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The Phoenix Rising: A Journey to Understand the Women Entrepreneurial Story

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Abstract: The main purpose of this paper is to understand the aspect of household woman turning into an industrialist and the persona influencing her as a successful women entrepreneur.

The paper uses case study approach and secondary data to identify the reason being a successful entrepreneur wherein Case study was taken from Nagpur region.

It is important that women in the 21st century should be treated as valuable assets for the growth of nation and not a liability. From the above case study, it briefly describes the condition of women and phases of life which twisted her from a household, demotivated and tired up from boredom routine to a successful, dynamic and motivational entrepreneur.

The paper's originality lies in its review of the woman situation, explaining briefly the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in different stages of her life. It enhances future direction to various researchers, academicians and women entrepreneurs working in this field.

Keywords: *Women entrepreneurship, Interview method, entrepreneurial skills, motivational factor, case study.*

Introduction

The case reflects the journey of a woman, Shilpa Agrawal, a successful women entrepreneur her chapter begins with a typical household wife twisting into a successful entrepreneur. Shilpa Agrawal, who comes up with the motivation to do something for her future and for her family, to be an asset but not a liability. This paper explores various reason and stages of her life which twisted her and now she is a dynamic personality to influence other women for the betterment of their future. This case is extremely pertinent because of the dearth of data collected from interview and questionnaires. It aims to shed light on the women who plays an important phenomenon for betterment of other women.

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While entrepreneurial studies have increasingly emphasized the role of both male and female entrepreneurs, research specifically focusing on innovation within women-owned firms remains limited (Alsos, Hytti & Ljunggren, 2013; Brush et al., 2022; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Mari & Poggese, 2024). This gap can largely be attributed to the understanding of women in innovation-driven industries. Most women-owned businesses tend to be concentrated in lower value-added and less technology-intensive sectors such as retail, healthcare, and education (Brush, Edelman, Manolova & Welter, 2019; GEM, 2023; Jennings & Brush, 2013; OECD/European Union, 2023).

Women entrepreneurs play a vital role in generating employment, boosting incomes, and introducing new products and services, thereby creating broader benefits for society (Aguiar, 2021). Investing in women-led enterprises not only supports economic development but also helps bridge the gender gap, as studies show that female business owners are more likely to employ other women (Quak et al., 2022). Additionally, Aguiar (2021) highlights that women entrepreneurs tend to reinvest their earnings into their businesses and communities, which contributes significantly to strengthening the local economy.

Literature Review

According to a study by Guzman and Kacperczyk (2019), women are 63% less likely than men to receive external financing in the form of risk capital, with the gender gap being the primary contributing factor. Even when women do own enterprises, they often lack full autonomy or decision-making power over how the business is managed. Factors such as limited control over income and profits, restricted mobility, safety concerns, and prevailing social norms further constrain their ability to prioritize and invest in their ventures. Additionally, the lack of influence within household decision-making structures significantly impacts the independence with which women can operate their businesses.

The wage gap is almost 51%, and in 2018 women in leadership positions were only 34%. The same is also true for 2020 (Global Gender Gap score stands at 68.6%) (World Economic Forum, 2020). In addition, according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2018/2019, which provides an overview of the status of female entrepreneurship in 49 countries, Slovenia, Greece, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and Turkey are the countries where women startups are less than half of men's. In some countries in Europe and North America, the levels of the TEA (Total Entrepreneurial Activity) rate for women do not reach 5% (Bosma and Kelley, 2019).

Vinnicombe and Park (2003), in their research work has suggested major factors for success for women whether the woman executive is one within the traditional corporate arena or within their own organization. Some of the factors include that she must be confident, must self-promoter, constantly take risks, must be guiding others and mentored, she must have international exposure, motivated towards work, and inhibit a standard leadership style comparable to that of her male entrepreneurs.

According to Heffeman (2002) shedding light on unseen truths of perplexing issues of women's slow and low progress in the workplace despite their presence influences in consumer market. According to the Center for Women's Business Research (2003) women now owns 50% of stake in 48% of privately held companies in U.S.

Fisher (2004) stated the ability to build relationship as a whole the reason women entrepreneurs reached high ladder of success. Women owned businesses are numerous and so robust that females are helping one another as men (p. 48). Among them Fisher (2004) reported most valuable reason that around 46% of women control over their own time scheduled as the main rationale for becoming a business owner. Whereas 44% of high growth CEOs have less than 45 years of age of women. She also elaborated that younger generation women's are more technosavy, digital oriented, uplifted from culture, dedicated to take risks at various phases.

