

# Empowerment of women and Entrepreneurship - A sociological study in Duliajan town of Assam

Monoj Bora

Research Scholar; Department of Sociology, Dibrugarh University (India)

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### Corresponding Author

Email: monojbora51[at]gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

*Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, It involves the building up of a society where in women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. The role of women as entrepreneurial activities is gradually increasing not only Assam but also all over the world. Women entrepreneurship development is the instrument of women empowerment. This paper is an attempt to examine whether the women become empower through entrepreneurship. In this context, the socio-economic status of the women entrepreneurs has been observed and analyzed. In this work investigated the phenomenon by using interview and observation techniques at Duliajan town of Assam. The study reveals that women entrepreneurs are engaged in different types of entrepreneurial activities and they successfully improve their socio-economic status through entrepreneurship activities. Even women entrepreneurs believe that they have equal rights, privilege and responsibility with their male counterpart.*

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## 1. Introduction

The women and their right to equality and justice are not abstractions detached from the perspectives of national development. They form an integral part of the development in its social, economic, political and cultural dimensions. This paper is an attempt to examine whether the women become empower through entrepreneurship. In this context, the socio-economic status of the women entrepreneurs has been observed and analyzed.

Empowerment of women pre supports a drastic dynamic and democratic change in the perception of and expectation from women in our society. (Gupta & Srinivasan, 1997) To help women attain economic independence is the first priority of such changes. Thus, when we talking about women's empowerment and women's status, it is important for us to recognize that interventions at all levels such as social, cultural, political and economic are required and are possible only if changes take place in the existing system and social structures, which are not at all favorable to women today.

Women account for more than half of the world's illiterate population and achieving literacy could be one of the first steps to empowering women to participate more equally in society and free themselves from economic exploitation and oppression.<sup>1</sup> The empowerment of women and economic opportunity is a highly important end in itself. (Gopakumar; 1995) Education is one of the most important means of empowering women and giving them knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary for their becoming full partners in the all round development process.

The empowerment of women stipulate empathy, rapport building, participatory action, efficient management of resources in such a manner that contribute to equity, social justice and freedom while avoiding social and family conflicts and disruptions. (Gupta & Srinivasan; 1997) This implies strong community participation of work. Women all over the world play a very important and crucial role in the development and management of their families. Development policies and programmes tend to view women as integral to the economic development process. (Rajkonwar; 2004) This is reflected in the higher investments in women's reproductive rather than their productive rules.

Economic empowerment in the context of women is seen as one of the most important driving forces behind reducing poverty and aiding economic growth. In every part of the world, women are paid less for their work and see fewer benefits of their labour. Discrimination and extra household responsibilities reduce their access to decent work, capital and time needed to improve their businesses, relative to men.<sup>2</sup> Women throughout the developing world engage in economically productive work and earn incomes. (Sasikumar; 2000) In this sense, economic empowerment of women is a prerequisite for sustainable development and for achieving the Millennium development Goals. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skill development and market information and entrepreneurial activities.

The role of women as entrepreneurial activities is gradually increasing not only Assam but also all over the world. Women entrepreneurship development is the instrument of women

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<sup>1</sup> Sinha, U.P. & Sinha, R. (2007): "Women Empowerment and Family Management in Tribal Region" Concept publishing company, New delhi.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.enterprise-development.org/implementing-psd/womens-economic-empowerment>

empowerment. Empowerment leads to self-fulfillment and women become aware of where they are going, what their position is in the society, their status, existence and rights, and women are becoming more empowered, personally and economically through business ownership or the different entrepreneurial activities.

The most important factors in determining the success of development is the status and position of women in the society. This means that if the neglect of women in the development process of any society or the nation-state then it will be waste of a human resource. (Vinza; 1987) In this premise, it will be a disservice for any nation state to ignore its women population in its development efforts. Faley (1999) stated that women's development is not nearly about reducing poverty by increasing productivity, but also about women's liberation and empowerment.<sup>3</sup> In the context of development, there are three categories of a woman in development process. These are: i) Individual II) Social and III) Economic development. Individual development means increased skills and capability, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well being. Increasing capacity connects social development, while economic development is determined by the increased capacity of the members of a society in dealing with their environment.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis means that development at the individual stage includes both the social and economic categories of development. Women perceive more and more clearly that if they really want empowerment and contribute to the welfare of their family and society.

