



Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment: A Study Based on Ema Keithal (Mother's Market) In Imphal, Manipur

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Abstract: The research study entitled “Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment” is to study at Ema keithal in Manipur State. In Manipuri Ema Means “mother”, named as mother market, khei- means storage and -thel means to spread out or to sell which literally means mothers’ market or women’s market. Khwairamband market or the Ema Market was probably the biggest women market in Asia, consists of different segments. Entrepreneurship and women empowerment are integral components of socio-economic development, particularly in marginalized communities. Ema Keithal, a vibrant, women-operated market in Imphal, Manipur, exemplifies the transformative power of women-led entrepreneurship in a traditionally patriarchal society. The market, which is entirely managed by women vendors, stands as a testament to the role of women in local economies and their ability to challenge gender norms. This paper explores the socio-cultural and economic impacts of Ema Keithal on women empowerment, focusing on how the market facilitates financial independence, leadership, and a sense of community among its participants. By analyzing the historical context, operational dynamics, and the personal narratives of the women involved, the study highlights the significance of Ema Keithal in promoting economic autonomy and gender equality in the region. The market not only provides women with a platform for economic activity but also fosters social cohesion and resilience. As such, Ema Keithal is a model for how women-led entrepreneurship can drive broader societal change, influencing both local

economies and the empowerment of women across the globe. This market has been providing livelihood for the entire Manipur from generation to generation. Being run only by the women, this market has performed a significant role in empowering the women in the Manipur society. It's traditional and culture bonding with people has made this market one of the biggest markets of its own kind in the entire country. It would try to cover some of the untold story of the women whose unbeatable power in bringing up their family. Situated in the centre of Manipur's capital city Imphal, it is the only market run by in the entire country possible in the world too. All the respondents were of the opinion that their lifestyle, socio economic condition has change after their entry in the Ema market

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Women Empowerment, Women Market, Mother, Handloom, Handicraft*

1. Introduction

The researcher in this study deals in 'Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment' based on Ema keithal in Manipur. In Manipur Ema Means "mother", named as mother market, khei- means storage and -thel means to spread out or to sell which literally means mothers' market or women's market. This market has been providing livelihood for the entire Manipur from generation to generation. Being run only by the women, this market has performed a significant role in empowering the women in the Manipur society. It's traditional and culture bonding with people has made this market one of the biggest markets of its own kind in the entire country. The study mainly focuses on the daily activity of the women and their perspective of the market. It also tries to cover some of the untold story of the women whose unbeatable power in bringing up their family. Situated in the centre of Manipur's capital city Imphal, it is the only market run by in the entire country possible in the world too. Traditionally, in Manipur society women mainly do all the buying for the family from household items like vegetables, children's clothes etc. to items for many occasions like marriage and festival. Today, due to influx of many products and technologies from neighboring country like Myanmar and Bangladesh, the real charm of this market is degrading in a faster rate. Many local productions have now been replaced due to lack of support. Many micro-bankers use many tactic to take advantage on the ground of poor education and financial condition of these women. But one should know, each day each woman fined their own courage and strength to save their family and Keithel for a better

future. Human Resource Development constitutes both gender, male and female of a country. Man cannot alone take the role of socio-economic development of a country without women.

Women constitute nearly one half of the world's population having enormous potential but being underutilized or unutilized for the economic development of the nation. Indian situation is not an exception for this. The 2001 census of India estimated 0.53 million females against 44 Status and Scope of Women Entrepreneurship a total population of 1.02 million. In India, women have remained as a neglected section of work force. They were not considered on par with men. Women are lagging behind men mainly because of the relative absence of economic opportunities and minimal participation in decision making process. Women's access to land ownership is extremely limited. Educational backwardness is another major reason why women are lagging behind men. The latest census reports 2001 revealed that female literacy rate in India was 54 per cent, as compared to the male literacy rate of 76 per cent. However, the life expectancy of female was 65 years in contrast to 64 years of male. All through small businesses owned by women have traditionally focused on fashion, food and other services sector, but recently women entrepreneurs have been moving rapidly into manufacturing, construction and other industrial field. Women owned business are lightly increasing in the economics of almost all countries. The hidden entrepreneurial potential of women has gradually been changing with the growing sensitivity to the role and economic status in the society. It means women have the potentials, skill, knowledge and adaptability to run a business successfully. The Government of India has defined a women entrepreneur is "an enterprise owned and controlled by a women having a minimum financial interest of 51% of the capital and giving at least 51% of the employment generated in the enterprise to women". Women entrepreneur is a person who accepts challenging role to meet her personal need and become economically independent. There are economic, social, religious, cultural and other factors existing in the society which responsible for the emergency of the entrepreneurs.

