

Empowering Women Entrepreneurship in MSMEs: A Pathway to Viksit Bharat

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Abstract

This research discovers the pivotal role of women's entrepreneurship in India's 'Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME)' sector and its contribution to achieving the vision of 'Viksit Bharat'. While participation of women workforce in MSMEs has increased to 41.3% as of 2023-2024, they continue to face significant barriers, including limited access to credit, gender discrimination, and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. Despite these challenges, women are increasingly taking on entrepreneurial roles in both farm and non-farm sectors, driving economic growth, innovation, and social change.

According to the 'Ministry of MSME', women-owned enterprises constitute 20.5% of all formally enumerated MSMEs on the 'Udyam Registration Portal (URP)', contributing to 18.73% of jobs and 10.22% of total turnover. This indicates that while women are actively engaging in entrepreneurship, their businesses are often smaller in scale and face constraints in accessing capital and markets. In contrast, data from the 'Udyam Assist Platform (UAP)' shows that women own over 70% of 'Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs)', highlighting their dominance in the informal sector due to lower entry barriers.

The study, based on a secondary data analysis, examines the current position of women entrepreneurs in MSMEs, the impact of government schemes like the 'Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme' and the 'SAMARTH' program, and their role in the journey towards a developed India. By leveraging technology, forming self-help groups, and benefiting from targeted government initiatives, women entrepreneurs are breaking barriers and fostering inclusive growth. This paper concludes that empowering women's entrepreneurship is not only a social necessity but a strategic pathway to unlocking India's full economic potential, paving the way for a more inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurship, MSMEs, Viksit Bharat, Gender Diversity, Economic Empowerment.

Introduction

Worldwide, women's entrepreneurship has become a potent force propelling innovation, economic expansion, and social transformation. In the context of 'Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)', women entrepreneurs are increasingly playing a pivotal role. However, despite their significant contributions, women face unique challenges and barriers that hinder their full potential. 'Gender discrimination' is one of the main factors that discourages women from taking on challenges. According to UNESCO, gender-based discrimination in all its manifestations violates human rights and hinders the 2030 'Agenda for Sustainable Development' (Parameshwar, 2020). This study scrutinizes the dynamics of female entrepreneurship in MSMEs, focusing on the barriers they encounter and the transformative changes they are driving in these sectors.

The farm sector, which includes agriculture and allied activities, has traditionally been a male-dominated domain. However, women are increasingly taking on entrepreneurial roles in areas such as organic farming, dairy production, agri-processing, and sustainable agriculture (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 2021). These ventures not only contribute to household income but also promote food security and environmental sustainability. 'The Periodic Labour Survey of India' indicates that although women's labor force participation has expanded dramatically, it was only 23.3% in 2017 and 41.3% in 2023–2024. On the other hand, "non-farm MSMEs, which encompass a wide range of activities such as handicrafts, retail, textiles, and services, offer women opportunities to diversify their income sources and achieve financial independence" (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2020).

Despite their growing presence, "women entrepreneurs in both sectors face numerous barriers, including limited access to credit, lack of training and technical skills, societal norms, and inadequate infrastructure" (World Bank, 2019). In rural areas, where women have fewer resources and support networks, these issues are often more pronounced. Additionally, the dual burden of managing household responsibilities and running a business further complicates their entrepreneurial journey (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020).

However, women entrepreneurs are breaking these barriers and driving significant change. They are leveraging technology, forming self-help groups, and accessing government schemes to overcome challenges and scale their businesses ('Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises' [MSME], 2021). Their efforts are not only transforming their own lives but also contributing to community development and economic growth. For instance, women-led cooperatives in the farm sector have improved market access for small farmers, while women in non-farm MSMEs are creating employment opportunities and fostering innovation (National Commission for Women [NCW], 2022).