## 2. Significance of the study

Women entrepreneur may be defined as a woman or group of women who initiate organize and run a business enterprise. An entrepreneur is someone who is a risk taker and is ready to face challenges. Women entrepreneurship in our society is less developed and it is more so in Assam, but we need it for our economic development and social justice. So, it is very necessary to understand the problems and prospect of women entrepreneurs.

In a male dominated society, women are always viewed as a docile, meek, subservient human being. Society consciously keeps track of her development and any deviation from the set pattern comes in for severe criticism. There is an inherent gender bias even in entrepreneurship. A woman entrepreneurship is gaining importance is not only India but also importance of every society. Because women entrepreneurship is one subject where there have been very few studies taken up at the national level and fewer still at the state level. Whatever material is available seems to be in form of articles in journals, papers presented in a seminar or a thesis work. Hence, observations in this area are limited. Further, in the patriarchal system of our society, Women have to face many challenges for fulfilling their aims. It is very condemnable for patriarchal society that a woman goes to outside of house to do something by irritated the circumference; through they

<sup>3</sup> Faley, G.O. (1999). "Women and Accountability" A Case Study of the Family Support Programme in Osun-State, MPA project

<sup>4</sup> Rodney, W.(1972): "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa", London: Bogle L'ou" Venture Publications.

succeed in their working place. But the patriarchal society does not accept it as usual matter. Now, in the present day society, women are involving and increasing rate of business field as entrepreneurs has changed the social and economic growth of the society. So, women entrepreneurs are playing a more active role in economy and the society. In this context, this study is very significant from sociological view point as well as gender perspective.

## 3. Objectives of the study

The present study concentrates primarily on three objectives. First, this study attempts to observe the socio-economic status of the women entrepreneurs. Secondly, this study strives to study the impact of entrepreneurial activities on women and finally the study attempts to examine whether the women become empower through entrepreneurship.

## 4. Field of the study

The present study is carried out in the 'Duliajan' Town of Dibrugarh district. Duliajan is an industrial town situated in Dibrugarh district in upper Assam and it is located in the upper northeast corner of India. It is surrounded by lush green tea estates and largest tea growing areas of the world. The town is about 45 km far from Dibrugarh town. It is developing as an industrial town based on Oil India Limited, one of the country's largest oil and gas companies and Assam Gas Company Limited, which carries out business related to natural gas in India, owned by the Government of Assam. Duliajan has bounded by the following boundaries. North: Bordubi; South: Burhidihing River; East: Boruah Tiniali; West: Kathalguri. The first time visitor of 'greenery' all around, was blending harmoniously. In 2011 census, the total population of Duliajan is 28,626, while the total populations there are 14,898 males (52%) and 13,728 females (48%). The total workers in the city of Duliajan town are calculated as 9,882 which is 35% of the population of which 8,140 (28%) are males and 1,742 (6.09%) are females. Duliajan Oil Town has an average literacy rate of 84% (total literate peoples are 24,312) out of which male literacy rate is 45% (13,014) and, the female literacy rate is 39% (11,298).<sup>5</sup> There are some of the women organization and clubs who emphasized the development activities of women and empowering the women all sides. There are more than 15 L.P, M.E and High School and two degree colleges and two junior colleges in Duliajan town. Duliajan is a multi-religious town. It has been included Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhism, and Christianity. In this town, more than 80% people belong to Hindu religion.

## 5. Theoretical Framework of the study

Sociologists suggest that entrepreneurship can be conceptualized as a social movement and entrepreneurs exit not only in the economy but in other spheres of society as well. Sociologists argue that entrepreneurship is most likely to emerge under a specific social culture. According to Max Weber entrepreneurship is a function of religious belief and the impact of religion affect of entrepreneurial culture. The religious beliefs produce intensive effort in occupational pursuits, the systematic ordering of means to end and the accumulation of

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.census2011.co.in/data/town/291703-duliajan-oil-town-assam.html>

assets. It is beliefs which generate a drive for entrepreneurial growth.<sup>6</sup> The famous sociologist Max Weber's theory of entrepreneur discusses in his famous study 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'. (Weber; 1988) He believed that entrepreneurship is a function of religious belief and the impact of religion affect of entrepreneurial culture. He emphasized that energies of an entrepreneur are exogenous and supplied by means of the religious belief.

