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Sustainable Business Models Rooted in Local Traditions: A Study of Women in the Bakery Industry

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Abstract

Rural development and women's empowerment are interrelated in the Indian socio-economic context. While India is celebrating its 75th anniversary of its Constitution, it is important to evaluate sectors that foster inclusive growth and sustainable livelihood. The food processing industry-based bakery sector has been a profitable venture for rural women through the offering of low investment, skill-intensive, and locally Marketable job opportunities. The study examines the role of the bakery industry in enhancing the role of women in rural labor participation, household incomes, and entrepreneurial capacity development. Drawing on secondary data garnered through channels such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), MSME and MoFPI reports and case studies from institutional training programs, the paper notes and discusses the levels of participation of women in bakery businesses, socio-economic advantages accruing from such activity, and issues of access to credit, training, and marketing. The study reveals that bakery-related work is enhancing women's economic independence and rural rural development outcomes at large through government-sponsored SHGs, micro-enterprises, and PMFME and MUDRA schemes. Nevertheless, structural restrictions such as access to scarce formal credit facilities, no appreciation for technology, and patriarchal social attitudes hinder complete participation. The study concludes that scale-up baking-themed training is essential; policy support must be enhanced; and linking women entrepreneurs with wider marketplace opportunities are a must to achieve rural development and gender equity outcomes according to India's vision in the constitution.

Keywords: Rural Development, Empowerment of Women, Bakery Sector, Food Processing, Employment, Constitution of India, MSME, PMFME

Introduction

Since independence, rural development and empowerment of women have been a key element of the Indian developmental agenda. Its ideals of equality, justice and inclusive development become especially important in the year of its seventy-fifth anniversary when the Indian Constitution is being remembered and celebrated and when rural women are marred with a variety of socio-economic vices. Unparalleled growth has occurred in the education and policymaking front but the rural women are not lesser figure with the problems of unemployment and low livelihood prospects and social disparity and thus their empowerment is an arena of the top priority in ensuring a sustainable growth of the nation. And in this respect the baking industry, which is one of the numerous branches of the larger food processing industry, has been a pliable and almost certainty success business in employing women. Having an inelastic demand in its services and little regard in terms of investment, and easy technology, it is a suitable sector in rural areas. Employment through baking enterprises not only provides women with economic autonomy but also brings stability into the family, enhancing entrepreneurial capacities, and attaining local development levels.

A number of initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), MUDRA Yojana promoted women headed micro and small enterprises found in food clusters. Beyond this, institutional training and entrepreneurship development opportunities, organized through organizations such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)

and non-governmental organizations, have enhanced baking and packaging and marketing skills amongst women. These plans are consistent with the constitutional mandate of justice and equality and acknowledge the role of women in the economy as the crucible of rural development.

But there are institutional obstacles to be cleared. These women who engage in business ventures in baking are usually faced with limited access to formal credit facilities, limited exposure to new technology, poor market connectivity, social restrictions to mobility and decision-making power. Policy disconnection and the mismatch between policy intent and field reality generates a research imperative on multiple levels of academia. The study concluded that food processing may be an effective path to women empowerment, though concerns about sustainability and large-scale processes should be considered. The study can be applied because it provides findings on empowerment as is possible in the baking industry.

Objectives:

1. To examine the role of the bakery industry in creating employment opportunities for rural women in India.
2. To study government policies and schemes such as PMFME, NRLM, and MUDRA and their impact on women entrepreneurs in the bakery sector.
3. To identify the key challenges faced by rural women in entering and sustaining employment in the bakery industry, including access to credit, technology, and markets.
4. To suggest policy measures and strategies for strengthening women's participation in the bakery industry as a pathway to sustainable rural development.

Review of the Literature:

1. Women Empowerment through Food Processing – A Case Study (Goel, Singla & Singh, 2018)

The case study was conducted in Patiala, Punjab, involving a sample population of 25 women participants engaged in food processing activities. The study compared their socio-economic status before and after joining the industry. The study showed that 64% of the population reported improved standards of living, 60% reported improved saving habits, and 52% reported improved knowledge and attitudes. Women were empowered with increased confidence regarding decision-making at the household level too. But issues such as high production costs, poor quality raw materials, and not much mechanization restricted scope for growth. The study concluded that food processing has the potential to be an effective path to women's empowerment, yet concerns over sustainability and scale must be answered. The study can be used as it provides

outcomes on empowerment similar to what is feasible with regard to the baking sector.

2. Systematic Review on Women Entrepreneurship in Food Processing Sector (D'Silva & Bhat, 2022)

The present paper is a systematic review of literature research studies carried out between 1980- 2022 on women entrepreneurship in food processing industries. The paper consolidates various findings employing ABCD framework (Advantages, Benefits, Constraints, and Disadvantages). The literature review points out that women entrepreneurs have made significant contributions to rural economies but there are enormous gaps as far as access to finance, training, and marketing is concerned. The first major limitation found is the absence of sectoral studies, especially at the micro food unit level such as bakeries or dairy. The second conclusion is that research was characterized by small sample surveys or qualitative interviews with low generalization possibilities. The authors consider that there should be quantitative data-based research and policy research. It applies to your research paper because it proves that there is gap lack of direct attention to baker and there is a reason to do it.

