

Flying Past Tough Times

By Gina Arora

If 'SHE' can be a perfect wife, mother, daughter or a sister then 'SHE' can be a perfect entrepreneur too. From ages she is adeptly 'managing' home then what's pulling her to be a successful businesswoman?

IT'S often said that "Women hold up half the sky" - but this holds less weight in real. No matter what role she plays (mother, wife etc), a woman is always looked upon as the one who creates, nurtures and nourishes. Sprawling inequalities like access to education, financial resources and opportunities in economic, socio-cultural sphere etc often cloud her capabilities. Gender discrimination still prevails at all levels in the society and in business it hinders the rise of booming 'sheconomy'.

Bottlenecks faced by women entrepreneurs

Being a patriarchal society, women in India were conventionally looked as homemakers and not businesswomen. Kanak Manot, franchisee of Kwality Swirls, Kolkata, asserts: "Often it becomes difficult for a man to accept a woman, who is managing a business enterprise. But without my husband's support, it would have been impossible for me to



step out for business.”

Besides, adding to her woes are-- geographical shift after marriage and occupational mobility (shifting from one product line to another).

Limited access to finance

Women franchisees have limited access to money, as banks and financial institutions are mostly sceptical about their entrepreneurial abilities and feel hesitant to lend them money. Even if women get an access to finance, it is often in small amounts. Manot says: “When I entered into the business world, I had no option but to bank upon my husband for financial needs.”

In India, women suffer from poor enforcement of monetary rights, overall poor assets, rigidity in collateral requirements and consequently poor access to social and community resources. Sairee Chahal, Co-Founder of Fleximoms (a Delhi-based firm that helps women to find their feet in business), says: “Women business owners, especially the ones that own scalable businesses are very few. They are not asset owners and own no significant real estate etc.”

Market boundaries

Due to lack of experience and exposure, women find it cumbersome to tap new markets. Women-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs) find it difficult to market strategically both goods and services. Women entrepreneurs have less experience in international arena, thus, developing new business contacts in a new market or country is often a barrier for her.

Inadequate training

Women are not exposed much to technical and vocational training. Low enrolment among women in education and poor education quality are further barriers.



Kanak Manot,
Franchisee of Kwalty Swirls, Kolkata

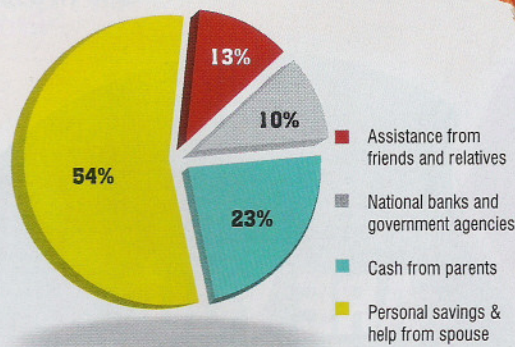
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Sairee Chahal, Co-Founder, Fleximoms

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Her fund support



Source: Franchise India Research

They have childcare responsibilities and double-work burden; as a result they are less likely to gain relevant skills and knowledge and are less equipped in managing business with proficiency in formal sector.

Breaking-free from traditions

Franchising - A knight in the shining armour

It is anticipated that the route to franchising can act as a saviour for all women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs have successfully taken to the franchising itinerary and soon it's sure to become a relevant career option for women, who wish to do business on their own terms.

Chahal quips: “Women in franchising are a direct reflection of women in business. Typically, three out of every 10 women, are giving a thought to franchising. Almost every day we get enquiries from women, who wish to become franchise business owners.”

Businesswomen have dual responsibility, which differentiates them from their male counterparts. Neelam Chibber, Co-founder of Mother Earth, affirms: “One of the biggest challenges for women entrepreneurs is to balance both family and business. Every woman aspiring to be an entrepreneur should go in for franchising, as it's an easy way out to balance both family and work.”

Several franchisors are coming up with home-based franchise business model, which is both low on cost and high on returns. This model is picking up momentum, as it allows a woman franchisee to fulfil her personal responsibilities whilst pocketing her share of returns.

Franchising provides innumerable options for women in healthcare, wellness, education, learning, software/IT and food and beverage. A lot of franchisors opt for women franchisees, as they feel that women are born with 'managerial' skills.

Game-changers

The mentioned women entrepreneurs and alike have proved their worth and policy makers can't afford to ignore them. As Chahal rightly says: “Being a franchisor/franchisee gives economic freedom to a woman. A woman entrepreneur can find her identity in the ownership puzzle, as highly opportune markets are yet to be tapped.”