



A Sociological Perspective of Empowering Women Flower Vendors : Purba Medinipur, West Bengal

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Abstract: The floriculture industry offers immense potential for women entrepreneurs, particularly in the field of value addition to flowers. Value addition refers to transforming raw floral materials into new products, such as dried flowers, essential oils, floral arrangements, potpourri, floral crafts, and natural cosmetics. Women play a vital role in this sector, not only as producers but also as entrepreneurs who bring creativity and innovation to the market. With growing consumer demand for natural, eco-friendly, and aesthetic products, the floriculture sector presents a promising business opportunity for women seeking to build sustainable ventures and generate income. This article explores the scope of women in the value addition of flowers, the steps they can take to start a business, how they can generate income, and their critical roles in this flourishing sector. Statistical data and trends are also provided to underscore the growth potential in this field. This growth is primarily driven by increasing demand for cut flowers, ornamental plants, and value-added floral products such as dried flowers, floral fragrances, cosmetics, and wedding decor. Women account for a significant portion of the workforce in this industry, particularly in flower harvesting, arranging, and processing. However, the shift towards entrepreneurial ventures in value-added floral products presents a new avenue for women to generate income and build sustainable businesses. This research could provide valuable insights into the lives of women flower vendors, highlighting opportunities for empowerment and development Perspective from Purba Medinipur, West Bengal.

Keyword: Women Empower, Women Flower Vendors, Sociological Perspective, Financial Perspective, Potential Challenges.

1. Introduction:

India is a society where the male is greatly sacred. Therefore women, particularly the young girls, get very little respect and standing in this country. The women of the household are compulsory to prepare the meal for the men, who eat most of the food. Only after the males are finished eating, can the females eat. Typically the leftover food is meager, considering the families are poor and have little to begin with. This study is an attempt to examine the empowerment of women employed in the flower vendors in West Bengal, India, where a considerable number of them can be found in the workforce. Women are still seen as the traditionally 'weaker' sex in India. The major findings of this study are that women working as housewives are considered less empowered than those acting as marketing agents in the domestic flower trading market, and those marketing agents who earn a higher level of income. This study tries to examine the indicators and impact of empowerment on these flower trading women. The underlying hypothesis is that marketing agents have a higher level of empowerment than housewives, and a higher level of regular income has a positive and significant impact on women's empowerment, compared

with ones earning a lower income. This study is important because floriculture has recently emerged as a fast-growing sector in Women Flower Vendors from Purba Medinipur, West Bengal for diversification, employment generation and value addition in the primary sector.

West Bengal is India's third largest flower producer after Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The production of cut flowers increased over the years to attain a production of 1,952 million flowers during 2002-07 from 615 million cut flowers in 1992-97. West Bengal is a leading state that produced maximum number of flowers over the last decade. Flowers like rose, tuberose, champak, jasmine, china box, marigold, gladiolus, gardenia, carnation, gerbera, chrysanthemum, a significant portion of which is produced in West Bengal, have vast scope of its external and internal demand. Floriculture has emerged as a fast growing sector recently in West Bengal for diversification employment generation and value addition in the primary sector. West Bengal is a potential state blessed with highly conducive agro-climate conditions for floriculture. Though the history of growing flowers and ornamental plants is too old, the commercial trade on these have generated recently. These have been made possible for the boost of its exports, recent expansion of joint ventures by corporate sectors for exemption from custom duties on imported plant materials, reduction of duties on materials for green house, high subsidy on airfreight etc. In West Bengal, Purba Medinipur District flower markets have taken a leading role in the commercialization of flower vending. These markets tries to satisfy the local demand which has been used for worshipping and occasions such as marriage etc as well as in the others state and international markets greatly. Flower vending started to emerge as a reliable economic option mainly in Panskura I and Kolaghat (Panskura II Block) of Purba Medinipur District. In its early stage of development, flower vending used to be practiced in combination with agriculture

along infertile banks of river Kasai and Khirai (a tributary of River Kasai). Later the practice gradually spread over the whole Purba Medinipur District as the flower vendors become attracted to it due to its lucrative return. Many others types of vendors came into this field. Major types of flower produced are Jasmine, Rose, Chrysanthemum, Aster, Tuberose, Gladiolus, Jarbera, Juhi, Beli, and Marigold etc., which have large demand in national and international market. This tremendous growth of flower vending in the Purba Medinipur District has strengthened the economic base and quality of flower vendors' life. In this backdrop, this paper seeks to analyse the socio-economic status of women flower vendors of the Purba Medinipur District.

1.1 Meaning of Empowerment: Empowerment of women is the development by which women achieve power and manage over their own lives and acquire the capability to make strategic choices. Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. In this context, education, training, awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, improved access to and control over resources, and actions to transform the structures and societies that reinforce and constant gender discrimination and inequality are important tools for empowering women and girls to claim their rights (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2008).

1.2 Meaning of Women Empowerment: Women's empowerment is the process by which women become aware of gender-based unequal power relationships and acquire a greater voice in which to speak out against the inequality found in the home, workplace, and community.