"Women entrepreneur refers equally to someone who has started a one women business to someone who is a principal in family business or partnership or to someone who is shareholder in a public company which she runs" self-employment among women. The study showed that self-employed women differ on most human capital variable as compared to the salary and wage-earning women. Identifies the reasons and influencing factors behind entry of women in entrepreneurship and mentioned the obstacles in the growth of women

entrepreneurship are mainly lack of interaction with successful entrepreneurs, social un-acceptance, family responsibility, gender discrimination, missing network, low priority given by bankers to provide loan. It has suggested the remedial measures like promoting micro enterprises, unlocking institutional framework, projecting and pulling to grow & support the winners etc. Compared and evaluated various research studies done on entrepreneurship including women entrepreneurship. It summaries various studies in this way that female entrepreneurs are relatively well educated in general but perhaps not in management skills, high in internal locus of control, more masculine, or instrumental than other women in their values likely to have had entrepreneurial fathers, relatively likely to have born or only children, unlikely to start business in traditionally male dominated industries and experiencing a need of additional managerial training. Performed a study to explore the role of women entrepreneurs in a global economy. The study has shown that the women business owners are making significant contributions to global economic social and community commerce by bringing many assets to the global market.

Women are an important ingredient put in the social-economic development of the country. Nearly half of the world population is constituted by women and woman is part and parcel of Human Resource Development. Being run by about 4000 women, the market exhibits products of weaving, handloom, handicraft, knitting, and embroidery for sale. Women market has performed a significant role in empowering the women in the Manipur society and nation as a whole. "Ema keithal" has been a part of the tradition of the Manipur from a long time. Until now, this unique market remains the identity of the Manipur because of its close traditional and cultural bonds. Even though, it is not clear when did the market established, evidence has been found dating back in 16th century. In the past, traditionally, women are mainly responsible for taking care of the household and men earns for the family. But during British rule, most of the family men are converted into soldier and are directed to fight in the war against Chinese and Burmese, many of them were employing as slave. That was the time when women put all the responsibility on their back and came out from their house for earning to feed their family.

2. Review of Literature

Chanu and Chanu (2006) studied on a topic "Women entrepreneurs of Manipur after MSME (ministry of micro small and medium enterprises) Act 2006." The objective of the

study was to make growth rate of women entrepreneurs of Manipur and the nature of products produced by the women entrepreneurs of MSME act 2016, in Manipur. They have focused their study on world economic order, where women entrepreneurship (mainly micro and small in nature) has been considered a process of economic development. Women entrepreneurs play a tremendous role in employment and income generation exploitation of local resources, import and export and potentials of women section who are considered weakest in our society as means that social and economic contribution of women entrepreneurship also forms as essential part of human resource development of the society. Their study found that the women entrepreneurs of Manipur are engaged mainly in traditional activities like weaving, handloom, handicraft, knitting, and embroidery.

Laskmibai and Bidyaluxmi (2013), studied on the topic “Empowering of Women through Economic Independence- Participation of Manipuri Women in Various Income Generating Activities for the Upliftment of States’ Economy”. This article focused on the role of Manipuri women in the upliftment of state’s economy and the essential tool to bring about changes in their socio-economic condition. The objective of their study was to achieved empowerment; women must educate about their rights and privileges in a modern society. The study found out that the Manipuri women play a significant role not in economic development but also in social, political and religious. They have also observed that the Manipuri women also work in different sectors like as handicraft and handlooms bring in a artistic skill that take up this occupation activities. They concluded that Manipuri women have a successful role for making a large growth in the socio- economic and political.

SholimHaokip et al. (2014) on the topic of study “Women Traders in Manipur- A Case Study on Khwairamband Keithel.” They have focused their study on the aged woman in the market area which was once developed in the form of a socio-economic recreational centre. The women from the nearby areas come to the market and make their daily transaction. The main objectives of the study were to study the constituents of Khwairamband Market and Problems of the women traders with the help of case studies. They have found out that Khwairamband market, probably the biggest women market in Asia , Majority of the women (vendors) who operate in the market are form economically backward class most of the women vendors are illiterate. They have given their views that the women in the women market faced economic problem as there isles scope for banks to lend to the primary vendors as this women do not come to the market regularly, only the secondary vendors are regular

traders they can provide credit opportunities for banks and financial institution so, from this article researcher finds out that only some women are effective in economic and some are not.

