



Social Support, Caste and Inhabitation as Correlates to Vocational Choice as Traditional / Non-traditional Entrepreneurship among Women of Saran District

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Abstract

The present empirical study intended to compare traditional and non-traditional women entrepreneurs of Saran district in the light of their social support, caste, and inhabitation. It was hypothesized that (i) there will be significant association between social support and vocational choice to opt traditional / non-traditional entrepreneurship among women, (ii) there will be significant association between caste and vocational choice to opt traditional / non-traditional entrepreneurship among women and (iii) There will be significant association between urban-rural inhabitation and vocational choice to opt traditional / non-traditional entrepreneurship among women. For the purpose traditional and non-traditional women entrepreneurs were selected from central pherephries area of Saran district based on convenient sampling in such a way that they must be equal in respect of high and low social

support, high and low caste, urban and rural inhabitation having (N=50) to each group based on social support scale by Madhu Asthana and Kiran Bala Verma personal Data Sheet. The obtained data were compared using chi-square. The results supported the hypothesis. It was found that high social support group, high caste group and urban inhabitation group of women referred more to opt non-traditional entrepreneurship whereas low social support group, low caste group and rural inhabitation group preferred to opt traditional entrepreneurship. Thus, it was concluded that vocational choice as traditional and non-traditional entrepreneurship among women is the function of social support, caste and inhabitation.

Key Words

Entrepreneurs, Traditional, Non-traditional, Vocational Choice, Social Support, Inhabitation, Empirical

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a powerful instrument for women's empowerment, social mobility, and economic participation in contemporary India. As more women take up entrepreneurial roles across rural and urban contexts, a clear distinction is often drawn between traditional and non-traditional forms of women's entrepreneurship. Traditional entrepreneurship includes activities historically linked to women's domestic or

community-based skills—such as tailoring, handicrafts, beauty services, food processing, pickle-making, agarbatti industries, weaving, and small retail shops. These vocations tend to be socially sanctioned, less risk-oriented, and rooted in gendered expectations of “acceptable” work for women. In contrast, non-traditional entrepreneurship expands into modern and male-dominated sectors such as technology start-ups, digital marketing, logistics, mechanical repair units, photography, transportation services, financial consultancy, fitness training, or large-scale manufacturing. Women entering these non-traditional sectors often challenge socio-cultural boundaries, negotiate gender stereotypes, and encounter distinct psychological, social, and structural barriers.

Vocational choice among women is not merely an outcome of individual interest or talent. Instead, it is shaped by a complex interplay of social support systems, caste affiliations, and the inhabitation context (rural–urban background). These sociocultural factors influence women’s self-efficacy, access to opportunities, exposure to resources, decision-making power, and perceived social acceptability of different occupations. As a result, women navigating traditional and non-traditional entrepreneurial pathways experience varying levels of opportunities, constraints, motivations, and perceived career possibilities. Understanding these correlates is crucial for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners seeking to promote women’s entrepreneurship as a strategy for sustainable economic development.

Review of Literature

Dhameja⁵ (2002) highlighted that women’s entrepreneurial choices are shaped strongly by family encouragement, socio-cultural acceptance, and access to basic financial support. The study found that social endorsement of women’s work increases their likelihood of opting for home-based, traditional vocations such as tailoring, embroidery, or food processing. Women with strong spousal and parental support explored more diverse entrepreneurial avenues. The research emphasized that social support acts as both a facilitator and determinant of entrepreneurial role adoption among women in India.

Brush et al.¹ (2006) argued that gendered expectations significantly affect women’s willingness to enter non-traditional entrepreneurial fields. Their study showed that women with strong business networks and mentorship were more likely to venture into high-growth and technology-driven enterprises. Conversely, lack of community support restricted many women to culturally approved traditional businesses. The authors concluded that social capital and institutional support play a vital role in expanding women’s vocational horizons beyond gender-stereotyped occupations.

