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Impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment: A study in Tirunelveli District

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Abstract
Rural entrepreneurship is vital for inclusive economic growth in India. Industrial growth plays a key role in transforming rural economies by creating employment, income, and business opportunities. The growth of MSMEs in rural areas encourages enterprises, reduces migration and improving living standards. Rural women have emerged as important participants, as women's entrepreneurship promotes economic development, financial independence and gender equality. Industrial growth supports this by providing infrastructure, market linkages, technology. This study focuses on Tirunelveli District, where industries such as textiles, food processing, palmyra products, match and engineering offer opportunities for rural entrepreneurship. Despite government schemes and Self-Help Groups, women face challenges in finance, training, marketing, and socio-cultural barriers. The study examines the impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment in Tirunelveli District using descriptive and empirical research design, using primary data and secondary data from government reports.

Keywords: Industrial growth, rural entrepreneurship, women empowerment, Tirunelveli District, socio-economic development, MSMEs, self-help groups

Introduction

India's rural economy has traditionally depended on agriculture, but industrial growth and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have brought significant changes by creating employment, reducing poverty, and encouraging entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurship contributes to balanced regional development by utilizing local resources and skills. Women entrepreneurs are increasingly important in this process, as their participation promotes financial independence, economic growth, social empowerment, and gender equality. Industrial growth supports women entrepreneurs through infrastructure, market access, technology, credit, and institutional support. Government schemes, training programmes, and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have further strengthened these opportunities. However, rural women continue to face challenges related to finance, skills, awareness, marketing, technology, and socio-cultural barriers. Tirunelveli District has a diverse industrial base, including textiles, food processing, palmyra products, match industries, beedi units, and engineering works. Although rural women increasingly engage in micro-enterprises through SHGs and local industries, they continue to face financial, technological, marketing, and managerial challenges. The impact of industrial growth on women's entrepreneurship and empowerment remains insufficiently studied. Hence, this study examines its impact on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment in Tirunelveli District, focusing on opportunities, challenges, and institutional support.

Objectives of the Study:

- To examine the impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship in Tirunelveli District.
- To assess the role of women entrepreneurs in rural industrial activities and economic development.
- To analyze the socio-economic profile and empowerment status of rural women engaged in micro-enterprises.
- To identify the financial, technological, marketing, and socio-cultural challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs.
- To suggest measures to strengthen institutional support and policies for promoting women entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Review of Literature

- Dhameja (2020) [1] identified major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs such as lack of finance, limited technology, poor marketing, and socio-cultural barriers which restrict business expansion.
- Sharma (2019) [2] found that government schemes like MUDRA and PMEGP have increased women-owned micro-enterprises in rural areas. Institutional support and training are crucial for growth of women businesses.
- Desai (2018) [3] stated that industrial growth in rural areas leads to employment generation and balanced regional development. MSMEs play a key role in utilizing local resources for rural entrepreneurship.
- Rajalakshmi (2017) [4] observed that in Tamil Nadu, districts with textiles, food processing and agro-based industries provide more opportunities for rural women. Industrial growth linked with SHGs improves women's participation in local economy.
- Kabeer (2016) [5] highlighted that Self-Help Groups provide financial support and skill training to rural

women. SHGs are an effective tool for promoting women entrepreneurship and empowerment.

Scope of the Study

The present study focuses on examining the impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment in Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu. It covers rural women entrepreneurs engaged in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and other micro-enterprises. The study examines their socio-economic profile, participation in entrepreneurial activities, employment and income opportunities, and empowerment status. It also identifies the major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, including limited access to finance, training, technology, marketing facilities, and socio-cultural barriers. Further, the study assesses the role of government schemes, financial institutions, and other support agencies in promoting women entrepreneurship and rural industrial development. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for policymakers, financial institutions, development agencies, and researchers in developing effective measures to strengthen rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment. The study is limited to Tirunelveli District, and the findings may not be directly generalizable to other regions with different socio-economic and industrial conditions.

Statement of the Problem

Industrial growth has become an important catalyst for rural economic development by creating employment opportunities, encouraging entrepreneurship, and improving living standards. The growth of industries and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), along with government initiatives, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and financial institutions, has created greater opportunities for rural women to establish entrepreneurial ventures. However, many women entrepreneurs continue to face challenges related to finance, technical and managerial skills, marketing, technology, and socio-cultural barriers. Tirunelveli District has experienced industrial development in sectors such as textiles, food processing, engineering, match industries, and palm-based products. Although this growth has created opportunities for employment and self-employment, its impact on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment has not been adequately examined. Therefore, this study examines the impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment in Tirunelveli District, identifies the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs, and suggests and measures to strengthen institutional support and policy initiatives.

