

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO SMALL KUDUMBASHREE (SELF HELP GROUPS) UNITS OF KERALA, INDIA

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**Abstract:** Entrepreneurship is a significant thrust area for any economy. Women empowerment is another area of focus by the Government of India. Financial freedom through entrepreneurship helps women empower themselves and participate in nation-building. The present study aims to understand the factors of women's empowerment through entrepreneurship. The study has focussed on small unit entrepreneurs and identified that improvement in socio-economic status, facilitating conditions and Self-satisfaction motivates women to turn to entrepreneurship and the empowerment they feel is driven by personal, economic and political improvement. Both the motivation and empowerment factors significantly influence self-empowerment. The study highlights the freedom women enjoy through entrepreneurship and the role of government support through kudumbashree units (self-help groups).

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, Women entrepreneurship, Empowerment, Socio-economic status, Kudumbashree, Financial aid.*

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### INTRODUCTION

As per the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the fifth sustainable development goal (SDG) is "Gender Equality. "One of the major thrust areas of all the societies across the globe is on empowerment of women. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed many schemes to empower and support women in India. One core area of empowerment of women is entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is considered the future of modern society. Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan and the "Make in India" initiative launched by the Government of India have given a platform for the citizens of India, especially women, to build the nation through their innovative ideas and to realize their dreams. During earlier times, the role of women in income-oriented and employment-generation activities was hindered by socio-economic constraints. Later society opened up for women, and they could use their potential and overcome the societal

constraints imposed on them, which helped them to make their niche in the areas they had dreamt of.

The economic contribution of women not only increases family income but also takes economic independence among women in the household. This helps them to contribute more effectively to intrahousehold decision-making and have better access to information. Nevertheless, this is also a point that women's economic participation cannot guarantee true economic empowerment as the ownership of resources may still be in the hands of the male members.

Women's economic empowerment is possible only when women have complete independence to use and control their incomes. Forbes India (2021) states that "women make up for 13.76% of entrepreneurs in India and own 20.37 % of MSMEs." Though a less percentage, this statistic is a light at the end of the tunnel.

The women population in India is 48.05% per the global statistics for 2022. Kerala is the southern state of India, and as per the report by the National Survey of India (2022), Kerala is the most literate state in India, with 96.2%. As per National Family Health Survey, 2019-21 (NFHS-5), Kerala has the highest sex ratio, with 1145 females per 1000 males.

Women entrepreneurs need not be highly educated, and they might not appear at the top list of entrepreneurs. The primary thought is the empowerment they gain through their self-generated income and self-esteem. "Kudumbashree" was set up in 1997 by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of Kerala as a women empowerment programme and as a three-tier structure for its women's community network: Neighbourhood groups (NHGs), Area Development Societies (ADS), and Community Development Societies (CDS).

Many women registered in Kudumbashree started their economic growth through these NHGs, and many have prospered economically and politically. The Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) by the Government of Kerala is a nodal agency promoting state entrepreneurship. They have a soft loan scheme to support women start-ups, which amounts to Rs. 15 lacs as working capital, and also have specialized programs which are women-centric that help them in their entrepreneurial journey.

The present study aims to assess the empowerment of women through entrepreneurship. The various factors are identified from the literature that influences empowerment through entrepreneurship, and the study focuses on assessing whether these factors have contributed to women's empowerment. The researchers have taken small units of women entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds to give a clear idea of the focus of the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's entrepreneurship significantly influences the economic growth of a nation. There are numerous studies on women's entrepreneurship in India at the national and state levels. According to Khan *et al.* (2022), political engagement, mobility & freedom, economic independence, self-confidence & respect, education relevancy, protest against

social ills, and financial planning & control are the most critical factors contributing to women's empowerment. Women are more independent than before and have the freedom to participate in their family business if required, indicating women's empowerment.

Rai *et al.* (2019) state that the participation of women in financial and economic activities will improve their status and offer them the power to participate in the basic leadership process. Roth (2017) has identified specific challenges women entrepreneurs face, and she further states that it is tougher to be in the business world for women. Some of the significant challenges that female entrepreneurs need to face are that they are not being considered seriously, letting fear of standing in their way, playing too many roles, wanting to please someone, etc..

According to Tiwari and Tiwari. (2016), women work more in the unorganized sector, and they work as tiny traders. It can be the primary vegetable seller to kitchen-made foods (homemade foods), which generally do not pave the way for a more extensive entrepreneurial journey. Sharma *et al.* (2012) state that women entrepreneurs have an essential role in local economies, and the challenges women entrepreneurs face in rural areas are more when compared with urban areas.