Her research not only reports on today's generation of female entrepreneurs having more corporate experience but they also hold 45% of all professional degrees, an increase of 41% from 1965.

Research Methodology

This study uses literature review and secondary data of the 21st century and evaluate the case study of women entrepreneurs and the struggles she faced during the entire journey. The data collected was through Interview by which author has taken data from Shilpa Agrawal by taking the Interview and doing the recording after which the entire manuscript was narrated from the case analysis. Moreover all constraints were documented through developing paper by depicting the case analysis to understand the broad aspects of women entrepreneur and their challenges and obstacles faced through various stages. The main aim of taking this case study was to understand the Shilpa Agrawal life journey as she after attempting suicide and undergoing different walks of life, facing numerous obstacles, a middle educated women has shown that if there is a path and courage to cross the boundary then sky is the limit. The main reason was to narrate the entire story into case study and show that women can undergoes various struggle and achieve very step to become successful entrepreneur.

Research Questions

RQ1: What challenges do women commonly face while overcoming struggles on their journey to becoming successful entrepreneurs?

RQ2: What specific hardships did Shilpa Agrawal encounter, and how did she overcome them to achieve success and rise above adversity?

Objectives

- To examine the various stages of life that women navigate while overcoming struggles to become successful entrepreneurs.
- To explore the entrepreneurial journey of women through the diverse experiences and challenges encountered in different phases of life

Research Objectives:

- 1) To study the best practices adopted by the mushroom farmers and cultivators in Bhandara.
- 2) To understand the entrepreneurial strategies that contribute for the success of mushroom farming in the Bhandara.
- 3) To find and identify the challenges and barriers faced by the mushroom farmers, suggest solutions for their sustainability.
- 4) To suggest the solutions and insights that can be provided to the policymakers, entrepreneurs.

Shilpa Agrawal- The Journey of a Woman Entrepreneur

Initial stage of life

Born in a typical family of four sisters and brothers, her passion was to become doctor but with a sense of responsibility she was restricted with wearing modern dresses, socializing, and traveling outside. Going outside, contacts with other sex were totally restricted for girls. She was ambitious to become doctor and serves needy but as a culture of tradition her dreams got shattered when she was married off at a tender age of 20 to a person who was a total stranger for her.

Coping with new stages of married life becomes very difficult and at young age of just 21 she was blessed with a baby champ. Boggled with burdens of expectations, responsibilities of family, child and to handle mother-in-law She had a strong head on calm shoulders and even though uneducated she managed the whole family business. And then slowing with the breaking point and depressed attitude she decided to commit suicide with the help of gobbling some sleeping pills in the hope of a prolonged peaceful sleep.

But due to glory of God, She was alive and her strongest pillar was husband who constantly motivated her for life changing. He confronted her of worst fears and constantly motivated her to overcome fears. He reinstated faith in her and helped her take first step into rehabilitation and towards a long journey of glory. With the overcoming of new life, taking u-turn with a new surge of power she decided to join her family business. On husbands' advice she took a major decision to join the family business, Akash furniture apart from family responsibilities due to caring for family support. She as an active woman to learn something and be a part of social forum along with her husband started following various clubs and places like Rotary club, Jaycee club, Vidharbha Industry Association, Vidharbha management association and many other such forums. Shilpa gradually started spending time and energy in Akash furniture and it became one of the biggest and most recognized furniture brands from Vidharbha region. Being a male dominated world past 15years back and earning tender for business; rumors got created to her as a wastless characteristic. When she went to China, seeing their passion and dedication of women for work she was inspired that they are coming front in every sector forgetting that they are born women. From that day she realized the potential of women and started recruiting maximum full-time lady employees doing work from scratch to managing whole team.

After joining business her life takes a complete twist from typical household woman to a successful entrepreneur with a wing flying over. She visited Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, to get aware of first-hand situations of women empowerment. There she saw men and women working together shoulder to shoulder. She is proud enough of saying that she was one of very few lady industrialists and entrepreneur in a whole of central India who is into full-time management and execution of a male dominated and hardcore business of manufacturing, wholesaling and retailing of consumer durables. There she felt like she had arrived on the scene with a bang and ready to plunge herself into greater successes with ladder of success.

