and community have a lot of relevance in this direction. For example, this study highlights that the passion and sense of financial independence have driven these entrepreneurs besides a sheer source of income.

Moreover, this study also highlights the contribution in socio-community development empowering and engaging the underprivileged women segment along with sustainable business practices. Looking into these welfare aspects Governments and policy makers can organize specialized policies for these craft-based women entrepreneurs to bring them to the mainstream of development.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research has advanced our understanding of artisan women entrepreneurship within the ecosystem of Northeastern India, particularly Sikkim, it underscores the need for more comprehensive studies to obtain robust and generalizable findings.

The focus on Sikkim, driven by its active governmental and non-governmental initiatives, limits the applicability of the results to other regions, where varying degrees of gender inequality, cultural differences, and the uneven distribution of training and incubation resources may impede similar entrepreneurial developments.

The research has helped us understand artisan women entrepreneurship in Northeastern India, especially in Sikkim. However, more comprehensive studies are needed to ensure reliable and applicable results. Since the focus was primarily on Sikkim, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions due to varying levels of gender inequality, cultural differences, and uneven distribution of resources for training and support. Future research would benefit from larger sample sizes and the use of advanced quantitative methods across multiple states. A comparative analysis of different states could help understand the impact of regional policies on the success of artisan women entrepreneurs and assess the effectiveness of support mechanisms.

It is also important to integrate qualitative assessments with quantitative analysis for a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics of artisan entrepreneurship and the factors that contribute to its success or failure. This multifaceted approach is essential for founding policies that support the artisan women entrepreneurs in India.



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