Ali *et al.* (2019) state that women entrepreneurship and empowerment are interrelated, and their study in the case of Nigeria states that government initiatives are to be more focussed on developing women entrepreneurs. Singh *et al.* (2012), in their study of self-help groups in Himachal Pradesh, point out that participation in SHGs has increased income and social status. They further add that government schemes help a lot in such empowerment.

Pachorkar *et al.*, in their case study of Jwala Mahila Samiti, also support the role of government aid in assisting women entrepreneurs. The literature shows that improvement in socio-economic status, facilitating conditions, and self-satisfaction motivates women to turn to entrepreneurship. Further, personal, economic, and political improvement creates self-empowerment. Hence the conceptual model is formulate as follows.

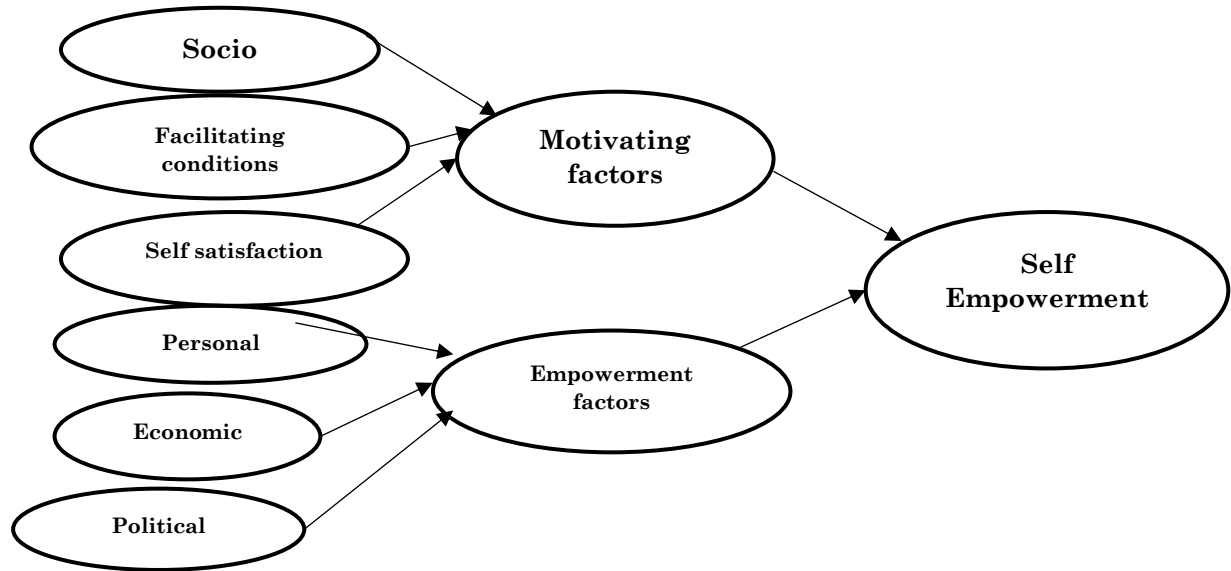


Fig 1: Conceptual model

**OBJECTIVES**

- To assess the factors of empowerment gained by women through entrepreneurship.
- To understand the factors of motivation towards entrepreneurship.
- To assess the influence of the factors like marital status, educational qualifications and income on the empowerment of women entrepreneurs.