Max Weber highlighted the spirit of capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system, where in the means of production are owned by the private individuals. It is further characterized by the economic freedom. In such a system and private enterprises are glorified. This system encourages the entrepreneurial culture. Spirit of capitalism therefore is still guiding factor which guide the entrepreneur get engage in activities that can bring about more and more profit. Thus the profit motive induces the spirit of enterprise and the power of talking risks. According to Max Weber the spirit of capitalism intertwined with the motive of profit resulted in the creation of greater number of business enterprises there by leading to a complete reorganization of industrial sector. So, this motive, profit guided the protestant ethic to become entrepreneurs. (Weber; 1988) Following this perspective, this study has tried to explore various factors that affects and influences the women entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities.

## 6. Application of Methodology

As domain of the study is concerned with women entrepreneurs, the respondents were collected from women entrepreneurs of Duliajan Town. After pilot study, it was focus that there were 145 women entrepreneurs and 100 women entrepreneurs were selected as respondents purposively. After that, these respondents have been divided into two categories on the basis of their marital status: 55% (55) married and 45% (45) unmarried women entrepreneurs. The research design of the study is exploratory in nature. The present study has been conducted with the help of both primary and secondary source of data. The primary data were collected through interview schedule and personal interviews and secondary data were collected from books, journals, govt. publications etc. After collection of the data, data were classified systematically on different items and questions wise since possible alternatives answer were provided to each questions, the classifications of response was done on the base of the alternative chosen by the respondent. After that, the classified data were put into tables and analyzed to find out a fruitful finding.

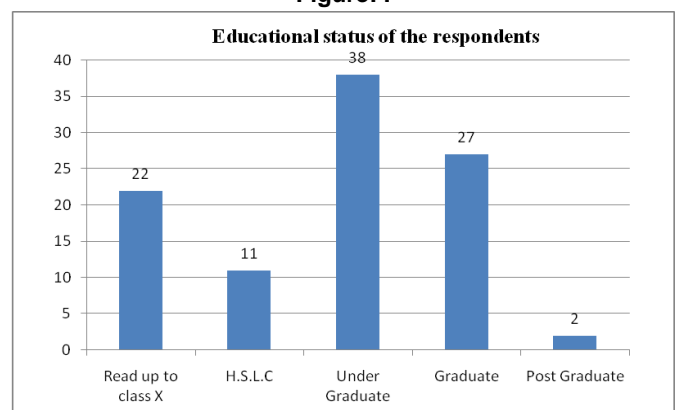
## 7. Socio- economic condition of the women entrepreneurs

Social background is the utmost importance of any individual. Social background plays a crucial role in shaping one's attitude, perceptions, and decisions of the individuals. Age is a very important component of social background of the individual. The study reveals that, the highest numbers of respondents to the age group of 25-29, in this age group 29% (29) of the respondents were found. The next higher percentage is represented by age group of 30-34. In this age

group 28% (28) of the respondents were found. The lowest number of respondents was found in the age group 50-54 and 55-59. In these groups 6% (06) and 2% (02) respondents were found respectively. In this study we enquired about the religion of the respondents. In this study, the majority of the respondents i.e., 94% (94) respondents are from Hinduism. As many as 4% (04) respondents are from Islamism and 2% (02) were the followers Christianity. Community wise, the respondents in this study are diverse. It was also found in this study that the respondents different communities. Here, the majority of the respondents i.e., 44% (44) respondents were belonging to Ahom community, 41% (41) respondents belong to other communities like Mishing, Nath, nepali etc ;9% (09) of the respondents belong to Kalita community, 4% (04) respondents belong to Muslim community and the lowest only 2% (02) respondents belong to Brahmin (Kaiyothy) community.

This study also shows that among the 100 respondents, 68% (68) respondents live in nuclear families and 32% (32) respondents belong to joint families. In this study, As far as the marital status of the respondents is concerned, among the 100 respondents 55% (55) respondents were married and 45% (45) respondents were unmarried. Educational background is the most important part of the research activities. Figure: I show the educational background of the respondents.