Meitei (2015) at Industrial design Centre, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay studied on the daily activity of the women at “Ema Keithel” and the perspective of the market whose unbeatable power in bringing up their family. He stated that ‘EMA’ is a word which every people of Manipur use call their mother with their despite love and ‘Keithel’ means Market as termed as ‘Ema keithal’ or ‘Mother Market’. The article commented that the market was a beautiful unique market which was just not a mere market, wherein it resembles a family, a society an identify, a tradition and mostly important way of life.

Chingangbam New gold Devi (2015) in the article “Women Entrepreneurs in Manipur.” The objective of the article is to study the social, economic profile of the women entrepreneurs finding out the reasons for becoming entrepreneur and to identify the sources of help received while women starting the enterprises. Her study focuses on the Women who are actively participating the entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurship is one of the ways to show the talent that women can make themselves economically independent and no longer need to beg money from anyone as economic condition of both the family and society increases, most of the women are become economically dependent. The study of the article was carried out among the women entrepreneurs of Manipur that the reasons of becoming entrepreneurs by women and try to identify the sources of help they receive while starting the enterprises. She found that most women entrepreneurs in the state (Manipur) wanted to be economically independent, self-confidence and help in decision making of the family. She concluded that the Women Entrepreneurs in Manipur play an important role in shaping the family and the society as a whole.

3. Research Objectives

- a) To explore the entire process of business in Ema market and role of women market in it.
- b) To understand the socio economic status of the women before and after becoming entrepreneurs in Ema Market.

3.1 Methodology

The present study of the research employed descriptive research design that provides the necessary freedom for both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the issues of the study. The study uses both primary and secondary data as the present study is analytical in nature.

3.2 Sampling Design

The researcher has used probability sampling in which simple random sampling method.

3.3 Sample Size

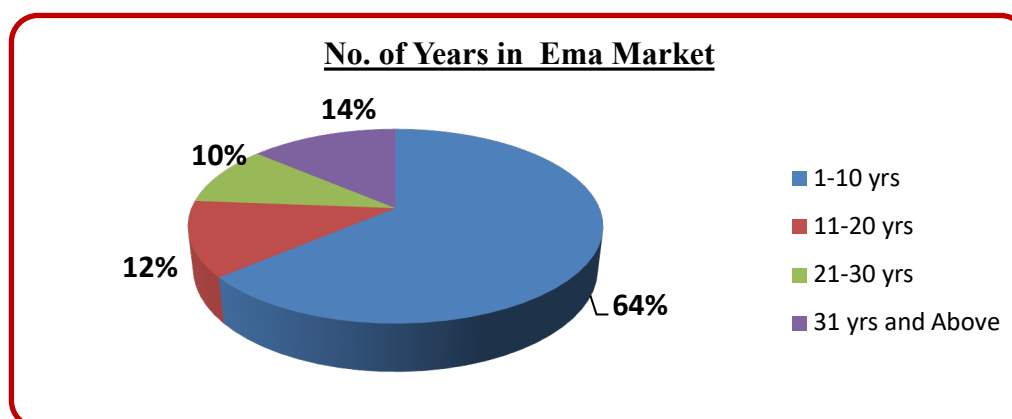
The study sample constitutes 80 respondents constituting in the research area, Questionnaire is filled by 80 women entrepreneurs at Ema Market, Imphal Manipur. Data collection was also done with the help of Interview Schedule.

3.4 Field of the Study

- *Situated:* Manipur, north eastern side of India
- *Location:* in the middle of capital city, Imphal
- *District* Imphal west, 795001
- *Market name:* Ema keithal (Mother's market) focused one segment Purana Market. Even though, it is not clear when the market was established, evidence has been found dating back in 16th century.