**METHODOLOGY**

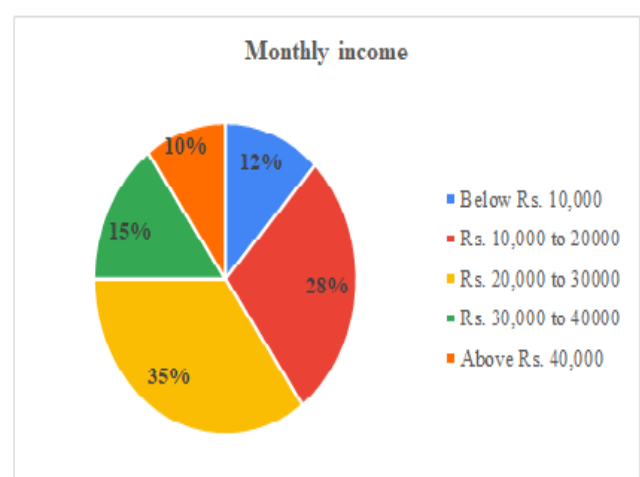
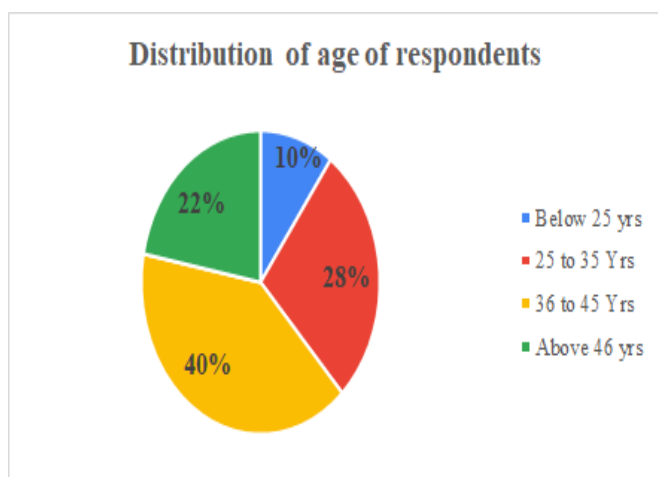
A descriptive research design was used for the study as the primary focus of the study is to describe the nature of a demographic segment. Survey method using structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was adapted from different studies as mentioned in the literature review.

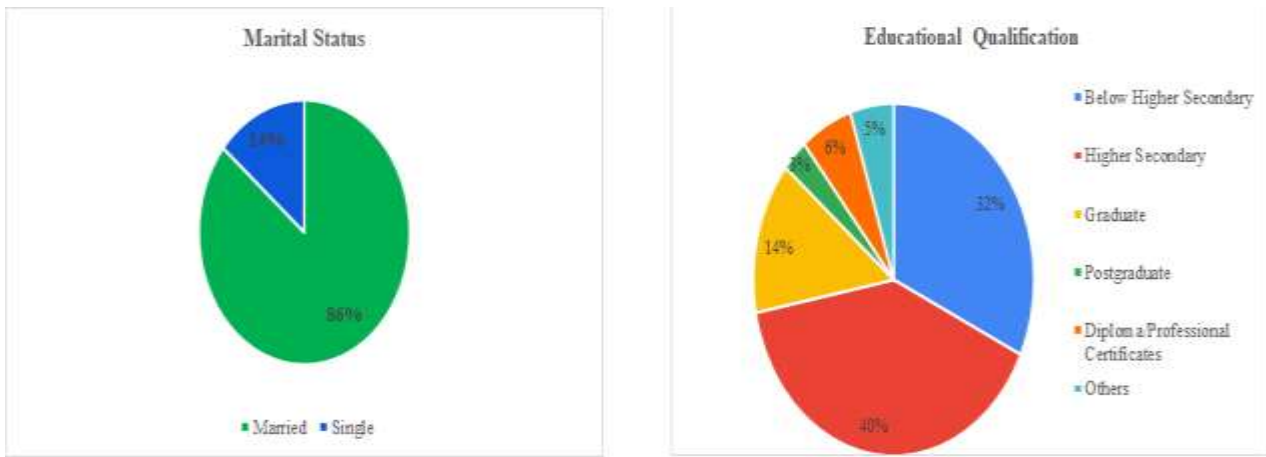
A purposive sampling technique was used in this study as the researchers felt that only small unit women entrepreneurs were to be selected as samples. The study was done in Kerala's various districts with a sample size of 100. Both offline and online methods were used for data collection. In some cases, questionnaires were distributed utilizing Google Forms using WhatsApp. Around 133 responses were received, and 100 were used for analysis after data cleansing. SPSS and Excel were used for data analysis, and statistical tools like regression, percentage analysis, t-test, and ANOVA were used.

**Data Analysis**

The first part gives the basic descriptives of the data and second part deals with the inferential analysis.

