

From Home Kitchens to the Economy: A Case Study on Women Entrepreneurs Driving Responsible Consumption and Sustainability

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Abstract: *Active participation of women in our economy is integral to India's journey towards becoming a developed nation. Family obligations and domestic responsibilities often restrain women in our country from participating in the workforce. In such a scenario, Home Chef Entrepreneurship can provide a potential solution. It can be instrumental in seeking their participation as well as empowering women from the confines of their homes. This paper aims to explore and identify the motivating factors and challenges faced by women in becoming home chef entrepreneurs, thereby fostering sustainable consumer food choices and contributing to the Indian economy. The study will employ a qualitative research design, specifically through the Case Study method. It aims to investigate the benefits of a sustainable home food system in empowering women. These insights will prove beneficial for policymakers and stakeholders involved in the home chef industry. This study highlights how kitchen entrepreneurship can encourage responsible consumption, sustainability, and economic resilience in the Indian mindset.*

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Home Chefs, Responsible Consumption, Sustainability.

1. Introduction

Home Chefs are said to be individuals who have a passion towards cooking and love to experiment with various ingredients and create new recipes at home. They may or may not be trained cooks, but are gifted with culinary intuitions. Cooking is not just a hobby for them but a way of expressing their creativity. This fondness for culinary creativity enables them not only to serve their own family members but also those around them, thereby paving the way for entrepreneurship. (Homefoodi, n.d.)

The home food industry experienced significant expansion, particularly during the pandemic, as dining out became impossible and home-cooked meals were deemed the safest option. This turned out to be an excellent opportunity for many talented and passionate home cooks. The number of Home chefs or Food entrepreneurs has not only risen, but the industry itself has also transformed. The kitchens have evolved into home-based food enterprises that are producing exquisite dishes, weekend menus, and vibrant bakery products. (Ankita.J.Sharma, 2023)

At the micro level, the business benefits homemakers and those who yearn for home-cooked meals but lack the time or skill. At the macro level, it becomes a medium to promote sustainability.

2. Literature Review

On the centennial of India's independence, the government of India aims to transform the country's economy from that of a

developing nation to one of a developed nation. This involves not only significant growth in Gross Domestic Product but growth accompanied by social advancement, environmental sustainability, and effective governance. Keeping in mind the demographic and social aspects, the four pillars of "Viksit Bharat" have been identified by the government of India. The pillars are: Yuva (Youth), Garib (the Poor), Mahilayein (Women), and Annadata (Farmers). The active participation of all citizens of India is sought in this vision, with an emphasis on "Jan Bhagidari". (Viksit Bharat 2047: Vision for a developed India: Viksit India, n.d.) However, examining statistics related to the participation of women specifically in India reveals that, although there has been an improvement, there is still considerable scope for improvement.

Female Labour Force Participation Rate has risen from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 41.7% in 2023-24, while Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for women has also increased from 22% to 40.3% during the same period. (Ministry, 2025)

Based on PLFS 2023-24, an article notes that India has 520 million women and 540 million men above the age of 14 who are legally eligible to work. Out of this, while in men 8 in 10 are in the labour force, in women it is a meagre 3 in 10. The most prominent reason for women to stay out of the labour force was their home-bound commitments. (Waghmare, 2024)

Reason for being out of labour force	Male	Female
Child care, commitment in home making	1%	56%
Education	59%	19%
Health/age	38%	16%
Others	4%	19%

Figure 1: Men and Women out of Labour Force by reason

Source: Data for India

The study further points out that the non-participation among women in the labour force doesn't seem to be related to the level of education. Interestingly, the proportion of women with higher education (47%) exceeds the share of women with no education (34%) who remain outside the labour force.

Home-based businesses, especially those of home chefs, have the potential to enable women to participate in the economy while fulfilling their domestic responsibilities actively. Home chefs as an entrepreneurial business allows women to work as per their convenience as well as the freedom to decide what they want to offer to the market based on their expertise. It has proven to be a viable and sustainable model, as it requires minimal investment and can be implemented with the existing kitchen setup. (Ms. Manasi Sadhale, 2021) The COVID-19 pandemic provided a significant boost to many home chefs, as there was a surge in demand for healthy, home-cooked meals. With the help of digital platforms, such as WhatsApp and food delivery apps, home chefs gained greater access to the market and made their mark in the well-established industries within the food business. (Jing Yang, 2024) For instance, a digital food delivery start-up was launched in 2023 to bridge the gap between the rising demand for hygienic home-cooked meals following the COVID-19 pandemic, on one hand, and the lack of a platform to tap this market by home chefs, on the other hand. The demand mainly was from elderly citizens with dietary restrictions, working parents, and professionals. The app fulfilled their requirements by offering customised menus, subscription-based plans, and ensuring hygiene and quality. The app brought on board 20+ trained home chefs, thereby contributing to women's empowerment by enabling them to earn a living from home by utilising their culinary skills. (Vinu, 2025)