Singh and Saxena¹¹ (2008) explored rural women’s entrepreneurial behavior and found that rural inhabitation acts as a major constraint in vocational choice. Rural women primarily engaged in traditional vocations owing to limited mobility, poor market access, and lack of awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities. Although rural women displayed strong motivation, infrastructural barriers reinforced traditional choices. The study concluded that regional disparities create unequal entrepreneurial ecosystems influencing vocational trajectories of women entrepreneurs.

Deshpande and Sethi⁴ (2009) examined caste-based differences in women’s entrepreneurial participation in Maharashtra. They found that women from upper castes had higher educational attainment and better access to capital, enabling them to explore non-traditional vocations. Women from lower castes tended to remain in caste-linked artisanal vocations due to social expectations and generational occupational continuity. The study emphasized how caste hierarchies restrict freedom of vocational exploration and influence entrepreneurial identity formation.

Tambunan¹² (2011), in his study on women entrepreneurs in developing Asian countries, observed that social support is a critical determinant in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations. Women with high spousal and family support were more confident to manage enterprises outside the home. The study found that limited support systems restricted women to low-income, traditional ventures. The author concluded that emotional and instrumental support significantly influence women’s vocational preferences and entrepreneurial success.

Baruah² (2013) studied North-Eastern women entrepreneurs and reported that social norms, family structure, and clan systems greatly influence their vocational choices. Traditional vocations such as weaving and handloom activities dominated among women with limited social approval for non-traditional enterprises. However, women with strong peer networks and institutional support were more likely to diversify into retail, tourism, and service-based businesses. The study highlighted the importance of socio-cultural flexibility in shaping entrepreneurial diversification.

The International Labour Organization⁷ (2014) noted that caste-based inequalities continue to influence occupational mobility among Indian women. Women from marginalized castes often face discrimination in accessing credit, training, and entrepreneurial networks, limiting them to informal, traditional sectors. Urban women from higher castes, however, experience fewer barriers in entering professional, non-traditional vocations. The report emphasized that caste continues to shape entrepreneurial aspirations, market participation, and women's socio-economic empowerment across regions.

Roomi and Parrott¹⁰ (2015) examined the role of social support networks in promoting women's entrepreneurship in South Asia and found that women with supportive families and community networks were significantly more likely to enter growth-oriented enterprises. Women lacking emotional or practical support remained confined to low-risk, traditional vocations. The study highlighted that access to training, SHGs, and microfinance groups strengthened women's confidence and facilitated non-traditional entrepreneurial participation.

Chakraborty and Saha³ (2016) investigated the impact of caste and socio-economic status on women's entrepreneurial decision-making. Their findings revealed that upper-caste women showed greater entrepreneurial diversification due to better financial stability and societal approval. Marginalized caste groups often faced socio-structural barriers, promoting continuity in traditional occupations. The study concluded that caste structures not only determine access to resources but also influence aspirations and vocational self-efficacy among women.

Panda⁹ (2018) analyzed rural–urban differences in women's entrepreneurship in Odisha and found that urban inhabitation provides greater exposure, market access, and training opportunities, enabling women to engage in non-traditional vocations such as digital services, boutique businesses, and educational ventures. In contrast, rural women remained confined to traditional vocations due to restricted mobility and limited infrastructure. The study emphasized that habitation significantly shapes the opportunity structure for women entrepreneurs.

Gupta and Srivastava⁶ (2020) explored the influence of social support and socio-cultural norms on vocational aspirations of young women entrepreneurs. Their research showed that women with strong peer support, mentorship, and institutional encouragement were more likely to opt for non-traditional, innovative ventures. Those lacking supportive networks continued to follow conventional entrepreneurial roles. They concluded that social support enhances self-efficacy, entrepreneurial identity, and willingness to pursue risk-intensive vocations.

