

Women Entrepreneurs in Ima Market, Manipur: A Literature Review

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Abstract: Manipur's Ima Keithel or "Mother's Market" is the world's only market where shops are owned, run and controlled by womenfolk, which stands as a unique example of women entrepreneurship in the world. This literature review provides a critical analysis of the socio-economic status, opportunities and also identifies the existing challenges and difficulties that need to be addressed to support women entrepreneurs. This market has been one of the main reasons why Manipuri women have become strong and financially independent people who can help build a better and fair society. This market is not only functions as the place for trade and business, but also a centre for cultural and ideological exchanges among people of Manipur belonging to diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions. As society has become more aware of women's roles and economic contributions, the once-hidden entrepreneurial potential of women has gradually evolved with their skills, knowledge, and adaptability emerging as key factors into business ventures. This review is based on existing journals and research studies on women entrepreneurship in Manipur's Ima keithel.

Keywords: Opportunities, Challenges, Economic Development, Ima Market, Women Entrepreneurs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Ima market, which is widely known as the "Ima Keithel" among the people of Manipur, stands as key symbol of women's economic freedom and cultural heritage in the Indian state of Manipur (Thangjam, 2024). Being one the oldest and biggest market in the world where the market is exclusively run and manage by the womenfolk only. Over the years, Ima Keithel market has grown from a tiny trading post to a busiest business centre during festivals and holidays in Manipur. Despite the numerous challenges and complexities faced by women entrepreneurs in this market (Thangjam, 2024), it also presents various opportunities for women (Thangjam, 2024), and established conditions to support women's economic empowerment. Their narratives of determination, perseverance, hard work, and achievement despite of loss, pandemic, or ethnic conflict collectively show significant process in women's empowerment (Thangjam, 2024).

Studying women's entrepreneurship in Ima Market reveals the social factors that support homogeneity among communities and highlights the role that women play as agents for social change and social progress (Thangjam, 2024). The findings of this study are expected to benefit young entrepreneurs and business owners while also contributing to

the expansion and enhancement of various opportunities for women in Manipur.

➤ Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the status of women entrepreneurs in Manipur's Ima Keithel market through a review of existing literatures and to identify the existing key challenges and difficulties that need to be addressed to strengthen and support entrepreneurial activities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding women's entrepreneurship in the particular setting of Ima Keithel reflects a unique socio-economic system rooted in equality, creativity, unity, stability, economic empowerment, socio-cultural importance, and policy relevance (Thangjam, 2024). Beyond personal gains, women's entrepreneurship promotes inclusive growth and community prosperity.

Chithung (2018) claimed that significant female entrepreneurs began enterprise in order to make money while a smaller proportion engaged in entrepreneurship due to interest or a sense of adventure. Rajkumari (2022) found that the Ima market is largely occupied by middle-aged women mostly free from childcare and major household responsibilities. Majority of them were literate although a few

illiterate women were also involved in business. Multi-ethnic religious communities, including Hindus, Muslim, Tribal people, and the indigenous Sanamahi believers, inhabit the Ima keithel.

Chithung (2018) reports that women entrepreneurs encounter many challenges, including intense market competition, poor customer response, delay of payment, and constraints travelling mobility and facility. Chingtham (2014) pointed out that most of the women vendors borrowed loan from the private lenders, while only a few accessed from the government, leading to financial strain (pay high interest) and little business improvement.

Keeping the above issues in mind, some researchers started their research on different domains of entrepreneurship which includes a study on entrepreneurship behaviour of women entrepreneurs (Ram, D. et al. 2013); Challenges and prospects of Women entrepreneurship (Lomgjam, 2016); Family support towards women entrepreneurs (Khundrakpam, 2016), Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment (Devi, 2025). Thangjam (2024) highlights that inadequate infrastructure remains a major obstacle for women entrepreneurs faced besides poor road conditions, limited access to reliable utilities, and insufficient market facilities hinder their business operations and limit customer reach.

Singh (2019) highlighted that women entrepreneurs in Ima Market faced several technological difficulties, including limited access to modern technology and inadequate training

opportunities, and issues with digital literacy. These challenges hinder their ability to leverage technology for business growth and market expansion.

Shimray (2021) in her studies found that women entrepreneurs on the daily basis deal with various variables that might intensify stress, including uncertain economic conditions, societal expectations, competitive situations, difficult balancing acts between the work and familial responsibilities, and more.

Thangjam (2024) asserted that women entrepreneur still encounter sexism and societal discrimination from those who prioritize their day today household responsibilities such as household chores, cooking, washing, looking after in-laws, taking care of children over their business pursuits, despite their market's matriarchal structure.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is entirely based on the secondary research method technique, involving an extensive review of the pre-existing literature of research papers, articles and journals publications, particularly focusing on Manipur's women entrepreneurs of the Ima keithel Market.

Table 1 presents studies collectively highlight varied dimensions of Women Entrepreneurial studies in Ima Market of Manipur.