Since its inception on July 1, 2020, women-owned MSMEs have accounted for 20.5% of all MSMEs registered on the Ministry of MSME's Udyam Registration Portal (URP). With **11.15%** of the overall investment, these women-owned MSMEs account for **18.73%** of the jobs created by all Udyam registered businesses. Women-owned MSMEs account for **10.22%** of the total revenue of all Udyam-registered MSMEs. According to data from the 'Udyam Assist Platform (UAP)', which registers 'Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs)', women-owned IMEs account for 70.84% of employment and 70.49% of all IMEs (since the Udyam Assist site launched on 11.01.2023) (PIB report, 2014).

The goal of this research is to offer a thorough knowledge of the role of women entrepreneurship in MSMEs, and their path to 'Viksit Bharat' by highlighting their contributions and the transformative changes they are driving, this research seeks to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and development practitioners on how to support women entrepreneurs better and create an enabling environment for their success.

The key objectives of Viksit Bharat

The primary emphasis of the 2024–25 budget is on 'GYAN', Gareeb, Yuva, Annadata, and Nari. The government's goal, known as 'Viksit Bharat 2047', is to make the nation a rich and self-sufficient economy by that year. The program's criteria include social empowerment, infrastructure development, economic growth, technical advancement, and sustainability. By 2047, when India celebrates its 100th anniversary of independence, the government's plan, Viksit Bharat 2047, seeks to make the nation completely developed. In just 20 years, it seeks to grow India's economy to \$30 trillion. The plan's primary objectives

include consolidating infrastructure, expanding social welfare programs, fostering economic growth, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing living and business conditions.

Literature Review

There are many similar research studies which shed light on this topic, and a few are mentioned here.

According to an **IBEF** survey, approximately 20.5% of Indian women run MSME businesses, comprising more than 18.73% of the workforce, and account for 10.22% of the total turnover. The percentages are still not up to par because they are much better globally than in India (almost 37% of GDP).

The report '**Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development**' (2011) published by the 'Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)', highlights the Women's contribution in agriculture, the barriers they face and the potential for empowering women to drive rural development. The report also suggests that reducing the gender gap in agriculture will benefit society and the agricultural industry greatly. If women have equal access to productive resources as men, they might increase farm output by 20–30%. This might result in a 2.5–4% increase in agricultural output overall in developing nations, which would lower the global hunger rate by 12–17%. World Bank's report '**Women Entrepreneurs in India: What is Holding Them Back?**' (2018) examines the obstacles that Indian women entrepreneurs confront, such as a lack of training, cultural standards, and financial availability. It also provides policy recommendations to support women-led MSMEs.

NABARD's report 'Self-Help Groups and Women Empowerment: A Study of Rural India' (2015) explores how SHGs have empowered rural women entrepreneurs by making credit available, training and collective decision-making opportunities. A report by the **ILO** '**Women Entrepreneurs in Non-Farm Enterprises: Challenges and Opportunities**' (2020), focuses on women entrepreneurs in non-farm MSMEs, such as handicrafts, textiles and retail. It also highlights the role of digital tools and government schemes in overcoming barriers. Women frequently forgo income, prospects for professional advancement, and education to fulfil obligations to their families, safety concerns, and other **constraints** (**Women Empowerment, a Reality Check [NABARD], 2021**). A report 'Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in India: The Role of Government Schemes' by the Ministry of MSME GoI, 2021, evaluates the impact of government schemes like 'MUDRA Yojana', 'Stand-Up India' and 'PMEGP' on women entrepreneurs in farm and non-farm MSMEs.

A study by **Brush et al. (2012)** examines the obstacles that women confront entrepreneurs in developing countries, including access to resources, cultural norms and institutional support. A report, 'Women in Agri-Tech: Breaking Barriers in Farm-Based Start-Ups' by **Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) (2022)**, explores the role of women in agri-tech start-ups, focusing on how technology is enabling them to overcome traditional barriers in the farm sector.