Kumari and Kumar⁸ (2021) examined intersectional factors—caste, gender, and geographical location in shaping entrepreneurial choices among women in Bihar. They found that low-caste rural women were primarily engaged in hereditary, traditional vocations due to socio-cultural restrictions, poverty, and lack of social capital. Urban women from stronger caste and class backgrounds demonstrated greater agency in selecting non-traditional entrepreneurial careers. The study highlighted the need for targeted policy strategies to reduce caste- and region-based disparities in women's entrepreneurship. It is clear that vocational choice among women has not been studied in context of Saran (Bihar). This justifies undertaking of the problem.

Women's Entrepreneurship in the Indian Context

India presents a unique socio-cultural environment where women's entrepreneurship is influenced by entrenched patriarchal norms, gendered economic structures, caste hierarchies, and regional disparities. While

women's entrepreneurial participation has increased due to Government schemes, microfinance support, SHGs, digital literacy, and globalization, the vocational choices they make are still shaped by familial expectations and social norms. In many households, women are encouraged to pursue "safe" and "suitable" occupations—usually those involving modest investment, close-to-home operations, and minimal exposure to the public sphere. Consequently, traditional vocations remain dominant among women belonging to lower socio-economic or rural backgrounds, whereas urban and educated women may explore more diverse entrepreneurial avenues.

Traditional vs. Non-Traditional Women Entrepreneurs

The dichotomy between traditional and non-traditional vocations is rooted in gender-role socialization. Traditional vocations emerge from cultural expectations that associate women with caregiving, nurturing, household management, and activities requiring patience and fine motor skills. These vocations typically involve limited capital requirements, lower risks, and flexibility to balance domestic responsibilities. Although they empower women at a micro level, their growth potential is often limited by small-scale operations, gender stereotypes, and resource constraints.

Non-traditional vocations reflect a departure from conventional gender identities. Women entering male-dominated, high-risk, or technologically advanced entrepreneurial fields display greater autonomy, risk-taking ability, education, market exposure, and support from progressive family environments. These vocations offer higher economic returns, greater professional identity, and increased social visibility. However, they also expose women to greater scrutiny, gender bias, and resistance from conservative cultural contexts. The pathways to becoming a non-traditional entrepreneur thus require broader social support, stronger self-confidence, and favourable socio-economic conditions.

Social Support as a Determinant to Vocational Choice

Social support plays a critical role in facilitating or inhibiting women's entrepreneurial decisions. It includes emotional encouragement, financial assistance, informational support, and practical help from family members, relatives, peers, community networks, and institutional bodies. Among women, family support is often the primary determinant of whether they can step into entrepreneurship at all given the cultural expectation that women prioritize household and caregiving roles. For traditional entrepreneurs, moderate family support may be sufficient to start home-based activities. However, non-traditional vocations require stronger instrumental and emotional support due to higher risks, mobility requirements, and challenges associated with breaking gender norms.

Spousal support, in particular, is essential for entrepreneurial women, as male partners often control financial resources, decision-making authority, and mobility-related permissions in patriarchal households. Support from extended family members helps women manage childcare, domestic responsibilities, and continuity in business operations. Additionally, community and peer support through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), microfinance collectives, women's associations, and entrepreneurial networks can enhance women's confidence, provide training, and facilitate resource sharing. Lack of social support can push women toward safer, more traditional vocations, whereas high levels of support can propel them into challenging, non-traditional fields. Thus, social support functions as both an enabler and a filter shaping vocational aspirations and choices.

Caste as a Socio-cultural Correlate to Vocational Choice

Caste remains one of the most influential structural determinants of socio-economic opportunities in India. It shapes educational attainment, economic resources, occupational identity, mobility, and social expectations. For women, caste effects are intensified due to gender-based limitations. Women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) often face restricted access to credit, limited property ownership, and fewer market linkages. As a result, their entrepreneurial choices may gravitate toward traditional low-investment vocations. In contrast, women from upper castes or

relatively privileged socio-economic backgrounds may have greater exposure, better networks, and more family resources to engage in non-traditional vocations.