Table 1: No of Years in Ema Market

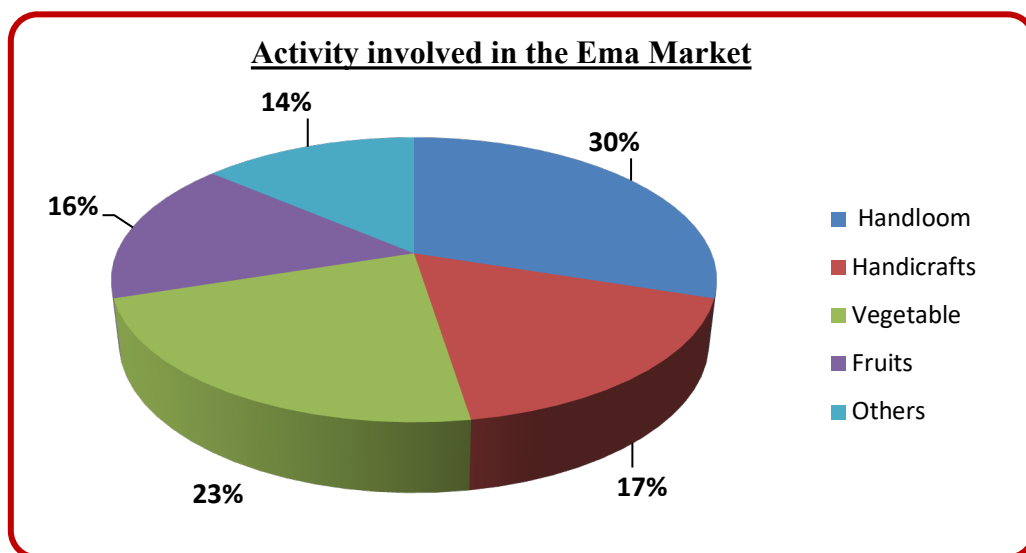
No. Of Years In Ema Market	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1-10 Yrs	51	64
11-20 Yrs	10	12
21-30 Yrs	8	10
31 Yrs And Above	11	14
Total	80	100



From the above *table (1)* it has been show that out of the 80 respondents 64% of the respondents were in the market for 1-10 yrs, 12% of the respondents were in the market for 11-20 years, 10% of the respondents were in the market for 21-30 yrs and 14% of the respondents were in the market for 30 years.

Table 2: *Field of Activity Involved in the Market*

Activity Involved	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Handloom	24	25
Handicrafts	14	9
Vegetable	18	6
Fruits	13	9
Others	11	51
Total	80	100

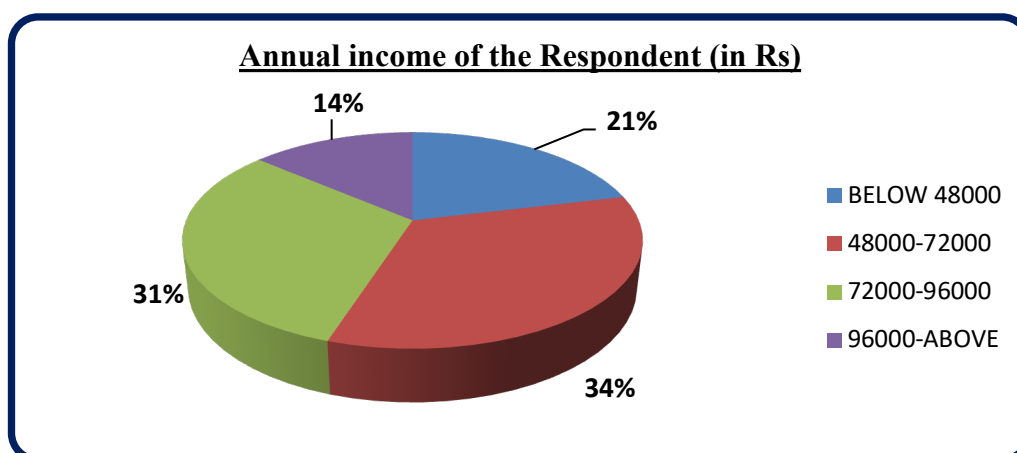


The above *table (2)* shows that 30% of the respondents are involved in Handloom as it have highest sales on the season duration during festival, marriage, ritual tradition, 23% of respondents involved in vegetable, 17% of the respondents are involved in handicrafts, 16% of the respondents are involved in selling fruits and 14% of the respondents are involved in different activities like ornaments, fish selling, Betel vine Betel nut, pottery, cutler, food hotel etc.