'**Role of Women Entrepreneurs in MSME Sector in India**' by **Patel Abhilasha et al. (2023)** compares men and women contribution in the MSME sector and finds that the share of women is very less than the share of men in this area. Although the number of MSMEs has increased over time, more needs to be done to boost the involvement of female business owners in the industry. Another study, '**Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in MSMEs in Rural India – An Exploratory Approach**' by **Madhurima et al. (2019)** gave insights into the rising importance of women entrepreneurs in India. She took data from 30 women and compared their experiences and challenges in starting entrepreneurship in MSME.

Research Gap

There are many studies on women entrepreneurship, but several critical gaps remain unaddressed. Those studies mainly focused on women's empowerment, their education and the development of their skills. Still, it is rare to see a combined research that focuses on women entrepreneurship in MSMEs and how they can contribute from the Indian perspective to the path of 'Viksit Bharat'. The research will be helpful in providing insights and directions for future research studies.

Methodology

For this research, the study used a secondary data analysis technique. The persistence of choosing the secondary data is that it provides access to large-scale, reliable and cost-effective information. The information used in this study came from a variety of sources, including databases, scholarly publications, international organizations, and official publications and websites.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the existing status of women entrepreneurship MSMEs in India, including their contributions to employment, GDP and rural growth.
- To analyse the impact of management policies and schemes on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs.
- To assess the contribution of women entrepreneurs in the path of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Women Entrepreneurship in MSMEs

'Accelerate Action', this year's 'International Women's Day' theme, coincides with a significant moment in India's history. One major question still stands when we consider our journey toward a developed economy: how can we best capitalise on the numerous financial advantages of gender diversity in the workforce? India's female workforce engagement rate is 41.7%, according to the World Bank, which is relatively low compared to the country's nearly 80% male workforce participation rate. Nearer to home, India's near-shore neighbours, Cambodia (~70%), Vietnam (~69%), Singapore (62%) and Thailand (59%), do far better than the Bahamas (90%) and Iceland (81%), which have the highest rates of women's employment worldwide.

One of the main reasons for India's poor workforce diversity is the disproportionate amount of unpaid care work, along with other sociocultural considerations. Even after entering the industry, many women continue to drop out following life events like marriage and childbirth due to a lack of proper support and workplace amenities.

To achieve its economic goals, India must address this issue. Here are some ways India can boost gender inclusion and economically empower women:

1. Building a "Care Economy"

Socio-cultural norms often define a woman's role as a family caregiver, which can limit her ability to participate in the economy. While some employers are starting to offer care support, more is needed. Data from India's 2024 'Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)' shows a strong link between childcare responsibilities and low female workforce participation, with 43.04% of women citing these duties as a barrier to working.

The Indian government has increased its efforts in this area. For instance, the 'Ministry of Women and Child Development's 'Palna Scheme' offers "Anganwadi cum Creches" to give kids a safe and secure

environment. In order to allow moms to work for pay, they also concentrate on the children's nutrition and cognitive development. Every state has a number of these programs that assist the development of childcare and family welfare.

2. Improving Workplace Conditions

Workplaces must be safe and hygienic for women. The government's **SHe-Box portal** is a step in the right direction, offering a unified platform for women to file and track workplace harassment complaints.

The Smart Cities Mission is also contributing by incorporating gender-sensitive urban planning. With an allocated budget of INR 48,000 crore, the mission aims to create jobs in technology, promote digital inclusion, and provide basic amenities like women-friendly toilets and smart water management systems. Additionally, affordable housing is critical. 'The Ministry of Women and Child Development's 'Working Women Hostel (WWH)' program offers working women safe, reasonably priced housing in a variety of cities and towns, sometimes with childcare included.

3. Reducing Drudgery

The demanding and physically taxing roles traditionally assigned to women are a major reason for their absence from the workforce. The arduous task of fetching clean water is a prime example. The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), with a budget of INR 8 lakh crore, aims to change this by providing household water connections. This frees up women's time, which can then be used for economic activities. States that have implemented programs like the JJM have seen a rise in women-led small-scale businesses and cottage industries.