1.3 Statement of the problem:

The Statement of the problem for the study on "Empowering Women Flower Vendors : A Sociological Perspective from Purba Medinipur, West Bengal" delineated the need to comprehensively understand how

Women develop entrepreneurial skills, such as managing finances, marketing, and customer relations, which can boost their confidence and self-esteem. Engaging in flower vending can elevate their social status in the community, especially when they become financially stable and respected entrepreneurs. The study could examine how vending challenges flower or reinforces traditional gender roles in Purba Medinipur. For instance, women taking up vending roles might shift perceptions of their capabilities in the workforce.

1.4 Objectives of the study:

1. To focus on the Socio-economic background Empowering Women Flower Vendors.
2. To identify the Challenges faced by Women Flower Vendors.
3. To analyze how socio-economic status helps women flower vendors to be empowered.

2. Review of Related Literature:

The review highlights the distinction areas covered by the many researchers and academicians which may be helpful to understand the issues relating to the present study and it also helps to find out the research gap. The basic sources of literature review of my study areas are- published research papers, articles in the journal of national and international repute, books, Government reports, Research agencies reports etc.

Helen R. Sekar, (2004) conducted a study on “Vulnerabilities and Insecurities of Informal Sector Workers” to capture and identify better working conditions and other characteristics related to street vending in the city of Noida. The broad objectives of the study are specifically to identify and highlight the special needs of vendors, especially women and child vendors, with a view to advice possible strategies to address their vulnerabilities and insecurities, as well as needs for support in the area of market access, vocational and life skills development for the enhanced employability, improving working conditions. The study made an attempt to capture the perceived skills of street vendors. A similar proportion of respondents felt that they should not only respect the customers but also be patient with them. An article entitled “Street Vendors: Exploitation by the State” written by Shailly Arora and Aoneha Tagore (2010) explored the street vendors exploitation.

Balasubramanian. B, Srinivasan. R and Vaidhyasubramaniam. S (2012) in their paper on ‘Being powerless’ or ‘To be empowered’: A Case of Women Street Vendors at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu” taken a sample of 68 women street vendors in Thanjavur. Correlation and regression analysis were employed on the data for the analysis. The study on women in Street Vending profession at Thanjavur reveals the poor economic condition of women engaged in Street Vending. The study suggested that there is a possibility to see some good to this community if they follow with certain regularization as suggested in the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2009.

Areful Hoque (2018) examined the socio-economic condition, housing environment and health status among female bidi workers in Malda district of West Bengal which is mainly comes under the unorganised and informal sector. The study reveals that most of the female bidi workers are working daily 12 hours in a day for earning the bread which is very arduous and monotonous work. Moreover most of the female bidi workers are suffered from major disease such as Tuberculosis, Asthma, Cough and Cold due to long years of practice of tobacco related raw materials and also suffered minor disease such as eye problems, backache and headache due to long hours of sitting at one place. The researcher suggested that there is an urgent need to issue the health card to the female bidi workers for treatment and curing of various diseases at government and private hospital at subsidy rate..

3. Methodology:

Mixed-Methods Approach: Combine qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

3.1 Sampling

1. Sampling Technique:

Purposive Sampling: Select women flower vendors based on specific criteria (e.g., years of experience, age, socio-economic background).

Snowball Sampling: Use existing vendors to identify and recruit others in the network.

2. Sample Size:

Determine an appropriate sample size based on the research objectives and available resources.

3.2 Data Collection

1. Primary Data:

Collect firsthand data through interviews, surveys, and observations.

2. Secondary Data:

Review existing literature, reports, and studies on women empowerment, flower vending, and socio-economic conditions in West Bengal.

3.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Pertaining to Objective 1

O1. To focus on the Socio-economic background Empowering Women Flower Vendors:

The socio-economic status mainly comprises five aspects. First; monthly income of the flower vendor, second; saving pattern of the vendor, third; debt status, fourth, property holding & living conditions and lastly the working hour per day in the flower market by them.

Table 1. Gender Composition of Respondents

S. No	Gender	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Male	25	50
2	Female	25	50
Total		50	100

Among the 50 sample respondents, 25 respondents are female and 25 respondents are male. Both Genders have involved in the jasmine flower street vending activity in the study area. This shows that both the gender are collectively engaged to bear the economic burden of the family.

Table 2. Religious composition of the respondent

S. No	Religion	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Hindu	41	82
2	Muslim	9	18
3	Christian	-----	-----
Total		50	100

Among the respondents 82 percent respondents were Hindu and 18 percent respondents were Muslim. It is found from the above data analysis that among the respondents Hindus were more in number. This is because; the number of Hindu people is more in India as per the census 2011.

Table 3. Monthly Income of the Respondents

S. No	Monthly Income	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Below 10 Thousand	19	18
2	11-20 Thousand	22	38
3	21-30 Thousand	09	44
Total		50	100

Flower street vendors are important which determines the health requisites of the respondents. Nearly 18 percent of the respondents had monthly income of Rs. 20,0000 , 38 percent of the respondents had monthly income range between Rs. 11,000 to 20,000 and 44 percent of the respondents were earning Rs. 10,000 and above per month. It implies that majority of the jasmine flower street vendors receive considerable amount of income every month through vending, make them rely on this activity for many years.