Figure: I



Above figure depicts that among the 100 respondents the majority of the respondents of the universe of the study i.e., 38% (38) respondents were under graduate, 27% (27) respondents were educational standard is graduate, 22% respondents were found who read up to class X, 11% (11) respondents were found whose standard was H.S.L.C pass and only 2% (02) respondents were post-graduate holders. Family source of income is a very important aspect in terms of the economic development of the respondents. Having known the family background of the respondents this study find out the occupational background of the respondents starting from their husband's occupation of the married women. Among the 55 married women's, the majority of the respondents i.e., 29% (29) respondents' husbands' occupation was trade and business, 11% (11) respondents' husbands engaged in Industrial enterprises, 9% (09) respondents' husbands were engaged in government service, 5% (05) respondents' husbands engaged in any other working activities like driving, poultry firm etc. and only 1% respondents' husbands working in agriculture. In the context of unmarried women, the study

<sup>6</sup> Rajkonwar, A.B. (2004): "Entrepreneurship Development." Kalyani Publishers, New Delhi P- 66 and 67.

reveals that the majority of the respondents' fathers i.e. 34% (34) were engaged in trade and business. As many as 27% (27) respondents' fathers occupations was industrial enterprise, 25% (25) respondents' fathers occupations was government service, 9% (09) respondents' fathers were engaged in agriculture and 5% (05) respondents' fathers were engaged in any other working activities. Monthly family income is another element of social background of the respondents.

Again, the study also depicts that among the 100 respondents, the maximum number of the respondent's families i.e. 23% (23) belong to income groups rupees 8001/- to 13000/- and more than 23000/-. The income group of rupees 3001/- to 8000/- which covers 21% (21) and 15% (15) numbers of the respondent's family are from the income group of rupees 13001/- to 18000/-. As many as 13% (13) family of the respondents are from the income group 18001/- to 23000/- and only 5% (05) family of the respondents have no more income and who earn below 3000/- rupees per month for their survival.

### 8. Impact of entrepreneurial activities on women empowerment

Entrepreneurship development refers to the process of enhancing entrepreneurial skills and knowledge through structured training and entrepreneurial income generating programmes. (Khanka; 2009) Entrepreneurship Development aims to enlarge the base of entrepreneurs in order to accelerate the pace at which new ventures enterprise are created. During the time of field study it has been observed that, women entrepreneurs were engaged in different types of entrepreneurial activities. which are: Garment making (item of clothing), Cutting and tailoring, knitting, embroidery & woolen articles, general store, beauty parlor, training institute, toy making, and food processing, steel fabrications, printing and binding and any other. The table no- I shows Types of women enterprises of the women entrepreneurs.

**Table no: I**  
**Types of women enterprises of the women entrepreneurs**

Sl. No.	Types of enterprise	Number of the respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Garment making (item of clothing)	08	8%
2	Cutting and tailoring	28	28%
3	Knitting	07	7%
4	Embroidery & woolen articles	07	7%
5	General store	10	10%
6	Beauty parlor	16	16%
7	Training institute	05	5%
8	Toy making	02	2%
9	Food processing	07	7%
10	Steel fabrication	02	2%
11	Printing and binding	03	3%
12	Any other	05	5%
	Total	100	100%

From the above table, it has been noticed that 8% (08) women were involved in garment making (item of clothes). They produce only clothes for women and children and produce new varieties of garment like mekhaela, riha, blouse, frock, shirts; shaddars etc. which are mostly women wears.