4. Supporting Entrepreneurship Skills

Developing skills and entrepreneurship among women is crucial for their financial independence. This requires a combined effort from both the government and employers.

- **Holistic Skilling:** India needs to promote skills training for women in high-demand sectors like digital services, financial technology, and traditional crafts. Government schemes like '**SANKALP**' have successfully provided women with access to quality training, boosting their employability.
- **Micro-Enterprise Development:** It's important to offer comprehensive support that combines both technical and business skills. Initiatives like '**Hastakala Setu**' and '**Handmade in India**' help women artisans move from being skilled workers to becoming successful micro-entrepreneurs.
- **Business Incubation:** India should create business incubators specifically for women that offer a full range of support, including training, mentorship, and access to markets. The recent Union Budget's announcement of term loans for women entrepreneurs will be more effective if paired with structured capacity-building programs.

"Women owned 19.5% of all unincorporated non-agricultural proprietary businesses, employing 22–27 million people, according to the 'National Sample Survey (NSS)' 73rd Round report" (July 2015–June 2016). The October 2022 report "Decoding Government Support to Women Entrepreneurs in India" on the 'NITI' Aayog website declares that women's economic involvement in India amounts to 17% of the nation's GDP (PIB report). In India, women have become more entrepreneurial during the last 20 years, especially in the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) sector. In 2024, MSMEs contributed nearly 30% to the GDP. The aim is to raise this to 35% in the current year (The Hindu), but women entrepreneurs are still struggling for limited access to credit. One of the biggest issues facing MSMEs, especially women-owned MSMEs, is loan availability, based on the June 2019 Report of the Expert Committee on 'Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises' published by the 'Reserve Bank of India'. In India,

women frequently lack collateral, credit history, or formal documentation mandatory by banks and NBFCs.

To encourage women to become entrepreneurs, the government has launched programs like 'StandUp India', 'Mudra Yojana Scheme', 'TREAD (Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development) Scheme', 'Mahila Udyam Nidhi Scheme', 'Annapurna Scheme', 'Stree Shakti Package for Women Entrepreneurs', 'Bhartiya Mahila Business Bank Loan', 'Dena Shakti Scheme', 'Udyogini Scheme', and 'Cent Kalyani Scheme'.

Women make up around 14% of all business owners, or 8.05 million out of 58.5 million, according to the "Sixth Economic Census." 13.45 million people (10.24%) were hired by these enterprises, of whom 83.19% were unemployed. Of them, 2.76 million women, or 13.3% of female entrepreneurs, work in agriculture, while 5.29 million, or more than 65%, work in non-agricultural industries. With respective percentages of 29.8% and 17.8%, manufacturing and retail trade were the most common non-agricultural businesses run by female entrepreneurs.

The Ministry of MSME has supported women-owned MSMEs in several ways, including:

- There are special pushes to register MSMEs owned by women on the Udyam Registration Portal.
- The 'Public Procurement Policy' was changed in 2018 to support women entrepreneurs, requiring Central Ministries, Departments, and Undertakings to source at least 3% of their yearly purchases from women-owned micro and small businesses.
- Under the 'Credit Guarantee Scheme' for 'Micro & Small Enterprises', two measures have been added to encourage female entrepreneurs as of December 1, 2022. These are;
 - a. 10% off the yearly guarantee fees.
 - b. 10% more coverage, up to 85%, compared to 75% for other business owners.
- The 'Ministry of MSME' runs the "Skill Upgradation & Mahila Coir Yojana" under the 'Coir Vikas Yojana', a special training program designed to improve the skills of women artisans working in the coir industry, to promote female entrepreneurship.
- The 'Prime Minister's Employment Generation scheme (PMEGP)', a significant credit-linked subsidy scheme, is also carried out by the Ministry. Its goal is to create self-employment prospects by establishing microbusinesses in the non-farm sector. Beneficiaries who belong to particular groups—such as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, OBC, minorities, women, ex-service members, physically challenged individuals, NER, hill and border areas, etc are given higher subsidies.
- Under the Procurement & Marketing Support Scheme, women-owned MSMEs receive a larger subsidy to promote their participation in trade shows.
- In order to help women-owned MSMEs train more than 7,500 female candidates from rural and suburban regions and support women in developing their skills and markets, the "SAMARTH" program was established. For aspiring and existing female entrepreneurs, the Ministry offers a 20% reduction in the annual processing fee on the 'National Small Industries Corporation's scheme', 20% of seats in free skill development programs run by the Ministry's skill development schemes, and 20% of MSME business delegations attending domestic and international exhibitions under the Ministry's marketing assistance programs.
- In terms of MSMEs' capacity building, the 'MSME Sustainable Zero Defect Zero Effect (ZED) Certification Scheme' is an effort that aims to give Indian MSMEs a road map to worldwide competitiveness. The program's objective is for the products produced by the MSME sector to have