Table 3: *Annual income of the Respondents*

Annual Income	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Below 48000	17	21

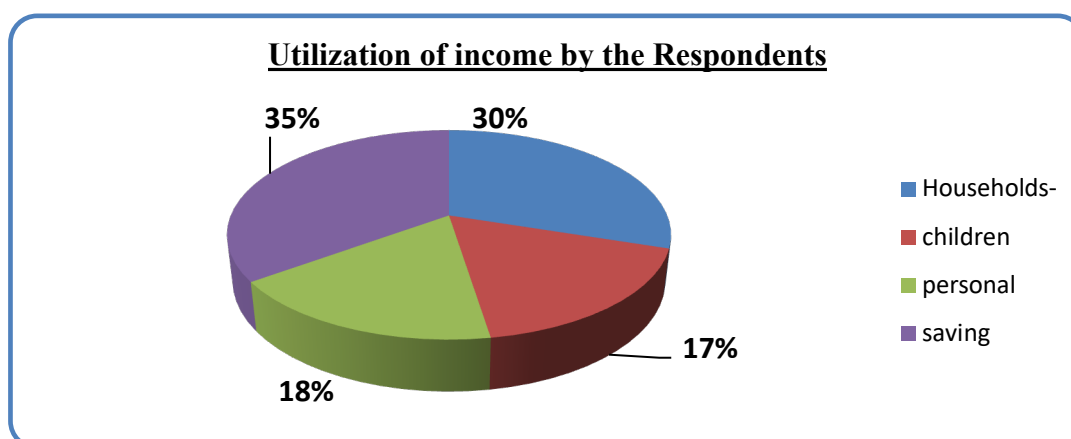
48000-72000	27	34
72000-96000	25	31
96000-Above	11	14
Total	80	100



The above *table (3)* concluded that out the 80 respondents, 34% of the respondents are earn annually income under 48000-72000, 31% of the respondents are earn annually under 72000-96000, 21% of the respondents are earn annually under below 48000 and 14% of the respondents are earn under below 48000.

Table 4: *Utilization of income by the Respondents.*

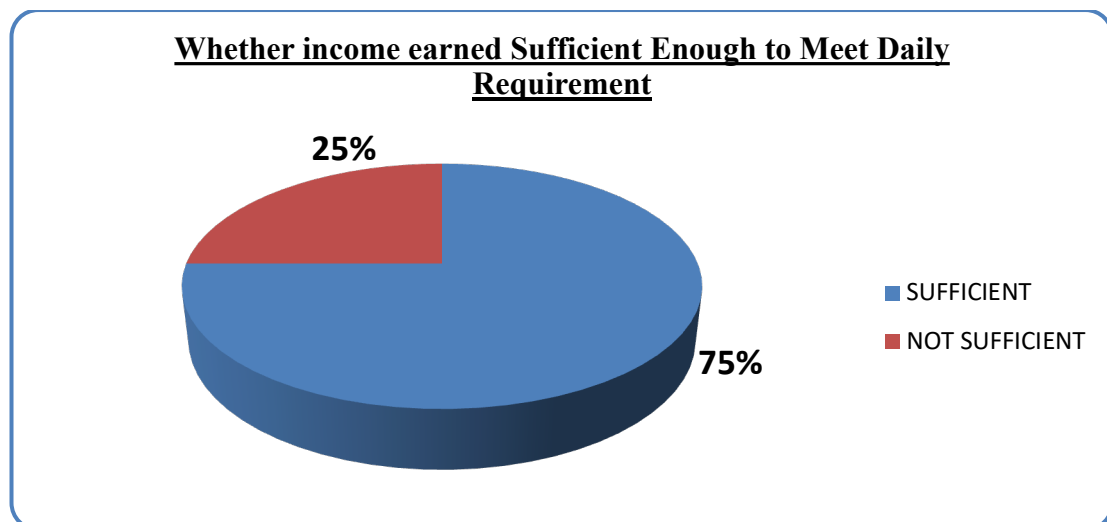
Items	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Households	24	30
Children	14	17
Personal	14	18
Saving	28	35
Total	80	100



The above *table (4)* concluded that out of the 80 respondents, 30 % of them utilized their income in household activities, 17% of them utilized in children education, 18% of them utilized their income in personal matter and the researcher find out that 35% of the respondents highest do their saving form their monthly income