The transformation of homemakers to home chefs has empowered them in multiple ways. It has brought them the much-needed economic independence. They can fulfil their requirements on their own with their own hard-earned money. This mix of passion and self-sufficiency provides them with both financial and psychological satisfaction. (Chinappa, 2023)

The active participation of women not only accelerates a country's progress but also ensures sustainable growth. The United Nations notes that women, in various capacities, such as consumers and powerholders in business or politics, play a crucial role in driving positive change. 70-80% of consumer choices made by women foster sustainability as they are more conscious about recycling, buying organic, and eco-labelled products. They make an effort to conserve water and energy in their household activities. (United Nations, 2022)

Sustainable production methods further facilitate and support responsible consumption. Responsible Consumption as defined by The United Nations (2015) is "doing more with less, enhancing net welfare gains from economic activities by reducing resource usage, degradation, and pollution throughout the lifetime". A study found that chefs can promote sustainability in consumption in three ways: (i) illustrating the delectability of sustainable food that would convince customers to be open to the idea of trying new ingredients, (ii) making customers more thoughtful about their food choices and their impact on the environment, and (iii) working with biodiverse ingredients. Thus, the chefs can bring about a change in the value system and, in turn, the behaviour of consumers in favour of sustainability. (Fernqvist, 2022)

3. Objectives

- 1) To determine the motivation and challenges in home entrepreneurship.
- 2) To identify the various ways home entrepreneurship promotes responsible consumption.
- 3) To ascertain how home entrepreneurship empowers women.

4. Research Methodology

The case study method was used in the research to gather detailed information about various aspects of Home Chef entrepreneurship. Three "cases" have been examined using an unstructured questionnaire. Consent was obtained from respondents before recording their interviews. Based on the recording, transcripts were created.

The questions were divided into three sections to align with the study's objectives.

- 1) Personal questions: origin and expansion of business, motivation.
- 2) Operational questions: procurement, cooking processes and methods, delivery and disposal of waste.
- 3) Questions related to future outlook: growth prospects and future challenges.
- 4) For a detailed study of how responsible consumption is promoted, the dimensions of Responsible Consumption that have been taken into account based on the pillars of sustainability are: Environmental, Economic, Social and Health.

Case 1: Balvinder Kaur Gupta

Balvinder Kaur Gupta, a 69-year-old homemaker, felt a vacuum after her daughters got married. To stay occupied, she tried various businesses, eventually focusing on the food industry. Her expertise lies in Punjabi snacks, such as mathri, gud ki roti, dahi bhalle, and seasonal pickles, as well as specialties like sarso ka saag and Makki ki roti. Demand grew through word of mouth at local gatherings, attracting patrons from Australia, Canada, and the U. S. A.

Her USP lies in traditional cooking methods. She uses freshly ground flour and homemade masalas. For health-conscious customers, she offers jaggery-based snacks as an alternative to white sugar. She emphasises hygiene, cleaning vegetables in salt water to remove pesticides. Sceptical of expensive organic produce, she manages quality herself. She prepares items only on order to reduce waste. To cut plastic use, she encourages nearby customers to bring their own utensils. She also utilises technology, such as UPI for payments, WhatsApp for promotions, and Dunzo or Porter for delivery.

She has no intention of expanding her operations further, as there is no one to carry it forward. Being a home chef offers her flexibility on one hand and emotional and financial satisfaction on the other. She feels empowered because she is not dependent on anyone for her needs.

Case 2: Jayshree Achary

Jayshree Achary, 47 years old, owns a food enterprise named “Simbly South Indian.” Her specialties range from various kinds of batters to sambhar powder, molgapodi, tamarind rice, and more. Her journey as a chef began when she noticed a surge in demand for home-cooked meals in her area during the COVID-19 pandemic. Admiration and appreciation motivated her to pursue a career as a home chef entrepreneur. Her idea was to offer customers preservative-free, authentic South Indian cuisine. She also wanted people to be aware of the health benefits of the foods on her menu. Therefore, she included a brief cultural history and benefits for each item. Jayshree’s priority has always been customer satisfaction rather than profit. This is shown by the effort she puts into her cooking. She makes sure that the pulses and rice she uses are of the highest quality, and her masalas are freshly roasted and ground. She has observed a rise in health consciousness among food patrons. As a result, she has added several healthy options, such as ragi dosa and millet idlis, to her menu. She also encourages sustainable practices by offering discounts to customers who bring their own utensils.

