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**CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN SMES: THE LOCUS OF INDIA'S LOCALIZATION**


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**Abstract:** The last two decades has witnessed the popularization of the concept of globalization intertwined with geographic significance of the term localization. Lost in the perspective and transitional depths of these concepts, it is important to see the existence of cultural industries as a category of global-local analysis. These industries employ certain distinct characteristics of production of cultural goods and services which opens the way for an explorative approach in understanding the role of women especially those in the micro, small and medium enterprises associated to cultural industry.

Culture, to call it ones own is a fragile entity. It requires continuous protection and preservation. There is always a perpetual fear of being lost. With the advent of globalization, locality-defined cultures which had once constituted an identity is witnessing obliterating differences. Culture specific identity of cultural industry is at risk as a result of depredations of globalization. In India, cultural industry is not an organized whole but a self-supporting and self-organised one. The focus on empowering those women who form the locus of majority of 'culture workforce' among the SMEs is an understudied subject.

Empowering women in cultural industries is being regarded as a curtain raiser considering the skill potential among them. Simultaneously, empowering women in cultural industries will also aid in the proliferation of cultural identity, rather than destroying its identity as a result of globalization. This requires setting up cultural identity as an autonomous dynamic force, arising from the grassroots. There is a need to provide a distinct programme, tailored to those women workforce specific to their culture and local economy. It would also end up in suggesting how national identity could be experienced within the ambit of globalization

**Keywords:** cultural industries, small and medium enterprises, women empowerment, challenges

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**Introduction:**

**Understanding the transitional depths of globalization and localization :**The impact of globalization upon culture is generally viewed in a pessimistic way. It is associated with westernization, consumer culture, destruction of cultural identities etc. Long before the advent of globalization there existed distinct, well-defined autonomous and culturally sustaining network between ones culture and the geography of a place, leading to establishment of one's cultural identity. Such identities were viewed to be ones existential possession from a traditional inheritance of the past that are fragile and insured with protection and some sort of preservation because there is always the perpetual fear of being lost.

Globalization has brought with it certain corrosive changes that threaten vulnerable cultural identities at varying degrees that has resulted in obliterating the differences between localized cultures that had once been an identity. It is mostly the localized weaker cultures in the developing world that are more prone to the threat of globalization.

The interplay of various factors associated with globalization has led to counterpoised local forces so much so that while drifting into globalization we are opposing the preservation and continued sustainability of localized cultures. Also the interplay between culture and trade at local and global level present certain challenges as is illustrated in the UNESCO publication on Culture, Trade and Globalization (2000).

Although the report strongly establishes the significance of culture and trade, it tends to go ambiguous when it comes to cultural industries. It states that "*Cultural goods and services convey and construct cultural values,*

*produce and reproduce cultural identity and contribute to social cohesion; at the same time they constitute a key free factor of production in the new knowledge economy. This makes negotiations in the cultural field extremely controversial and difficult.....when culture is put on the table, it often prompts complex discussions on the relationship between the economic and non-economic value of things, that is, the value attributed to those things that do not have an assigned price (such as identity, beauty, or the meaning of life)"<sup>1</sup>.*

**Cultural Industries and pertaining challenges:** The term 'cultural industries' was initially used by the Greater London Council (GLC)<sup>2</sup> during the 1980s as a rhetorical device to emphasise firstly, that cultural activities that fell outside the public funding system and operated commercially were important generators of wealth and employment and secondly, a more directly cultural/ political point is that the entire range of cultural goods and objects which people consumed, the vast majority had nothing at all to do with the public funding system. This cultural strategy soon evolved as an alternative to promote and democratize cultural production and distribution, along with an approach to funding of cultural activities. Cultural industries soon came to be associated with economic and cultural policy. It was made use off by art and cultural agencies and those involved in tourism and marketing strategies. Cultural industries came to be seen as large scale economic and cultural transformations which needed to be addressed and secondly, the expression went global.

A single precise definition of cultural industries has been a subject of intense debate. Many of the debates stem from conceptual and definitional problems that reflect various transformations in the role of culture in

contemporary socio-economic aspect. The uncertainty about transformational implications have also led to cultural industries debate unclear so much so that the 'value' of culture shifts constantly between social, economic and aesthetic understanding of 'value'. Besides this, the notion of cultural industries is usually driven by those involved in policy formulation. Academic writings on this subject focused mostly upon the cultural and social implications of mass consumption of cultural commodities. Those outside the academic field such as consultants and other knowledge intermediaries have significantly contributed to the promotion of the above notion.