Table 1 List of Journals on Entrepreneurship in Ima Market

Author and Year of Publication	Article Title & Journal	Main objectives of the paper
Ram, D. Singh et al. (2013)	"Entrepreneurship Behaviour of Women Entrepreneurs in Imphal of Manipur". <i>Indian Res. J. Ext. Edu.</i>	This study assessed the socio-economic status of Ima market's women entrepreneur and examined their entrepreneurial behavior.
Chingtham, T. (2014)	"Women and Human Resource Development at Ema Market: A case study". <i>Voice of Research</i>	The study aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the economic and social contributions of Women entrepreneurs in the Ema market and identify the challenges they faced in sustaining and expanding their entrepreneurs.
Longjam, R. (2016)	"Challenges and prospects of Women entrepreneurship in Manipur: A Case study of Ima Keithel". <i>Asian Journal of Research in Business Economics and Management.</i>	This study explored the opportunities and challenges faced by the womenfolk entrepreneurs, specially within the context of the Ima Keithel market in Manipur.
Singh, M.S. (2016)	"Empowerment of Women in Manipur: A study based on IMA Market" Introduction, Conference paper: International seminar on New Education Policy (NEP) And NAMODI Framework, Amarkantak (M.P.)	The study focused in assessing the actual socio-economic status of women in Ima Market and highlighted the major problems faced by women traders.
Chavai et al. (2017)	"Entrepreneurial Behaviour of Women Entrepreneurs of Ima Market, Manipur". <i>International Journal of Tropical Agriculture</i>	The study focussed to assess the profile of the women entrepreneurs in the Ima market and to evaluate their entrepreneurial behaviour while identifying the constraints and problems faced by women entrepreneurs.
Chithung, M. T. (2018)	"Challenges faced by women entrepreneurs of Manipur: A Case study".	This paper critically analysed the financial needs, social obligations, mobility, availability of

	<i>International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)</i>	workers, and challenges in obtaining loans faced by women entrepreneurs of Manipur.
Singh, S.K., & Devi, S.N. (2019)	“Technological obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in Ima Market, Manipur”. <i>International Journal of Science and Technology Research</i>	This paper critically analysed the several technological difficulties and challenges, including limited access to modern technology, adequate training facilities, adopting new technologies, an issues with digital literacy.
Arambam, S. (2021)	“Women’s Empowerment in Manipur”. <i>Journal of Social and Political Sciences</i>	This study aimed to understand the myriad roles that women play in Manipur Society.
Shimray, L. (2021)	“Women Vendors in Manipur and its impact on Economic Activities”. <i>Educational Aministration: Theory and Practice</i>	This study aimed to understand the women’s roles as market vendors and the challenges they face.
Nonibala, R. (2022)	“A comparative Analysis of Ema Keithel market of Manipur: An Anthropological understanding”. <i>EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)</i>	This study examined the various sections of the Ema market, the types of products sold in the market, and its significant potential for an entrepreneurial development.
Thangjam, G. (2024)	“Women Entrepreneurs in Ima Market, Manipur: Challenges and Opportunities”. <i>Tuijin Jishu/ Journal of Propulsion Technology</i>	This study explored the opportunities and disadvantages faced by womenfolk entrepreneurs in Ima Market, Manipur.
Devi, S., & Irom, S. (2025)	“Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment: A study based on Ema Keithel in Imphal, Manipur”. <i>International Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches in Psychology (IJIAP)</i>	This study explored the business process in Ema market and to comprehend the socio-economic situation of the women before and after they became entrepreneur in Ema market.

Source: Literature Review

IV. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Manipur has witnessed a surging growth in entrepreneurship over the years especially in Ima market and surroundings. With a change in the mindset of the people and to tackle unemployment issues, there is growing evidence that an increasing number of women are showing interested in small business ownership and are actively starting up their own business.

Majority of the women entrepreneurs are middle-age, possess a middle-school level of education, belonging to small families, and earn a medium level of annual income. Similarly, Chavai (2017) reported that most women entrepreneurs demonstrated moderate level of decision-making ability, managerial competence, risk-bearing ability, problem recognizing skills, need for independence, achievement motivation, and level of aspiration.

Thangjam (2024) stated that a strong peer network enable women entrepreneurs to share experiences and challenges, receive practical guidance, and access emotional support. Such a strong sense of community and a sense of purpose not only boost their self-confidence, encourage perseverance, and motivate them to work more effectively toward their goals and aspiration. Additionally, Ima Market offer women a number of benefits, including the ability to economically empower themselves, preserve cultural history, and build a feeling of community.

From the review of literature indicates that the problem and difficulties faced by the women entrepreneurs include of dual responsibilities and demands of household and business work, low profit margins, inadequate capital support, and complicated procedure of availing benefits from government welfare schemes. In addition, frequent bandhs, blockade, and strikes disrupt their daily business operations and hinder economic stability.

V. CONCLUSION

In reviewing the literature related to women entrepreneur in Ima Market, it was found that the Ima Market, which is the world’s largest all-women market, is a major economic hub for the region, generating substantial income for the State and providing a vital source of livelihood for thousands of women. Motivated by a sense of obligation to their families and the State, female transformational entrepreneurs use their networks and a methodical growth strategy to get past personal obstacles and produce goods and services.

There is a need to strengthen marketing support mechanisms for women entrepreneurs such as design centres, packaging assistances, and related services etc. And need to promote positive image of women entrepreneurs as a key contributes to economic and social development. Thus, the government should engage with and consult representative associations, including women entrepreneurs’ associations, when formulating enterprise and development policies. Promoting women’s entrepreneurship is an essential strategy

in this regard. However, persistent traditional mindsets within society and negligence on the part of the State and concerned respective authorities remain barriers to the development of women's entrepreneurship. Ima Market entrepreneur face numerous challenges include financial constraints, market competition, and adapting to changing market conditions. Despite these hurdles, the Ima market women entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience, leveraging community support and cultural heritage to overcome obstacles and maintain their economic activities.

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