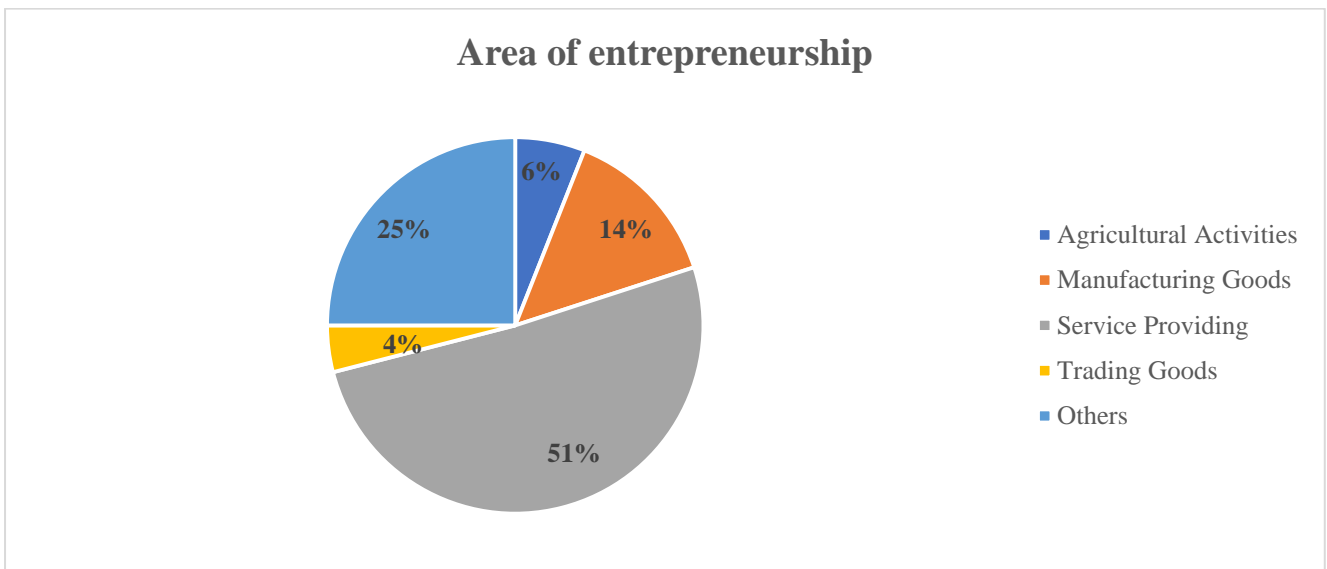
**Descriptives**





**Fig. 2: Descriptives of the data**

The women entrepreneurs were having operations in different areas which are depicted as follows:



**Fig. 3: Entrepreneurship areas**

**Inferential Analysis**

As stated in the literature review, the significant factors identified for motivation for entrepreneurship are socio-economic factors, facilitating conditions, and self-satisfaction.

The factors identified for empowerment are improvement at the personal level, economic level, and political level. All the factors were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 for Strongly Disagree and 5 for Strongly Agree. The mean values are as follows:

**Table 1: Mean values of the factors**

Motivation Factors	Mean	Empowerment factors	Mean
Socio Economic Factor	4.01	Personal level	3.98
Facilitating Factor	3.86	Economic level	3.94
Self-satisfaction Factor	3.97	Political level	3.52

From the above table, the socio-economic factor is the most motivating factor for entrepreneurship among women, and the personal level of empowerment drives them more. The mean value for self-empowerment

is 4.14, meaning women have felt a sense of self-empowerment through entrepreneurship. An exploratory factor analysis was done using the method of principal components and varimax rotation to identify the underlying factors. The results are as follows.

**Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.807
	Approx. Chi-Square	539.370
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	15
	Sig.	.000

**Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component	
	1	2
Socio economic	.766	.568
Facilitating	.801	.259
Self-satisfaction	.902	.191
Personal	.232	.833
Economic	.445	.854
Political	.170	.960

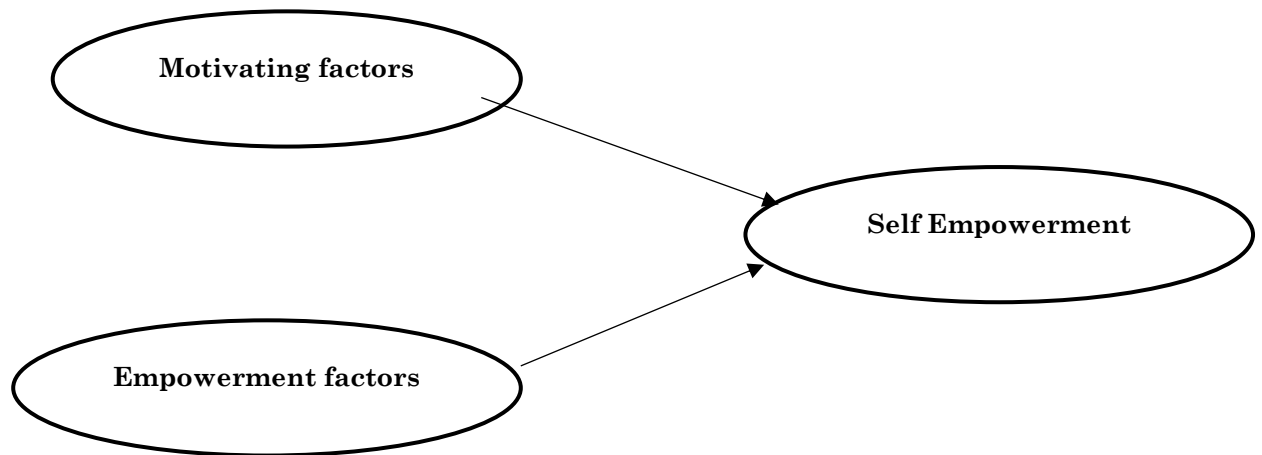
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