Limitation of the Study

The present study is confined to Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu, and therefore the findings may not be generalized to other districts or states with different socio-economic and industrial conditions. The study focuses only on rural women entrepreneurs engaged in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and other micro-enterprises. The analysis is based on the responses collected from the selected sample respondents; hence, the findings depend on the accuracy and reliability of the information provided by them. The study primarily examines the impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment and does not cover all aspects of industrial development or entrepreneurship. In addition, constraints such as limited time, financial resources, and accessibility to respondents may influence the scope and extent of data collection. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insights into the relationship between industrial growth, rural entrepreneurship, and women empowerment in Tirunelveli District.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment in Tirunelveli District. Both primary and secondary data will be used. Primary data will be collected through a structured questionnaire from rural women entrepreneurs, while secondary data will be obtained form books, journals, government reports, DIC, MSME publications, and other relevant sources. The collected data will be analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques.

Area of the Study

The study is confined to Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu, which has witnesses significant industrial growth and increasing participation of rural women in entrepreneurial activities. The district was selected to examine the impact of industrial growth on rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment.

Sources of Data

- **Primary Data:** It will be collected from rural women entrepreneurs in Tirunelveli District through a structured questionnaire.
- **Secondary Data:** It will be obtained from books, journals, government reports, the MSME publications, and other relevant sources.

Sampling Design

- **Sampling Method:** It employs Stratified Random Sampling or Purposive Sampling to target rural women entrepreneurs from Tirunelveli District.
- **Sampling Size:** The study consists of 100 rural women entrepreneurs selected from Tirunelveli District.
- **Sampling Frame:** The sampling frame comprises rural women entrepreneurs in Tirunelveli District. From this population, 100 respondents were selected for the study.

Tools for Analysis

- Percentage Analysis
- Likert Scale Analysis

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Percentage Analysis

Table 1: Impact of Industrial Growth on Women Entrepreneurs

Particulars	No. of. Respondents	Percentage
Market Access and Sales	45	45%
Infrastructure and Transport	30	30%
Availability of Raw Materials	20	20%
No Benefit Received	5	5%
Total	100	100%

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: 45% of women entrepreneurs stated Market Access and Sales benefited most. Hence industrial growth mainly improved market opportunities.

Table 2: Role of Women Entrepreneurs in Rural Development

Particulars	No. of. Respondents	Percentage
Poverty Alleviation	25	25%
Women Empowerment	50	50%
Regional Balanced Development	15	15%
Innovation and Self-Reliance	10	10%
Total	100	100%

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation: 50% of respondents stated Women Empowerment as the major role. Thus, women entrepreneurship mainly leads to women empowerment.

Likert Scale Analysis

Table 3: Problems and Challenges faced by Women Entrepreneurs

Challenges	Total Score	Mean Score	Remarks
Financial Problems	432	4.32	Severe Problem
Technological Problems	405	4.05	Major Problem
Marketing Problems	378	3.78	Major Problem
Social Problems	356	3.56	Major Problem

Source: Computed data

Interpretation: Financial Problems with a mean score 4.32 is the Severe Problem faced by women entrepreneurs. Marketing, Technological and Social Problems are Major Problems, indicating financial constraint is the biggest barrier in Tirunelveli District.

Findings of the Study

- 45% of women entrepreneurs stated Market Access and Sales is the major benefit of industrial growth.
- 50% of respondents identified Women Empowerment as the major role of women entrepreneurs in rural development.
- Financial Problems with mean score 4.32 is the Severe Problem faced by women entrepreneurs.
- Technological, Marketing and Social Problems are Major Problems with mean scores 4.05, 3.78 and 3.56 respectively.
- Lack of finance is the biggest barrier for women entrepreneurs in Tirunelveli District.

Suggestions

- Banks and Government should provide low-interest loans with simple procedures for women entrepreneurs.
- Regular training programs and workshops should be conducted to update technical knowledge.
- Establish women-only markets, exhibitions and online platforms to promote and sell their products.
- Conduct awareness programs to gain family and community support and reduce social barriers.
- Improve transport, power and raw material availability in rural areas to support business growth.

Conclusion

The study on Impact of Industrial Growth on Rural Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment in Tirunelveli District concludes that industrial growth has played a positive role in promoting rural entrepreneurship. It has improved market access, created new business opportunities, and provided better infrastructure for women entrepreneurs. Women have emerged as key contributors to rural development by generating employment, alleviating poverty, and supporting women empowerment. However, the study also identifies major challenges such as financial problems, lack of technology, poor marketing facilities and social barriers which hinder their growth. Therefore, to maximize the benefits of industrial growth, there is a need for targeted support in the form of easy credit, skill training, marketing platforms and infrastructure development. With adequate government and institutional support, rural entrepreneurship and women empowerment can be further strengthened for sustainable economic development in Tirunelveli District.

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