no market recalls and no environmental impact. This program offers women-owned MSMEs a 100% cost-subsidy on ZED Certification to empower and encourage female entrepreneurs.

- An exclusive MSME Idea Hackathon 3.0 for female entrepreneurs was held under the MSME Innovative Scheme's incubation component, and 18,888 ideas were submitted. The 'Ministry of MSME' carries out the following capacity-building and skill-enhancing initiatives for MSMEs, especially women entrepreneurs in MSMEs:
- 'Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programme (ESDP)': Promoting new businesses, enhancing the proficiencies of current MSMEs, and nurturing an entrepreneurial ethos throughout the country are the goals of ESDP. Approximately 40% of the intended recipients of ESDPs must come from under-represented groups in society (SC/ST, women, and people with physical disabilities). Participants who are SC, ST, physically disabled, below the poverty line (BPL), or women will not be charged a participation fee.
- 'The Mahila Coir Yojana (MCY)' offers a two-month training program with stipends to empower women craftsmen in the coir industry. The 'Prime Minister's Employment Generation Program (PMEGP)' encourages women artisans to apply for aid.

Table:1

Women-owned MSMEs' share of all MSMEs registered on the Udyam Registration platform since its launch (July 1, 2020, to January 31, 2024)

Category	Total	Employment	Investment (Rs in cr)	Turnover (Rs in cr)
Women MSME	4,667,278	28,407,069	126845.12	1714992.98
MSMEs	22,819,417	151,668,034	1,137,237	16,784,358
% of women-owned MSME	20.5%	18.73%	11.15%	10.22%

Source: pib.gov.in

The table indicates that 20.5% of the total registered MSMEs are owned by women, demonstrating significant participation. However, their share in employment (18.73%), investment (11.15%), and turnover (10.22%) is relatively lower, indicating that women-owned MSMEs tend to be smaller in scale and more constrained in growth. This reflects a gender gap in access to capital, market size, and scalability despite active registration.

Table:2

Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) owned by women's share of all IMEs registered on the Udyam Assist Platform since the portal's launch (11.01.2023 to 31.01.2024)

Category	Total (nos)	Employment (no. of persons)
Women IME	9,108,058	11,023,945
IMEs	12,920,177	15,561,967
Percentage	70.49%	70.84%

Source: pib.gov.in

The table explains that over 70% of informal micro enterprises are owned by women, and they contribute a similarly high share to employment (70.84%). This highlights that women are dominant players in the informal microenterprise segment, possibly due to lower entry barriers, home-based businesses, and flexible operations. It also reflects that while women lead in informal entrepreneurship, they face challenges transitioning to the formal MSME sector, where access to credit, technology, and networks is essential.