The make clothes of various designs keeping in view the changing fashions and local demands. Total unit of production by the individual firm varies from one to another. 28% (28) women were engaged in enterprise of cutting and tailoring. Knitting is another enterprise, in which women entrepreneurs tend to be interested as 7% (07) of the respondents were engaged in knitting. This unit produced ladies and children wear only. In the same 7% (07) and 10% (10) respondents engaged in embroidery & woolen articles and general store respectively. 16% (16) were found to have been engaged in beauty parlor enterprise. 5% (05) of the respondents established privately training institute. 7% (07) of the respondents were engaged in food processing enterprise. Out of 100 respondents 2% (02), 2% (02) and 3% (03) of the respondents were engaged in toy making, steel fabrication and printing and binding enterprises respectively. Any other enterprises including jute, bamboo and cane craft and poultry firm etc are popular enterprise in which women entrepreneurs were found to be interested as 5% (05) of the respondents established such units respectively. In the present study, it is enquired that maximum of the women entrepreneurs have engaged in her first entrepreneurial activities. On the other hand, a few women entrepreneurs have done the earlier working activities. Among the 100 respondents, the majority 90% (90) of the respondents have first business enterprise. Only 10% (10) of the respondents are engaged in earlier enterprise.

In this study, we observed some of the influencing factors to empower and development of women in the different entrepreneurial activities. The table no- II shows influencing factors to start the enterprise of the respondents.

**Table no: II**  
**Influencing factors and starts the enterprise of the respondents**

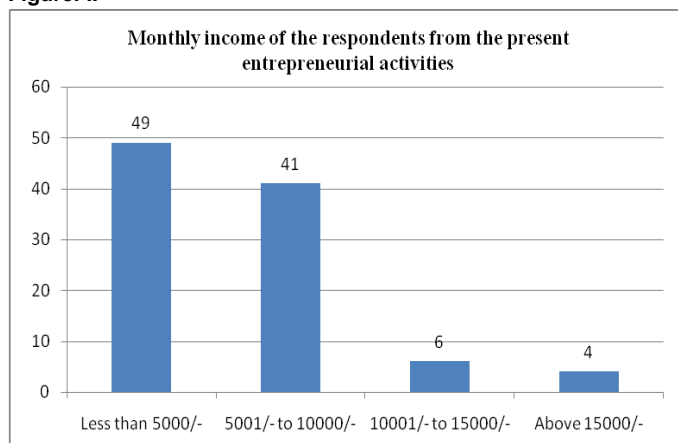
Sl. No.	Influencing factors	Number of the respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Occupational status of the family	09	9%
2	Economic status of the family	38	38%
3	Occupational status of own	53	53%
	Total	100	100%

The study reveals that large majority i.e., 53% (53) of the respondents were very much influenced by herself that means occupational status of own, 38% (38) of the respondents were influenced by economic status of the family and 9% (09) of the respondents stated that occupational status of the family might be influencing factor for their present enterprise. The large majority of the respondents stated that their influencing factor is own. Because, some of the respondents were engaged in different working activities before starting their enterprise and they were influenced primarily by previous association in the same line and they thought to take up business activity. Second largest majority of the respondents were very much influence by economic status of the family, because choice of entrepreneurial activity is not considered only on the basis of skills and technical knowledge, but also on the economic status of entrepreneurs family. Women entrepreneurs who belonged to high or medium income group family, they generally preferred to women to engage in business

activity but lower income group families also considered women to enter into business enterprises that the necessary training obtained by themselves. Besides economic status, occupational status of the family was also considered to be relevant to choosing the type of enterprise. Family occupation means occupation of father, husband and mothers. Occupational status of the family would have an influence on the enterprise because of women entrepreneurs received help and co-operation from family in managing the enterprises.

In the context of monthly income of the respondents, it has been observed that they were much earning money in their enterprises. The following figure II display the monthly income of the respondents from the present entrepreneurial activities.

**Figure: II**



The study reveals that the maximum number of i.e., 49% (49) of the respondents belong to income group rupees less than 5000/-. The second majority of the respondents i.e., 41% (41) belong to income group rupees 5001/- to 10000/-. As many as 6% (06) of the respondents are from the income group rupees 10001/- to 15000/- and only 4% (04) of the respondents earn more than 15000 rupees. In this context, economic work may help the people to increase their economic status. During the time of field visit it was asked to the respondents regarding their view of economic position or status. Majority, 97% (97) respondents have been replied that do they think that they are economically well being or satisfied after starting in entrepreneurial activities. In this study, it has been observed that 91% (91) women have to take financial responsibility of their family.