3. The Role of Food Processing Industry in Women Empowerment: A Case Study of Prayagraj District (Khan & Singh, 2023)

The case study was conducted in the district of Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh to explore how food processing industry empowers women. The researchers found the participation of women in the industry to be very minimal and where they do participate confined to menial and unskilled work. Lack of information, social norms, and discrimination were observed to be major deterrents. The study also reported the role played by Self Help Groups (SHGs), courtesy of which some access to entrepreneurship came to women, although profitability and scale were still limited. Despite all these limitations, women reported improvement towards some rise in income, control over finances and decision-making within the household. The study mentioned the finding to emerge as unless there is fruitful policy support and social awareness is created for food processing and its role in empowering women, food processing benefits by way of empowering women will be limited and peripheral. For your paper, it portrays structural issues in food industry confronted by women where there is scope for comparison with bakery-specific contexts.

4. Women Development through Cookery and Bakery Skill – A Case Study (Khot, 2022)

The paper addressed in particular the impact on socio-economic status generated by training courses in cookery and bakery skills. Participants included women who underwent training in bakery skills, product preparation and in certain cases

marketing and packaging. The study revealed participants with improved income opportunity, boosted self-confidence and decision-making capacity at household and community levels. Some females started micro-enterprises in baking and contributed to household earnings to bring about improvements in their living standards. The study lacked scope and size in terms of samples and geographic spread and did not quantify long-term viability of Bakery enterprises. Despite such limitations, studies show the immediate empowering potential of jobs in bakeshop-related fields. This is especially helpful to your research as it connects rural women with baking ability and empowerment results at the same time.

Methodology

The research is conducted using secondary data gathered through various sources like PLFS,

reports from MSME, publications by MoFPI, documents by NRLM, and research-based academic journals. There is a descriptive and analytical examination to find out the involvement of women in the bakery sector and its effect on empowering them. The research is confined to rural areas and has pointed out both challenges and prospects for women involved in this sector.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The table below provides major statistics regarding women's participation in rural MPKPY-covered areas of the food processing and bakery industries in India. The statistics reflect their work-force participation, entrepreneurship, and independence through skill development initiatives and micro-enterprises. These are good indicators of women's increasing contribution to rural employment and empowerment.

| Source | Statistics | Year |
|------------------|--|------|
| PLFS | 32.8% (female labour force participation) | 2021 |
| MoFPI | 70.44 lakh women workers in food processing | 2022 |
| NRLM (Prayagraj) | 2.8 lakh rural women self-reliant through SHGs | 2025 |
| MSME Report | 71% women-owned micro-enterprises contributing to employment | 2024 |

Table 1: Key Statistics on Women's Participation in Bakery and Food Processing



Diagram 1: Women's Participation in Indian Sectors

According to Indusfood, the bakery products market in India is experiencing significant growth, with strong potential for expansion in the coming years. Credence Research reports that the frozen bakery products segment is also witnessing steady growth, indicating rising demand for convenience-based baked goods. Additionally,

Mordor Intelligence highlights the cake market as one of the fastest-growing segments in the Indian bakery industry. These sources collectively show that the bakery sector is poised for substantial growth, offering opportunities for women entrepreneurs and businesses rooted in local traditions.

| Market Segment | Value (2023) | Projected Value (2032) | CAGR | Source |
|-------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------|---------------------|
| Bakery Products Market | \$12.6 billion | \$29.4 billion | 9.8% | Indusfood |
| Frozen Bakery Products Market | \$1.21 billion | \$2.34 billion | 7.53% | Credence Research |
| Cake Market | \$2.10 billion | \$3.95 billion | 13.47% | Mordor Intelligence |

Table 2: Market Insights Related to Bakery Industry in India

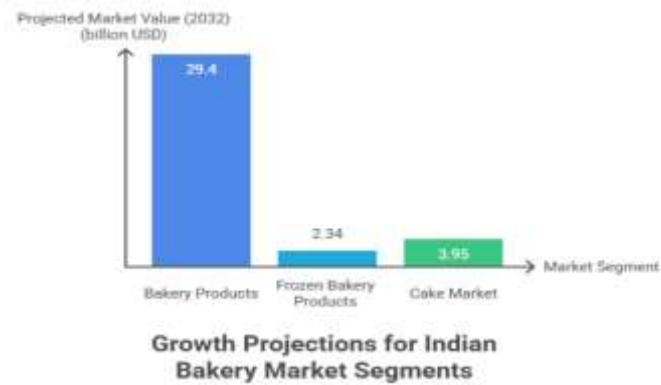


Diagram 2: Bakery Industry in India

Conclusion

The study highlights rising participation of women in the food processing and baking sector in rural India in the 75th year of India's Constitution. Literature and data reveal that skill development programs, micro-enterprises, and self-help groups have made women financially and socially empowered and developed their level of confidence and decision-making abilities and contribution towards family earnings. With these efforts, however, some of the major challenges such as limited access to finance, technology, and marketing opportunity continue to constrain growth and sustainability. The study identifies the imperatives of policy intervention at targeted levels, training programs, and infrastructure development to further leverage women's participation and ensure sustainable rural development.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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