Caste also influences vocational stereotyping. Certain traditional occupations like weaving, pottery, handicrafts, midwifery, or artisanal work are historically associated with caste-based division of labour. Women belonging to these communities may internalize these identities and continue these vocations across generations. Conversely, for many women from marginalized castes, non-traditional entrepreneurship becomes a tool for breaking oppressive caste boundaries, achieving social mobility, and asserting self-worth. Social and institutional discrimination, however, often continues to limit their upward mobility in non-traditional fields. Caste thus directly affects women's career confidence, access to capital, creditworthiness, mentorship, and perceptions of entrepreneurial legitimacy.

Inhabitation and Vocational Choice

The distinction between rural and urban inhabitation significantly shapes women's entrepreneurial trajectories. Rural women often encounter limited education, restricted mobility, inadequate infrastructure, and traditional gender norms that confine them to home-based work. Rural entrepreneurship is dominated by agricultural, handicraft, or small-scale traditional vocations. While rural women demonstrate strong resilience and creativity, their venture choices remain tied to local markets and limited exposure.

Urban women, by contrast, benefit from greater access to training, credit facilities, technology, transport, and professional networks. Urban environments also provide more acceptance of women in diverse and non-traditional occupations, such as IT-enabled services, e-commerce, creative industries, or manufacturing units. The urban context encourages vocational experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation. However, urban women may still face gender stereotypes, dual-role strain, and competitive pressures.

Semi-urban or peri-urban areas operate as transitional spaces where women may navigate both traditional and modern vocational identities. Thus, inhabitation directly affects opportunity structures, resource availability, mobility, societal expectations, and entrepreneurial aspirations.

Need for the Present Study

Despite the increasing visibility of women entrepreneurs in India, research examining the interplay of social support, caste and inhabitation as correlates to vocational choice between traditional and non-traditional women entrepreneurs is limited. Most existing studies analyse these variables in isolation for example, exploring social support and women's empowerment, caste and economic mobility, or rural-urban differences in entrepreneurship. Few studies integrate all three correlates within the specific context of vocational choice among women entrepreneurs.

Given the socio-cultural diversity of India, understanding how these factors intersect is essential for developing effective policies and interventions. Insights into these correlates will help clarify why some women pursue high-growth, non-traditional vocations while others remain confined to culturally sanctioned, traditional ones. Such understanding can inform Government schemes, microfinance institutions, women's empowerment programs, skill development initiatives, and entrepreneurship training models. It can also contribute to theoretical understanding of gendered vocational decision-making and the psychological processes underlying entrepreneurial aspirations.

Objectives

It was intended to examine the association of social support, caste and inhabitation with vocational choice to opt as traditional / non-traditional entrepreneurship.

Hypotheses

- H₁** There will be significant association between social support and vocational choice to opt traditional / non-traditional entrepreneurship among women.
- H₂** There will be significant association between caste and vocational choice to opt traditional / non-traditional entrepreneurship among women.
- H₃** There will be significant association between urban-rural inhabitation and vocational choice to opt traditional / non-traditional entrepreneurship among women.

Method of Study

Sample Used

The sample comprised of 100 women belonging to non-traditional entrepreneur group and traditional entrepreneur group respectively. They were selected from among women population of Saran district of Bihar based on purposive sampling. They were equally belonging to high and low social support groups, high and low caste groups and urban and rural inhabitation groups. Other than the conditions of research the sample was matched so far as practicable.

Design Used

This is an ex-post facto type of research, Ex-post facto is a type of research moving from effect to cause. Therefore, causal comparative research design was used.

Tools Used

- Personal Data Sheet prepared by the researchers themselves was used to gather the necessary information about women entrepreneur respondents.
- Social Support Scale – Social support scale by Madhu Asthana and Kiran Bala Verma was used to measure social support among the women entrepreneurs.