Table 5: *Whether income earned Sufficient Enough to Meet Daily Requirement*

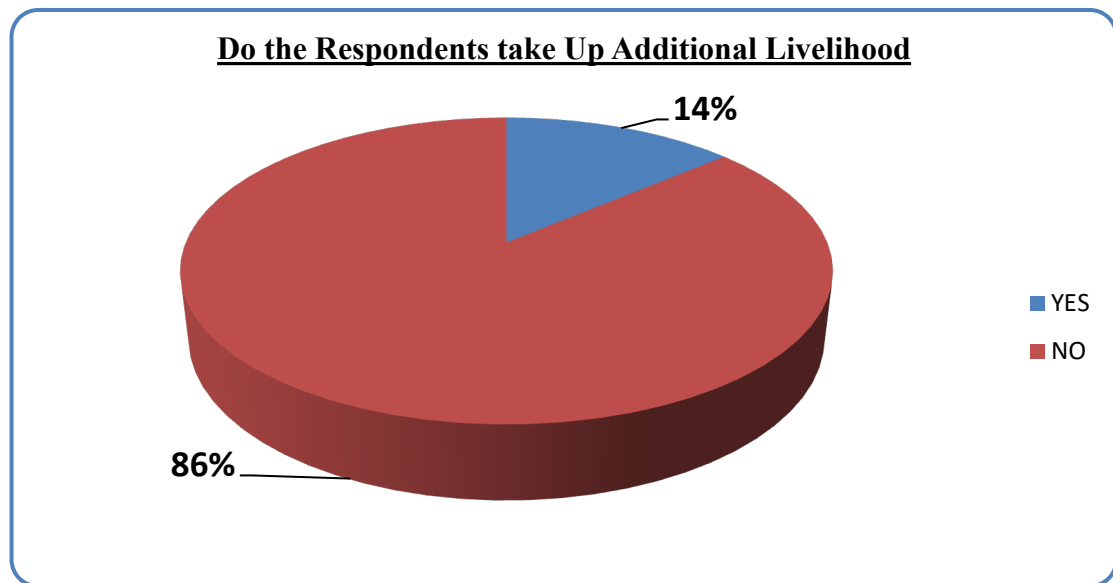
Requirement	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Sufficient	60	75
Not Sufficient	20	25
Total	80	100



From the above *table (5)* the researcher found that out of the total 80 respondents, 75% of them are sufficient for their daily livelihood and 25% of them are not sufficient for their daily livelihood maintenance

Table 6: *Does the Respondent take Up Additional Livelihood.*

Additional Livelihood	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	11	14
No	69	86
Total	80	100



From the above **table (6)** it is found that 86% of the respondents does not take up additional livelihood and only 14% of the respondents take up additional livelihood. The researcher finds out that maximum respondent is sustained their livelihood from market.

4. Limitation of the Study

- i. Lack of enough secondary data on the historical evolution, records of the markets from any sources which otherwise would have immensely enrich in understanding the market in contact of the Manipuri society.
- ii. The Ema market is largest women Market in the Asia, the market is located in the middle of the Imphal city which is very rush in every time mainly during the occasion season like marriage, festival, rituals tradition occasion etc.; the duration of the study was is on the month of March 2025, there is a biggest festival Holi for the Manipuri community, so the researcher faced problem while interacting with the women during the occasion selling in the market.
- iii. During the study it was found that some women in the market were not license holder, so they were not given permanent seats in the market. As a result, some difficulties were faced in collecting the data during the study.
- iv. Due to time constraint in-depth study of the market could not be carried out where many other women in the market also involves in different activities apart from their routine business.

5. Findings

1. Majority of the women traders are from rural areas who operate in the market are from economically problem.
2. During the study, many respondents have expressed their regret for not having got any education because of poverty and lack of institution in rural areas. There was only one respondent who was post graduate.
3. Maximum numbers of the women are sufficient from the income of their market, as Ema market has become a way of living are still getting education and major expenditure are spend on the children education.
4. Many women continue this traditional skill of handloom weaving either individually or by forming groups in cluster level. As there is highest respondent involved in Handloom activities.
5. Majority of the women respondents have been in the Market for more than 10 yrs and most of them does not carry any other alternative means of livelihood.
6. The main problem that the women entrepreneurs face is the adverse effect of frequent Manipur bandh or vehicle band and economic blockade.
7. Most of the women in this market are at the age groups of 40 to 60 years. But one also see some few younger women who often come to help their mother business when they are ill or busy. For many of them, this market is much more than a business but a part of their family. Everyday maximum of them come to the market in morning around 6am or 7 am morning, depending on the season, and return to their house at around 7.30 pm. When asked, all of them hint that they are quite pleased to get a space here even, thought it doesn't serve all the needs for their family
8. Alongside, there are an also complementary business which runs parallel with the commodities business. For instance, In between there are small food courts which are run by the women. They provide vegetarian to non-vegetarian thali for lunch and in evening one will get all the popular Manipuri snacks like Singju, Bora, Khangou and tea.
9. Some of the respondents said that there were so many unemployed youths in the society, so, they want to give employment to these people by starting an enterprise. Few of the respondents said that they started enterprise to earn livelihood as the financial conditions of the family were very poor. They explained that their husband's

