

## **Socio-Economic Status of Women in Home-Based Industries (HBIs) in Sonitpur District, Assam**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women constitute about half of the population of the world and therefore no country achieve optimum development as long as women remain depressed and exploited. Women participation in work is an important aspect of their status and empowerment. Because, economic dependence of women on men is one of the main cause of exploitation of women. Home-Based Industries (HBIs) can help women in self-employment and it is more secure than other modes of earning, i.e. earning cum dwelling. The study is based on the socio-economic status of women in Home-Based Industries in Sonitpur District of Assam. The study is exploratory and conducted on 55 HBIs from the four major towns of Sonitpur District viz. Tezpur, Dhekiajuli, Biswanath Charali and Gohpur by using non-probabilistic judgment sampling method. Primary data were collected through personal interviews and schedules. It has been found that the Home-Based Industries can uplift the socio-economic status of women in the district which needs proper policies, guidance and support from varies government and non-government agencies.

**Key words:** Socio-economic status, Entrepreneurship, Home-based Industries

### **INTRODUCTION**

A country can achieve development to the fullest extent only if all human

resources in it are being utilized to the optimum level. This implies that both men and women must participate equally in the achievement of this goal. Women constitute

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about half of the population and therefore there cannot be happiness and full development as long as women remain depressed and exploited. No society can be free, fair and just until its women enjoy freedom, justice and opportunities for utilizing their full potential.

Women participation in work is important from the point of view of their status and personal advancement. They need to enter the workforce in all societies on an equal footing with men and get integrated into the world of work. One of the main causes for the exploitation of the females is their economic dependence upon men. It is extremely necessary to educate and empower women, as it is a common saying that when you educate a woman, you are not only educating an individual, but also the entire family and the society. Thus enlightenment and empowerment of women will lead to the enlightenment and advancement of the entire society including the younger generation. In the field of employment and other economic activities women are discriminated. Their personhood however is now being recognized and steps are taken to step such discrimination and exploitation. Their right to participate in economic activities and seek employment equally with men is now legally recognized and to some extent enforced. Their economic independence and security will enhance –their status, position and end exploitation.

Home-based industries play an important role in economic development of a country, most particularly in under-developed or developing countries. The home-based industries are those industries, which are based on the locally available resources more particularly in village areas. These home-based industries are, mostly run by the members of the family for meeting local requirements. Another great advantage of HBIs is Business from dwelling. Women are traditionally homebound in India; they are very much security concerned. The HBIs provide a great opportunity especially to the rural women to earn for their family from the home itself. Thus, it helps in women empowerment.

Census definition of ‘Household Industry’(Home-Based Industries) provides that as an industry conducted by the head of the household himself/herself and/or by the members of the household at home or within the village in rural areas, and only within the precincts (campus) of the house where the household is in urban areas. The larger proportion of workers in a household industry should consist of members of the household including the head. The industry should not be run on the scale of a registered factory. The main characteristic of a home-based enterprise is the participation of one or more members of the household. This character applies in urban areas too.

A home-based industries is one that is engaged in production, processing, servicing, repairing or making and selling (but not merely selling) of goods. It does not include professions such as those practiced by a pleader or doctor or barber, musician, dancer, dhobi, astrologer etc. or merely trade or business, even if such professions, trade or services are run at home by members of the household.

A major portion of the population of Assam lives in villages but employment opportunity in villages is low. Under such circumstances home-based industries playing a vital role by exploiting the local resources and local talent, can come to the rescue of the villagers in producing gainful employment. At the same time, development of such industries will stop migration of labour to urban areas.

The main HBIs in Sonitpur District under this study are, food-processing industry, japi industry, cane and bamboo industry, jute based industry & wood works industry.

**Food Processing Industry:**

The Sonitpur District in Assam is a good place for development of food processing industry. There are various locally produced raw materials available in this District. The prominent processed items are fruit pulps and juices, canned fruits and vegetables, jams, squashes, pickles etc. One of the important food



**Plate 1.** Nibedita’s Food Products of Tezpur processing items is ‘ladu & pitha’ (Traditional cake). The ‘pitha’ food processing industry can supply various types of ‘ladu’ & pitha’ not only to local area but also to different places of Assam. This ‘pitha’ has a very high demand during seasonal festival (Bihu) in particular and in other social functions in general.