### 9. Entrepreneurship and social life of the women entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship is a socio-psychological phenomenon. (Gupta & Khanka 1996) It is associated with a number of factors which may be referred to like motivation, reasons, facilities, resource etc. The growth of entrepreneurship though depends upon the availability of resources. The fact is that resource alone cannot lead to entrepreneurial growth if the consciousness of the individuals is not business-oriented. (Gupta & Khanka 1996) If we see in the traditional patriarchal family, then it has been noticed that, the father holds the authority of property, women and children. The father has the role of providing sufficient budget for the family by working and the mother stays at home to look after the children. Nowadays,

it is perceived in the society that the dominant culture portrayal of work and family classifies women as either work oriented or family oriented.<sup>7</sup> Women are tackling any forms of profession and feminizing labor forces that were restricted and were dominated by men in before.

Now in the present situation, women participation in the any working activities or any entrepreneurial activities is quite progressive way. (Tong; 2009) A good number of women have shown their willingness to do some of the working activities but at the same time they have to develop abilities for their activities. Status is a social position, as the 'socially defined location or place' which an individual occupies in a system of interaction or society. (Aruna; 2006) Social status leads to social life of the people. In the context of social status, the respondents have been asked that "Could they think that participation in entrepreneurial activities has helped in achieving a comparatively more favorable social status?"

The study reveals that the majority of the respondents i.e., 81% (81) respondents opined that they could help achieve a comparatively more favorable social status of participating in entrepreneurial activities. 19% (19) respondents reported that they could not achieve a comparatively more favorable social status of participating in entrepreneurial activities. During the time field visit, it has been asked to the respondents that do they feel that that after establishment as an entrepreneur, have you got a status in the society. In the response to this question out of 100 respondents, 69% (69) respondents mentioned that they have getting status in the society after establishment as an entrepreneur. But, rests of them 31% (31) respondents have not getting status in the society after establishment as an entrepreneur.

The study reveals that women's equal rights and regards in the family has been observed. During the time of field visit, it has been asked to the respondents that have they thinks that they are enjoying equal rights with the male members in the family. This question was asked separately both married and unmarried respondents. In this response to this question, out of 55 married respondents, i.e., 17% (17) respondents mentioned that they are equal rights and regards with the male member of the family. However, 38% (38) married respondents reported that they are not enjoying equal rights and regards with the male members of the family. Therefore, it was observed that these respondents have to depend on their male counterpart to take various household decisions.

After knowing the equal rights and regards of the married respondents with the male member of the family, the respondents were asked the unmarried respondents enjoying equal rights and regards in the their family. The study depicts that out of 45 unmarried respondents, i.e., 25% (25) respondents opined that they have equal rights and regards with the male member of the family. However, 20% (20) unmarried respondents said that they are not enjoying equal rights and regards with the male members of the family. In this study, it has been observed that women are empowered through various entrepreneurial activities. After analysis the

<sup>7</sup> [wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminisation\\_of\\_the\\_workplace](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminisation_of_the_workplace)

data, it was observed that, some of the major impacts have been observed during the field study. The respondents tried to increase self confidence through entrepreneurship development and they become success up to a mark. Even it upgrades their living standard for which they achieved satisfactory social status. Significantly in this study it was noticed that respondents expressed their contentment in terms of decision making. According to maximum number of the respondents i.e., 42% (42) their power of decision making has increased.

#### 10. Concluding remark

The study reveals that, women the capacity to access resources but due to lack of insufficiency of capital and lack of inspiration they are unable to make meaningful choices for proper economic enhancement. But a few of them try to overcome the problems faced by them to start their enterprise for economic upliftment. The study depicts that some women

try to change their mindset and take part in income generating activities and achieved a social status in the society. The women have come forward to face any kind challenges in context of role conflict, de motivation and hindrances of social institutions. They involved in different types of entrepreneurial activities and realized the prospect of entrepreneur. They involved in different types of entrepreneurial activities and realized the prospect of entrepreneur. Of course, due to the impact of modern education and increasing scientific temperament women in Assam have been considered for entrepreneurial activities up to a mark. Now, the attitude of male members of the society based biased approach gradually decreased to some extent. Still there are some women entrepreneurs are victims of these problems. If the society as well as women themselves becomes aware about this it will be reduced to zero level; which may provide an egalitarian human society.

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