It can be seen from the above tables that the KMO measure is 0.807, and Bartlett's test is significant (value <0.05). Hence there is substantial correlation in the data, and the data is adequate for factor analysis. Further

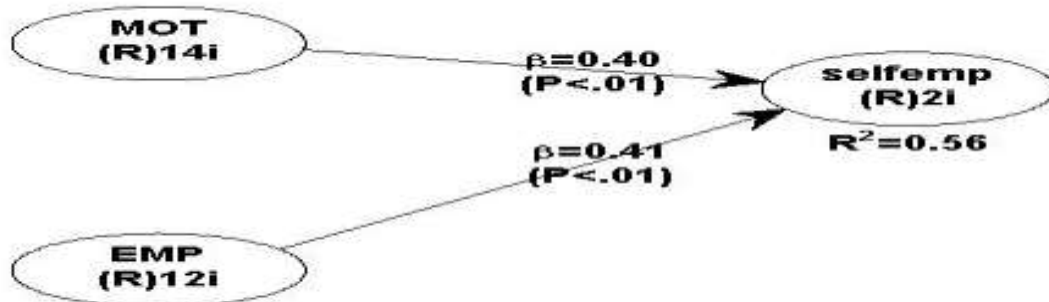
from the rotated component matrix, two factors have emerged; hence we can name them motivational and empowerment factors. Further the model is depicted as follows after identifying the factor from the factor analysis as above.



**Fig. 4: Model after factor analysis**

This model was then tested using Warp PLS.

Since the sample size is small, Warp PLS is used to estimate the model better.



**Fig 5: Structural model after analysis**

It can be seen that both the paths are significant as the p values are less than 0.05, and the beta values are 0.40 and 0.41, which are strong values. The R square value is 0.56, which means 56% variation of the model can be explained by the motivating and empowerment factors. The fit indices are as follows.

Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)=0.574, small  $\geq 0.1$ , medium  $\geq 0.25$ , large  $\geq 0.36$

Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR)=1.000, acceptable if  $\geq 0.7$ , ideally = 1

Hence the model seems to be fit as per the indices.

Further the analysis results to meet the third objective are as follows.

An independent samples t- test was done to check if there is a difference of marital status in the feeling of self-empowerment. The sig value was found to be greater than 0.05 and hence there is no significant difference.

One way ANOVA was done to check if there is a significant difference of educational qualifications and income on the feeling of self-empowerment. Both the sig values were greater than 0.05 and hence there is no significant difference for both educational qualification and income on self-empowerment.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship is one area that is given thrust in India in recent times. A lot of Government initiatives are introduced to facilitate entrepreneurship. Similarly, the Government of India considers women's development equally a vital area.

Empowerment of women is given high importance, and many initiatives like "Beti Padao, Beti Bachao," "Swachh Bharat Mission," and "Mahila E- Haat" are on track to emphasize empowerment. The study aimed at understanding whether women feel self-empowered through entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs who own small units were taken as sample for the study. Majority of them were into service providing like waste management, computer centers, dry clean centers, stitching units, day care units, etc. Participation in Kudumabashree

activities helped them to create a network and manage funds for their entrepreneurial ventures.

The different factors like improvement in socio-economic status, facilitating conditions, and self-satisfaction were studied to understand if these influence motivation to be entrepreneurs. It was found that all these factors were highly prominent and driven to empowerment too. Further, the personal, economic, and political improvement created a sense of self-empowerment among them.

Many of these small unit holders were even politically empowered and contested in the local self-government elections and are now office bearers. The study concludes that opportunities are to be provided for women to improve their economic level through entrepreneurship, which can help empower women. Entrepreneurship is an essential tool to empower the women in the country by increasing Family, Economic, Financial, and Social Status.

## SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was limited to only small unit women entrepreneurs; hence, the sense of personal, economic, and political level improvement cannot be generalized to a larger population. Future researchers can study entrepreneurs from different scales and have more generalized conclusions.

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