Table:3

**Gender wise distribution of ownership of MSME (including Informal Micro Enterprises on UAP)
31st Dec, 2024**

Category	Total	Percentage
Male	4,08,70,924	70.8%
Female	1,66,04,106	28.8%
Others	2,14,192	0.4%

Source: Ministry of MSMEs

This table presents the number and percentage share of ‘Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)’, including informal micro enterprises registered on the ‘**Udyam Assist Platform (UAP)**’, categorised by gender. The gender gap is evident, with a male percentage of 70.8% and a female percentage of 28.8%. The data highlights that although women and other gender groups are contributing to India’s MSME sector, a gender imbalance persists. To move in the direction of a more egalitarian and inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem, proactive and gender-sensitive policies are necessary at both the national and state levels.

Table:4

**Top 10 States of Women-Owned MSMEs Registered on URP and UAP from 1.07.2020 to
30.11.2014**

Sl. No.	States	Percentage
1.	Tripura	66%
2.	West Bengal	62%
3.	Mizoram	60%
4.	Andhra Pradesh	53%
5.	Nagaland	50%
6.	Bihar	50%
7.	Jharkhand	48%
8.	Kerala	47%
9.	Sikkim	46%
10.	Karnataka	45%

Source: Ministry of MSMEs

‘Women entrepreneurs’ role in the path of ‘Viksit Bharat’

In India's quest for ‘Viksit Bharat’ (Developed India), women entrepreneurs are becoming more and more important, contributing significantly in both the social and economic domains.

Economic contributions

- **GDP Growth and Job Creation:** Particularly in the ‘Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME)’ sector, women-led firms are generating jobs and stimulating the economy. According to studies, India could generate 150–170 million employment by fostering women entrepreneurs and establishing over 30 million women-owned businesses.
- **Innovation and Diversification:** The businesswomen are bringing fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to various industries, from traditional sectors like handicrafts and food processing to emerging fields like technology and sustainable solutions.
- **MSME Sector Growth:** Women own around 20% of MSMEs in India, contributing to a significant portion of the sector's output and employment. Initiatives like the ‘Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana’ and ‘Stand-Up India’ have provided crucial financial support to women-led micro-enterprises, fostering financial inclusion and self-reliance.
- **Startup Ecosystem:** Women-led startups are gaining prominence in India's booming startup ecosystem, attracting significant funding and contributing to India's position as a global leader in innovation.
- **Rural Economic Development:** Women entrepreneurs in rural areas, often organised into Self-Help Groups (SHGs), are transforming local economies by engaging in income-generating activities like food processing, textile production, and agribusiness.

Social contributions

- **Women Empowerment and Gender Equality:** Entrepreneurship provides women with economic independence, boosting their self-confidence and empowering them to make decisions and challenge societal norms.
- **Social Impact and Community Development:** Women entrepreneurs often focus on businesses that address social issues and contribute to community development, with many ventures prioritising social impact and environmental sustainability.
- **Skill Development and Education:** Government initiatives like the Skill India Mission and Digital India are empowering women with the necessary skills to excel in the digital economy and traditionally male-dominated sectors.
- **Role Models and Inspiration:** Women entrepreneurs who are successful, becoming inspiring role models, encouraging future generations of women to chase their entrepreneurial visions and break gender stereotypes (Piramal Foundation).

Conclusion

Empowering women entrepreneurship in ‘Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)’ is not merely a social imperative but a strategic pathway to achieving the vision of ‘Viksit Bharat’ (Developed India). The burgeoning potential of women-led businesses, particularly in rural India, presents a unique opportunity to drive inclusive growth and socio-economic transformation. Women are central to the agricultural value chain, from cultivation and processing to marketing. Empowering them with modern

farming techniques, access to credit, and market linkages can significantly boost agricultural productivity and income, creating a ripple effect across rural communities. Women entrepreneurs have enough potential to add value in any sector, whether it is the farm or non-farm sector. By dismantling existing barriers, fostering innovation, and building supportive ecosystems, India can bind the immense potential of its women entrepreneurs, paving the way for a more comprehensive, prosperous, and sustainable Viksit Bharat by 2047.

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