Table 4. Number of Days per Month the Respondents Work

S. No	Working Day Per Month	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	20-24 days	7	14
2	25 days	5	10
3	26-30 days	38	76
Total		50	100

From the table, 76 percent of the respondents were working for 30 days in a month, 14 percent of the respondents were working for 20 days in a month and 10 percent respondents were working for 25 days in a month in the study area. Thus, it is identified that more number of jasmine vendors work throughout the month for their survival without rest.

Table 5. Savings Pattern of the respondents

S. No	Savings	Number of Respondent	Percentage
1	Commercial Banks	17	34
2	Co-operative Banks	0	0
3	Post Office	09	18
4	No Savings	24	48
Total		50	100

Again it is pertinent to study the saving habit of the respondent while researching the living state of the jasmine flower vendors in the study district. Among 50 respondents, 26 respondents were able to save from their monthly income in the study area. 34 percent of respondents have account in the commercial banks, 18 percent of the respondents were saving from the part of their income in the post office. Nearly, half of the respondents that is, 48 percent do not save at all as their income is insufficient to meet even their basic need. Among them 18 percent of the migrants have no saving for the reason they spend their entire earning to establish in this field in the study area. Thus, it is inferred that nothing remain in their hands to save after meeting their daily food expenditure.

Pertaining to Objective 2

O2. To identify the Challenges faced by Women Flower Vendors.

Flower vendors often face challenging working conditions, limited access to infrastructure facilities, and uncertainty in leading a normal life due to persecution and encroachment issues.

Access to Participants: Building trust and gaining access to women flower vendors might be challenging, especially if they are hesitant to share their experiences.

Language Barrier: If the researcher is not fluent in the local language (e.g., Bengali), it might affect data collection and interpretation.

Cultural Sensitivity: Researchers need to be aware of and respect local customs and norms during data collection.

Seasonal Demand: Demand for flowers can fluctuate with seasons, festivals, and events, affecting vendors' income stability.

Perish ability: Flowers are perishable goods, requiring vendors to manage inventory carefully to minimize waste.

Competition: Vendors may face competition from larger flower shops, online sellers, or supermarkets.

Market Access: Women may face difficulties accessing markets, negotiating with suppliers, or dealing with competition from larger businesses.

Financial Constraints: Limited access to credit or financial resources can restrict their ability to expand or sustain their businesses.

Social Barriers: Patriarchal norms, lack of mobility, or societal expectations might limit their participation in the flower vending industry.

Work Conditions: Physical strain, exposure to harsh weather, and lack of proper working conditions could affect their health and well-being.

Sustainability: Flower vendors can adopt sustainable practices, such as using locally sourced flowers, reducing waste, and promoting eco-friendly products.

Digital Presence: Vendors can leverage social media and online platforms to reach a wider audience, promote their products, and build a customer base.

Innovation: Vendors can innovate by offering unique flower arrangements, subscription services, or personalized bouquets to attract customers.

Pertaining to Objective 3

O3. To analyze how socio-economic status helps women flower vendors to be empowered:

Empowering women flower vendors can have a significant impact on their lives and communities.

1. Economic Impact: Flower vendors contribute to the local economy by providing employment and generating income. They often source flowers from local farmers, supporting the agricultural sector.

2. Cultural Preservation: By selling traditional flowers and arrangements, vendors help preserve cultural practices and traditions.

3. Social Interaction: Flower markets and street vendors often serve as social hubs where people gather to buy flowers, share news, and interact with others.

4. Aesthetic Value: Flowers add beauty and vibrancy to markets, streets, and public spaces, enhancing the overall ambiance of a community.

5. Economic independence: Generating income through flower vending can enhance financial stability and decision-making power.

6. Social mobility: Successful entrepreneurship can elevate social status and respect within communities.

7. Skill development: Women can develop business skills, such as marketing, finance, and customer service.

8. Community impact: Empowered women can inspire others, challenge traditional gender roles, and contribute to community development.

9. Improved livelihoods: Enhanced economic stability and financial security.

10. Increased confidence: Empowerment through entrepreneurship can boost self-esteem and confidence.

11. Role modeling: Empowered women can inspire others, promoting positive change in their communities.

12. Environmental Impact: The flower industry can have environmental implications, such as water usage and pesticide use. Sustainable practices are increasingly important.

4. Conclusion:

Flower vendors play a multifaceted role in society, blending tradition, culture, and commerce. Their contributions go beyond mere economic value, as they bring joy, beauty, and cultural significance to communities. A well-designed research methodology will provide valuable insights into the lives of women flower vendors in Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, and their empowerment journey. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, researchers can capture both the depth and breadth of the topic. A sociological perspective can provide a nuanced understanding of the structural and cultural factors at play, offering insights into how empowerment can be sustained and scaled.

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