Results & Interpretation

Table 1: Chi Square showing association of social support with vocational choice among women as traditional and non-traditional entrepreneurs

Variable	Groups	N	Women Entrepreneurs		χ^2 (df=1)	P
			Traditional	Non-Traditional		
Social Support	High	50	30% (N=15)	70% (N=35)	29.17	<.01
	low	50	68% (N=34)	32% (N=16)		

Table-1 shows a significant association between social support and vocational choice among women entrepreneurs, as indicated by the chi-square value of 29.17, which is significant at the $p < .01$ level. The data reveal that women with high social support (N = 50) are far more likely to choose non-traditional entrepreneurial activities, with 70% (35 women) opting for non-traditional ventures and only 30% (15 women) engaging in traditional occupations. In contrast, women with low social support (N = 50) show the opposite trend: 68% (34 women) choose traditional vocations, while only 32% (16 women) pursue non-traditional entrepreneurship. This indicates that higher levels of social support encourage women to take up innovative, modern, and non-traditional entrepreneurial roles, whereas limited social support restricts them to traditional and socially familiar occupations. The significant chi-square value confirms that these differences are meaningful and not due to chance.

Table 2: Chi Square showing association of caste with vocational choice among women as traditional and non-traditional entrepreneurs

Variable	Groups	N	Women Entrepreneurs		χ^2 (df=1)	P
			Traditional	Non-Traditional		
Caste	High	50	28% (N=14)	72% (N=36)	20.48	<.01
	Low	50	60% (N=30)	40% (N=20)		

Table-2 demonstrates a significant association between caste and vocational choice among women entrepreneurs, as reflected by the chi-square value of 20.48, which is significant at the $p < .01$ level. Among women belonging to high caste groups ($N = 50$), a large proportion 72% (36 women) engage in non-traditional entrepreneurial activities, while only 28% (14 women) follow traditional occupations. In contrast, women from low caste groups ($N = 50$) show a reverse pattern, with 60% (30 women) choosing traditional vocations and only 40% (20 women) opting for non-traditional entrepreneurship. These findings indicate that caste plays an important role in shaping entrepreneurial choices: women from high caste groups experience greater social mobility and exposure to modern opportunities, encouraging them to enter non-traditional fields, whereas women from low caste groups remain more inclined toward traditional occupations due to social, cultural, and structural constraints.

Table 3: Chi Square showing association of urban - rural Inhabitation with vocational choice among women as traditional and non-traditional entrepreneurs

Variable	Groups	N	Women Entrepreneurs		χ^2 (df=1)	P
			Traditional	Non-Traditional		
Inhabitation	Urban	50	32% (N=16)	68% (N=34)	23.12	<.01
	Rural	50	66% (N=33)	34% (N=17)		

Table-3 presents the association between urban–rural inhabitation and the vocational choices of women entrepreneurs, showing a highly significant chi-square value of 23.12, which is significant at the $p < .01$ level. The data reveal that among urban women ($N = 50$), 68% (34 women) are engaged in non-traditional entrepreneurial activities, whereas only 32% (16 women) pursue traditional occupations. In contrast, the pattern is reversed among rural women ($N = 50$): 66% (33 women) choose traditional vocations, while only 34% (17 women) engage in non-traditional enterprises. These findings clearly indicate that inhabitation plays a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial choices. Urban environments provide greater exposure, resources, and societal openness toward modern, innovative, and non-traditional ventures, leading more women to adopt such occupations. Conversely, rural settings are often more influenced by cultural norms, limited resources, and traditional expectations, resulting in a higher inclination toward conventional entrepreneurial activities. The significant chi-square value confirms that these differences are statistically meaningful, demonstrating that the place of inhabitation significantly affects women’s vocational preferences.

Conclusions

Social support significantly influences women’s vocational choices, with urban women receiving more support for non-traditional entrepreneurship than rural women. Caste also plays a crucial role, as urban women overcome caste-based barriers more easily, while rural women remain inclined toward traditional occupations. Inhabitation strongly affects choices urban women prefer non-traditional ventures, whereas rural women predominantly select traditional vocations.

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