or father's income was too low, and those small amounts of money were not enough to maintain and manage the household necessities or requirement properly.

10. Results of the socio-economic profile of the respondents show that maximum women are sufficient from the income of the market. It not only helps in improving their economic conditions but brings economic improvement of both the family and the society.
11. Some social information was collected during the study viz the change in lifestyle of the respondents before and after entry in the Ema market, the change is socio economic condition of the respondents. All the respondents believed their lifestyle, socio economic condition has change after their entry in the Ema market.
12. The women in the Ema market felt that they are now self-independent, and their decision-making power have increased in their family after starting women entrepreneurs in the Ema market.

6. Conclusion

Women are the most important resource of a nation without which balanced social development cannot be brought. Hence, women as a resource need to be utilized properly and effectively. In addition, women need to explore themselves, the ultimate result of which will be the social transformation. Entrepreneurship is the most significant way in which women can not only explore themselves but also contribute to the development process. It is also observed that the cultural and religious bonding play a very significant role in reviving the market. Although, those women who might not have the license to do their business inside, but this market is as much as for them as any other women in the market. They are also an undeniable soul of this beautiful market. In olden days, women are not much free to go outside from their houses as the whole family household relies on them. But as the time passes, Ema Keithel breakthrough all this social norm and changed the way of living for these women. They are not restricted to the household chores anymore. Some of them have started building their own business to support their family. They become more aware about their social and economic status. Above all this problem, each day these women come to the market with the hope that one day they can make a better society for next generation. Participation of women in entrepreneurship is necessary for the development of the society. It

not only helps in improving their economic conditions, but brings economic improvement of both the family and the society

In the changing global scenario of entrepreneurship, it was seen that women entrepreneurship has contributed to empowerment of women as a whole by making them economically independent, enabling them to be self-employed and also create employment for others and supporting their family financially. Majority (64%) of the women entrepreneurs in Ema market was middle-aged lying in age group of 41 to 60 years and most of them (64%) were illiterate. It was found that most (52%) of the women belonged to medium size of family with 5 to 7 members in the family. 34.00 per cent of them were found to have medium total annual income earning Rs. 48,000 to Rs. 72,000 annually.

Similarly, (60.00%) of the women in Ema Market were married. Most (45.30%) of them established and started their enterprises with their own money without any outside source. Further, on analysis, it was found that the variables like education, family size, and socioeconomic status had significant influence over the extent of entrepreneurial behavior of women and therefore, were important predictors for any variation in the extent of entrepreneurial behavior.

The market is also a place of unity and integrity, different women from various community come together to do their business without the fear of discrimination. They all speak only one language that is the “market language” which does not have any rules. Community participation is something one needs to learn from this market. Whether, the women who are selling or the people who are supplying the trade good or the young boy who take care of the goods, each individual has a role to play which they play with utmost care and Some women expressed that the market is their life and for some, they have, no need to work as their children are well settled but, its being in the market has become their pastime and they know nothing else. Women play a very important role in the economic development. They are involved in business activities at all levels making important contributions to economic growth. Nowadays, Manipuri women are playing an important role in contributions to the economy that were previously considered male domain. While many women are succeeding in business, they are still constrained by the gender values, norms and stereotypes in the environment in which they operate. Because of their reproductive roles they tend to be responsible for business as well as for most of the unpaid work in the household (domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning and caring for children and other family members).

They have less time to devote to their work, and they are less mobile. Women also face social and cultural barriers, because the overall perception in society is that a woman's main duty is to be a good housewife and mother. The study has shown that Ema Market makes the women to considered entrepreneurship development as a possible approach to empowerment of women.

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