**‘Japi’ (Traditional Head-cap)Industry:**

A japi is more advantageous to the cultivators and other open-air workers than the conventional umbrella, because the cultivator after putting it on, can tie the strings around his chin leaving his hands



**Plate 2.** Woman engaged in making japi at ‘Japi Xojia Village

free to work in any position-standing, squatting or stooping. 'Japi' can also be called a poor man's umbrella, because of its cheap price. There is a village in the district, which is known as 'Japi Xojia' near Tezpur town where most of the families are engaged in 'Japi' making with huge demand.

#### **Cane and Bamboo Industry:**

Sonitpur District is rich in sylvan resources and most of its forests are richly stocked with bamboos and canes of various species. From time immemorial to the present day, cane and bamboo have formed an integral part of the lives of the people in the North Eastern Region, especially in Assam. The women of Sonitpur District use cane and bamboo for making different types of baskets, toys, hand-fans and various domestic and agricultural implements and they sell this product in the local markets. All these articles can be produced on a cottage and small-scale basis with small and cheap machineries.

#### **Jute Based industry:**

Sonitpur district is one of the major jute growing areas of the state. There are some cottage and household industries in S.D, which are very much famous for producing jute bags, jute carpet and wall hangings; these goods can capture the local market in this District.

#### **Wood Works:**

India has been a traditional

producer of woodcarvings for ages. This craft flourished under royal patronage for several years. In Sonitpur District of Assam the woodwork home-based industry is a popular industry. Many artisans are engaged in the production of woodcarvings, which is developed on a commercial scale. Different types of wood are used for making different items depending on the local availability of raw materials.

The following literatures are reviewed in order to prepare the paper on "Socio-Economic Status of Women in Home-Based Industries (HBIs) in Sonitpur District" and a synoptic outline of the reviewed literature is given below:

In the advanced countries of the world, there is a phenomenal increase in the number of self-employed women after World War II. In the US, women own 25% of all business, even though their sales on an average are less than 2/5<sup>th</sup> of those small businesses. In Canada, women own 1/3rd of small businesses and in France it is 1/5<sup>th</sup>. In U.K., since 1980, number of self-employed women has increased three times as fast as the number of self-employed men.

The Government of India has also undertaken some valuable and positive steps in this regard. "Towards Equality" (1974), which rightly seeks to secure fundamental freedoms of woman on an equal basis with men in the spheres of political, economic, social, civil and culture is a milestone in the history of women

emancipation in India. Home based industries or informal sector, which gained prominence in developing countries like Kenya; Ghana to make sample investigation about employment scenario with reference to developing nations has suitably proved to be best alternative to formal sector where employment opportunities are limited. Woman either as “single woman” or as economic partner of spouse joins this sector in order to overcome economic hardship. Woman face extended form of general disparity and further victimized of existing social structure. This reflects that how badly they are mentally and physically harassed.

A research study entitled, “Entrepreneurial Competencies and Gender wise Variation”, discussed the concept of entrepreneurial competencies as determinants of entrepreneurial success and traces the gender wise variation of the Entrepreneurial Competencies. The findings indicate conclusively that on the whole, successful female entrepreneurs are more like the successful male entrepreneurs and are significantly different from unsuccessful female entrepreneurs. Gender may, therefore, not be determinant of competence level and in turn entrepreneurial success.

“Access to financial services will also help foster the entrepreneurial spirit amongst women and promote social and financial inclusion. The achievement of

Grameen Bank is a prominent example. Today more than 90% of the customers of Grameen (Gramin) Bank are women.”

#### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study is based on the socio-economic status of women in Home-based industries (HBIs) in Sonitpur District. Four major towns viz. Tezpur, Dhekiajuli, Biswanath Charali and Gohpur will be covered in the study.

Home based industries run by household members and employing less than fifteen (15) temporary workers will be considered for the study.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

The primary objective of the study is to identify social-economic conditions of women in home-based industries of Sonitpur District. To obtain the main objective of the study following secondary objectives have been formulated:

- (i) To examine the number of women involved in Home Base Industries (HBIs) and their earning pattern in Sonitpur District.
- (ii) To analysis the employment opportunity provided by the Home Base Industries (HBIs) run by women in the district.
- (iii) To analyze the role of women as entrepreneur in Home Base Industries (HBIs) in Sonitpur District.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Type:

This study is exploratory. The survey has been conducted on Home based industries like food processing industry, cane and bamboo industry, carpet and weaving industry etc. The study is based on primary data and practical observation, although secondary data has been used to establish the authenticity of the study. The primary data were collected through sample survey. The HBIs has been selected after a scrutiny of the information collected from the DIC and other reliable data sources. As a first step, a pilot survey over five (5) HBIs have conducted and a tentative questionnaire has been prepared.