Recognition towards greater heights

Achieving greater heights with a success ahead receives "the rotary vocational excellence awards" by rotary international sponsored by the Rotary club of Nagpur which is one of the prestigious awards given to top achievers in their chosen field of vocation. Received best lady industrialist of the region" handed by Maharashtra's honorable ex-CM Prithviraj Chavan, got nominated by times of India for Nagpur heroes' award, which was given again by honorable CM Shri Devendra Fadnavis.

According to Shilpa, Women are naturally born and are better managers as good at multitasking, organizing and managing. Akash furniture got new CEO in form of her and taking motive of women; started hiring more female professionals and workers, which didn't go well

with the male members. Most of the time it was difficult to get work done by the unskilled and unorganized section of people the task proved to be more of a challenge.

Passionate to be an entrepreneur

Today a 12-pass lady is visiting faculty to various MBA, BBA, Engg colleges such IMT Karol, Tirpude College, Lad College & much more & professional organizations like VIA, TIE, VMA etc. which in itself is a great success story. That again gave her a sense of reassurance and getting back to flashback old ways of working with a new sense of vigor and extremely mature and the cool head.

Later she won Mr. and Mrs. Nagpur with Akash in 2005. Also won Mrs. India 1st runner up a title (Indian married woman from all over the globe where the participants) and won Mrs. Universe Lovely (2016).

Conclusion

She was born a lady, and her inspirational life story inspires young, vibrant, and active women to take the leap, go above and beyond, and experience success. Her words of encouragement for women convey the idea that women are God's magnificent creation. They are gifted with intelligence and beauty. They are destined to share empathy, joy, and love. Seize the day because it is yours and never doubt your own abilities. Instead of merely pursuing their own passions, people ought to pursue their own. It's about getting to know interesting, creative individuals, becoming friends with them, and picking their brains. It involves self-grooming, exposing, confidence building, and much more. I therefore draw the conclusion from the aforementioned research that, despite the fact that women face challenges in life, we must work hard to achieve success. Education and independence are not necessary for success; all that is required is commitment, drive, and enthusiasm to succeed and create a standard of excellence.

Findings from Research-Case Study

Cultural and Social Barriers:

Shilpa faced strong traditional restrictions in her early life, including limitations on dress, mobility, and interaction with the opposite sex, which curtailed her ambitions to become a doctor.

Early Marriage and Responsibilities:

Married at the young age of 20 and a mother by 21, Shilpa had to cope with the emotional and physical responsibilities of marriage, motherhood, and joint family life at a tender age.

Mental Health Struggles and Turning Point:

Overwhelmed by life pressures, she once attempted suicide. However, her husband played a crucial role in her recovery, inspiring her to pursue a new path by joining the family business.

Transition into Entrepreneurship:

Encouraged by her husband, Shilpa joined Akash Furniture and transformed from a housewife into a proactive businesswoman. She also engaged with professional organizations such as Rotary Club, Jaycee Club, VIA, and VMA.

Breaking Gender Stereotypes:

Operating in a male-dominated furniture industry, Shilpa faced criticism and skepticism. Her visit to China and exposure to women in the workforce inspired her to recruit and empower more women in her organization.

Business Expansion and Global Exposure:

She played a vital role in expanding Akash Furniture, turning it into one of the most recognized furniture brands in the Vidarbha region. She traveled to countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand to study women empowerment and apply those lessons back home.

Leadership and Social Impact:

Shilpa became a role model by hiring women and promoting gender inclusion in her business, even when male employees resisted the change.

Educational Contributions:

Despite having only completed her 12th grade, she is now a guest faculty at leading institutes such as IMT Karol, Tirpude College, Lad College, and professional bodies like VIA, TIE, and VMA.

Philosophy and Message to Women:

Shilpa believes that success does not require formal education or freedom alone—it demands passion, commitment, resilience, and vision. She encourages women to be confident, connect with inspiring people, groom themselves, and pursue their dreams wholeheartedly.

Shilpa Agrawal's journey reflects resilience, transformation, and empowerment. Despite early restrictions and a forced marriage, she overcame personal struggles and societal norms to become a successful entrepreneur. With her husband's support, she revived her spirit, joined the family business, and built *Akash Furniture* into a leading brand. She broke barriers in a male-dominated industry, promoted women's employment, and gained global exposure. Her achievements earned her prestigious awards and recognition. As a visiting faculty and motivational figure, she inspires women to believe in themselves. Shilpa's story proves that passion, determination, and support can lead to success beyond education and limitations.

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