The definition among various countries has often been understood in terms of its practical ability to guide planning linked to the need for statistical measurement for instance, financial aspects, employment generation, labor market profile, training needs, contribution towards national, regional and local GDP. Each country has its own ways of collecting statistics in these areas which make comparison difficult. Also statistical measurement of tourism, heritage, creatives, artists etc., gets difficult. Coming to employment, occupational categories and cultural jobs being dispersed across a cross sectional categories statistical collection tend to get ambiguous. Further paid and non-paid jobs, self employment have restructured the labor market among this industry makes analysis invalid and less illuminating.

Cultural industries involve those activities that deal with goods whose economic value is derived from its cultural value. The visibility of cultural industries is high because of their influence on values and life styles. In spite of its significance, cultural industries have not been able to receive the much needed attention from researchers. Although several attempts have been made to fit cultural industries into the broader framework, but all went in vain. Kuhn<sup>3</sup> (1970) is of the opinion that the response to anomalies, is to set them aside as something curious, interesting but irrelevant and finally, to look up to them as both interesting and relevant.

The combination of knowledge and creativity are the focal of most of the industries to sustain and generate competitive advantage. Technical knowledge and skill development are regarded today as the foundation of competitive advantage. However, knowledge sans creativity can rarely meet the challenge of continuous innovation needed to sustain advantage especially in the cultural industries. Firms in cultural industries have long had to deal with this challenge, their experience contains significant lessons for most of the other industries.

Cultural goods, by contrast, are experiential goods (Bjorkergren 1996, Hirsch 1972, Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). They derive their value from subjective experiences that rely heavily on using symbols in order to manipulate perception and emotion. Producers of cultural products are more likely to find market success when they blend familiar and novel

elements. Consumers need familiarity to understand what they are offered, but they need novelty to enjoy it. Finding a successful synthesis of these two opposing elements depends more on art than technique, more on insight than professional judgment.

The strategy of firms in the cultural industries is oriented towards finding, developing, and maintaining control over the resources. Consequently, the long-term survival of firms in cultural industries depends heavily on replenishing their creative resources. However, because the processes that generate them are poorly understood, there is considerable uncertainty not only about how to detect them, but also on how to replicate and use them. Managerial practices such as training and apprenticeship that are useful in other industries are largely ineffective in cultural industries. What is more important is that resources that have proven valuable are usually embedded in individuals and groups over which the corporation has limited control (Stearns et al. 1987, Saundry 1998, Robins 1993)<sup>5</sup>.

One of the main challenges confronting cultural industries is that of maintaining creative resources. In order to tackle this challenge, firms in the cultural industries have to recruit and motivate individuals who seem to possess the insight and intuitive understanding of how creative resources can be discovered and nourished. Their competitive advantage depends on finding these individuals, and also on developing structures which leverage creative resources without at the same time stifling them.

To recapitulate, producers in the cultural industries have to deal with two main problems: demand patterns that are highly unpredictable and production processes that are difficult to monitor and control. Keen interest in cultural industries is driven by attempts to deal with such constraints by constantly shifting managerial practices and organizational forms. Shaping consumer tastes is always difficult, and in the case of the cultural industries it is made even more difficult by the fact that tastes are part of a wider social and cultural matrix over which firms have little or no control. Also firms need to seek to develop new ways of uncovering and managing creative inputs, because creativity comes from individuals whose talents and inputs can be organized and controlled only up to a point. The successful management of creative resources in the cultural industries depends on finding this point, on striking a balance between the imperatives of creative freedom and commercial imperatives.

Cultural industries are a combination of dual aspects of human experience. Culture is the result of individual and collective expression of basic ideas and aspirations, the artistic value of cultural products are balanced against their entertainment value through which cultural products attract audiences that can support them. Cultural industries are always striving to maintain loyalty towards artistic values while striving too hard to also deal with market economics.