### Study locale:

This survey has been conducted on Home-based industries in Sonitpur District. Four major towns are selected for the study. These are Tezpur, Dhekiajuli, Biswanath Charali and Gohpur. The above mentioned three towns can represent the whole population of Sonitpur District, because the density of population is high in these three towns.

### Sample Frame:

To achieve the objectives of the study a sample survey was conducted to know the growth of HBIs run by women. Sampling frame (population of the study) is not clear and definite because the study is

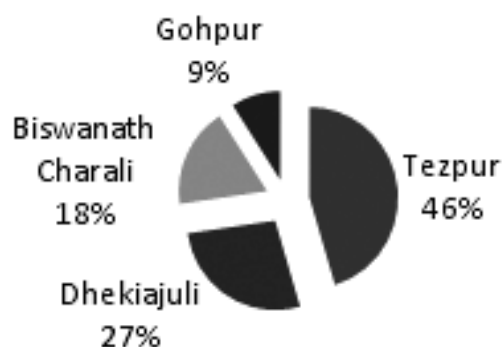
based on most unorganised sector of the economy. The identified & viable HBIs in the district will be selected after the scrutiny of information collected from DIC, Tezpur, Lead Bank Sonitpur and other reliable sources.

### Sample Size:

55 numbers of HBIs are taken from various parts of Sonitpur District as sample for the study which includes Tezpur, Dhekiajuli, Biswanath Charali and Gohpur.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Samples

Town	Sample	Percentage
Tezpur	25	46
Dhekiajuli	15	27
Biswanath Charali	10	18
Gohpur	5	9
Total	55	100



**Figure 1.** Distribution of Samples No. of HBI

**Data Collection Procedure:**

As the appropriate sampling frame is not available, probabilistic sampling method cannot be employed. Therefore, non-probabilistic judgment sampling method is used for the convenience of the study. For the purpose of collecting data the respondents have been provided a structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire has been prepared where variables like, name of the firm, name of the owner, marital status of the owner, firms registration number (if firm is registered), firms registration date, loan amount (if any), name of the bank from where loan has been taken, number of family members involved in the firm, number of workers in the firm, salary structure, availability of raw material etc. has been measured.

**Analysis Technique:**

After the data collection work is completed, it is tabulated and presented in the form of diagrams such as bar-diagram, pie diagram etc. to know the women involvement in HBIs as well as their socio-economic status. Cross tabulation technique is also adopted for analysis. Chi-square test has been preformed to find out existence and degree of relationship between variables. The SPSS package is used for analysis the data.

**RESULTS & DISCUSSION****6.1 Gender of the owner of the firms:** Out

of the 55 HBIs studied, it has been found that the 78.2% (43) are female and the rest of 21.8% are male.

**Profile of the female owners of HBIs:**

**Education:** While analyzing the education profile of the female respondents, it has been found that most of the owners have education upto 10 or 10+2 level (69.8%). Graduates also comprise a major chunk of the respondents (20.9%)

**Marital status:** The marital status analysis shows almost equal distribution between married (53.5%) and unmarried (41.9%), while widow comprises a very small part of the respondents (4.7%).

**Types of HBIs run by women:** While analyzing the type of industries run by women, it has been found that the Food Processing Industry comprises a major portion i.e. 16 (37.2%) HBIs. The Handloom & Weaving Industry also comprises the second larger portion of HBIs in the district, which are 10 (23.3%) HBIs. While Art and Craft (1), Wood Works (1), Jute Goods (2), takes a very small portion i.e. 4 (9.3%) except Cutting and Tailoring and Doll Making Industries which was 7 (16.2%) and 6 (14%) respectively.

**Earning:** It has been found that most of the household income of the families belongs to Rs.5000 to Rs.20000 per month i.e. 29 (67.5%) and 6 (14%) families have household income more than Rs.20000 and

above, where 8 (18.6%) families have below Rs.5000.

**Loan:** By analyzing the amount of loan taken by the HBIs, it has been found that only one (2.3%) HBI has taken highest amount of Rs.75000 as loan. 16 (37.3%) HBIs have taken loan amounting to Rs. 30000 to Rs. 70000. And only 3 (7%) HBIs have taken loan amounting to Rs.20000 to Rs.25000.

**Employment:** The highest number of employees in a HBI is 8 persons; the general trend of the employment is 4 persons. 5 (11.6%) HBIs have run by single person and only one HBI (2.3%) have employed 8 persons, while 10 (23.3%) HBIs have run by 2 persons.

**Female Employment and Earning Pattern:** It has been found that in the 55 HBIs surveyed, a total number of 199 are employed out of which 149 are female. Hence, it can be concluded that the HBIs of Sonitpur District are mainly run by female. The break-up of 42 is in managerial level, 22 are in supervisory level and 85 are working as workers in the HBIs surveyed.

**Comparison earning and female managerial level:** While comparing female engaged at the managerial level and income level, it has been found that 15 firms employing female at the managerial level earned Rs.10, 000-Rs.20, 000 per month and 14 firms employing female at managerial level earned Rs.5,000-

Rs.10,000.

To verify the existence of relationship between earning and female managerial, a chi-square test has been carried out and it has been found that there is relationship between earning and female managerial level at 5% Level of Significance, Karl Pearson Chi-square Value : 8.303, d.f. 3

#### **Suggestions:**

- (1) Government's support to HBI: To get the real success of HBI, we need a very powerful support from Government system. For an industry the productivity cannot be the only concern, it needs the right exposure, good market and profit for sustainability. The study covers the HBIs, running by the women and they are not very viable economically, Government policy should be so that they can get financial back-up and assistance for marketing the products. Government can initiate strong channels for export the products and try to produce a good market in the urban areas. The government regulation should be flexible enough to give the opportunities to the producers to build up relationship between either with any non-government organization or any commercial partner.
- (2) Professional training to the Producers: It has been found in the analysis that, in



case of some HBIs, the products are not very fine to compete with in the market. Besides that, they are not efficient enough to deal with financial matters of the product. So it is very much essential for them to go through proper training in preparing the products, financial deals, marketing etc.

- (3) **Large scale production:** It has been noticed that most of the HBIs are run by individuals. As a result the production is very less. It is suggestible if the production be done in group form by making cooperatives or by forming Self-Help Groups (SHG), the productivity will be in large scale and profitability will be high. Besides that in group they will be able to have banks loans easily and take advantage of the schemes of Cooperative bodies, NABARD, and other Govt. Institutions.
- (4) **Guidance:** If any NGO or govt. organization provide guidance to the owners of HBIs, the business will be more sustainable. They can be guided with the new schemes and policies of Government. Besides that they can also have the understanding of marketing and financial matters of HBIs.
- (5) **Developing proper distribution channel for the products of HBIs:** During the observation it has been

found that selling of the products of HBIs is the biggest hurdle for the producers. Hence, importance should be given in establishing a strong distribution and marketing channel for the HBIs.

- (6) **Soft loan:** To start any business the financial back up is very much required. In the social system in Sonitpur, It is noticed that the women have hardly any financial ownership nor any financial support from the counter part to start a business for such women is a big challenge. If they can get financial loan to build up HBI, it will give high success rate to such industry.

## CONCLUSION

From the study, it is clear that there are different types of HBIs in Sonitpur District they are food processing industry, cane and bamboo industry, handloom and weaving industry, doll making industry, wood works industry, jute based industry etc. This survey is based on 55 HBIs in Sonitpur District, from which 43 of HBIs are run by women. Out of which more than 60 percent HBIs are food processing more than 70% and handloom and weaving industry. Most of these industries are managed and supervised by women. From 55 HBIs 12 HBIs are run by male, but here women also plays an important role. Most

of the owners of the HBIs are not taken any loan from government and private parties; they invest their own capital. And most of them are not taken any training. Without any loan and any training they managed their HBIs properly. If government offer loan at low interest rate and if they can get proper training then HBIs in Sonitpur District can capture the world market and reduce unemployment. From the above survey it is clear that, the proper development of HBIs can reduce the unemployment problem and it also can help to improve the socio-economic status of women in Sonitpur District. But to attain the above-mentioned destination, proper endeavours must be taken to make women more educated. In this regard, the zeal and attempt of the Govt. must be positive.

Women empowerment has developed in connection with improving the status of women. It is thought that political empowerment or economic empowerment will improve conditions for women and they will be closer to getting justice and equality. The empowerment of woman and education can give economic independence and security, which can improve their socio-economic status, position and reduce exploitation. It can be

concluded that the home-based industries can uplift the socio-economic status of women in the District by improving securing and social status.

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