**Cultural Empowerment of women in small and**

**medium enterprises:**

Off late empowerment of women has been a concern. The role of women empowerment needs to be studied in the economic development of the nation for various reasons. Empowerment of women has been recognized during the last decade as an important untapped source of economic growth. Empowering women can not only create new jobs for themselves but for other women too and by being different they also contribute to the society with different solutions to management, organizations and business problems as well as they pave the way for entrepreneurial opportunities for women.

India has always been regarded as a country whose traditions and cultures are deep-seated. Most of the traditional arts and cultures continue to be a part of the daily living in rural India. Some enterprises in urban India are also involved in retaining traditional art and culture through government support. The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector is also a major contributor to the national economy, in terms of employment creation and alleviation of poverty among improvised women, etc. However, the degree of recognition of the role of women participation in MSMEs and strategic support provided to them

especially those related to cultural sector is grossly inadequate. This is true from the fact that there has not been any study specific to cultural participation and resultant empowerment of women.

Several economists have argued that the promotion of women empowerment is a prerequisite for overall economic growth and alleviation of poverty and gender inequality. Women empowerment in cultural sector have not been provided with much meaningful assistance from the national government in terms of recognition, access to finance required for starting and operating small businesses and enterprises profitably and efficiently.

The degree of women empowerment and entrepreneurial development is closely related to the degree of gender equity, which in developing countries is generally lower than that in developed countries. Table 1 & 2 shows the distribution of employment in MSMEs by type of enterprise and type of gender category. In India, the percentage of employment by gender male percentage stands at 79.55%, while the percentage of women in employment stands at 20.45% only<sup>6</sup>.

Table 1: Distribution of employment by type of enterprise and type of gender- All category (Numbers in thousands)

Type of Enterprise	Number of enterprises owned by		
	Female	Male	Total
Micro	5133.85	1400.33	6434.18
Small	1906.57	436.45	2343.03
Medium	365.02	67.25	432.27
Total	7405.44	1904.04	9309.48

Final Report of the fourth All India Census of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, 2006-07 (Numbers in thousands)

Table 2: Distribution of employment by type of enterprise and type of gender-rural category			
Type of Enterprise	Number of enterprises owned by		
	Female	Male	Total
Micro	2099.61	636.83	2736.44
Small	645.78	162.04	807.82
Medium	110.86	26.88	137.75
Total	2856.25	825.75	3682.00

Final Report of the fourth All India Census of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, 2006-07.

About 13.72% units were reported to be women enterprises. This reveals that empowerment of women and developing women entrepreneurs to make it a reality involves a strategic orientation in order to overcome challenges. Empowering women in cultural industries is one such strategic option which can make an impact on the level of employment by women at least in the rural areas.

Cultural empowerment leads to self-employment, to generate income and to utilize traditional skills that have been passed from generations. Rural women's

reasons for cultural empowerment by starting business are not always driven by positive factors but are due to circumstances such as low family income, lack of

employment opportunities, improve standards of living etc. These factors tend to be most predominant among women in rural India. They still represent a minority among women entrepreneurs.

Empowering women on traditional art forms as a source of living is an attempt to bring into forefront the question of balancing traditional and contemporary art practices with that of the evolving new forms. Art forms such as Gond, Kalamkari, Kerala's murals, Pattachitra, Cherial scroll, Bengal's patua, Madhubani art etc., have

to be approached in such a way that these skills and ideas culminate into employment prospects.

In order to approach this opportunity of empowerment factors relating to denial of operating licences, access to finance, insufficient training etc need to be addressed. National government must alleviate such challenges by introducing awareness camps, enabling macro economic environment, education, etc. Such a possibility can be achieved by enabling higher degree of participation of disadvantaged women in the economy. Tailor made loans and suitable training programmes directed at women should be aggressively promoted.

**Conclusion:** Thus there exists a cultural market waiting to be tapped and would result in the possibility of

becoming women entrepreneurs and the possibility to become successful entrepreneurs. This cultural market needs to be addressed by policy makers so that the economic potential of this group can be fully utilized. It is therefore suggested that increasing the cultural skills and abilities of women to participate in the cultural labor force and generally to improve the position of women in society and generally increase the possibility to engage in entrepreneurship. However, promotion of women entrepreneurs is a prerequisite for overall economic growth and more targeted initiatives are also needed to support women entrepreneurs.

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