WhatsApp communities have helped her expand her markets. These communities not only help the chefs secure more orders but also provide them with a platform where they can support each other by combining their specialties to meet market demand. Jayshree plans to partner with local grocery stores in the future for dry items like sambhar and rasam powder; however, she is not very comfortable with batters, as she wants to stick to her principle of serving preservative-free food.

Case 3: Regina Shetty

Regina Shetty, a 50-year-old enterprising entrepreneur, says “Dubai is a culinary paradise”, and that’s where she developed her interest in cooking. Her food journey started by helping her kitchen staff in the chain of restaurants run by her husband. After relocating to India, she enrolled in a bakery course, and today she is a renowned cake artist who promotes healthy eating through her desserts. Her use of healthy flour and sugar alternatives, such as jackfruit, plantain, dates, and honey, has been a key differentiator. Besides cakes, her menu spans South Indian, European, and Pan-Asian cuisines. Traditional taste, customer trust, and customisation remain the pillars of her business.

Regina truly believes in supporting women. She prefers having women as her helpers because she feels women are naturally more hygienic and tend to add more love, positivity, and blessings during the cooking process. She also encourages other women entrepreneurs by including their menus under her brand. This also results in other women associated with the brand learning to maintain and match her high-quality standards. Moreover, Regina prefers buying her raw materials from the local kirana walas. “Why Blinkit, when you have the opportunity to help your locality? Just walk it,” she says.

Her expansion strategy in the near future includes opening patisseries within their restaurants and offering healthy cakes. She is also considering setting up supper clubs, and if possible, she would love to become a lecturer and conduct sessions at cooking schools

5. Limitations of the study

The study is limited to Pune City and focuses on three home chefs. Thus, it leads to scope for conducting a broader study by taking into account home chefs across different cities of India.

6. Analysis

Axial coding

Names	Motivation	Sustainability in Operations at different stages					Challenges	Future prospects
		Procurement	Cooking	Delivery	Disposal	Use of technology		
1. Balvinder Kaur	1. To overcome isolation 2. Emotional gratification	1. Inputs bought from local mandi 2. Fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables Freshly ground flour	1. No reuse of oil for cooking 2. Cleaning of vegetables with salt water 3. Hygiene maintained	1. Plastic containers 2. Utensils of customers in nearby areas	1. Wastage is minimised by producing against order 2. Extra consumed by family members 3. Dry wet waste segregated	1. WhatsApp group for promotion 2. Dunzo and Porter for delivery 3. UPI for payments but prefers cash	1. Succession 2. Inflation 3. Finds government compliance cumbersome	Wants to continue as long as health permits, no plans for expansion
2. Jayshree Achary	1. Appreciation 2. Satisfaction of providing preservative-free food	1. Quality is the main priority 2. Local mandis preferred	1. Purified water used for cooking 2. Freshly ground masalas to retain aromas 3. Cooked against order Hygiene maintained	1. Offers discounts to customers for the use of their own container	1. Minimal wastage due to production against order 2. Dry wet segregation of waste	1. WhatsApp communities 2. UPI 3. Porter and Dunzo	1. Scalability as food is preservative-free, leading to lower shelf life. 2. Inflation	1. Stocking of dry items in local grocery stores 2. Serve Indian food to patrons abroad.
3. Regina Shetty	Financial support to the family during COVID	1. Quality-focused 2. Preference for local grocery stores to support them 3. Seasonal fruits and vegetables	1. Use of healthy flour such as plantain and jackfruit flour 2. Hygiene 3. Use of healthy substitutes in place of sugar in desserts	1. Paper cardboard for cakes 2. Avoids plastic knives and candles 3. Uses her own utensils for delivery	1. Wet waste turned into manure 2. Egg trays used for gardening	1. WhatsApp communities 2. UPI 3. Porter and Dunzo	1. Inflation 2. Lack of awareness about government initiatives	1. Cloud kitchen 2. Supper clubs

Figure 2: Axial coding

7. Findings and Conclusion

1) Customer Satisfaction is a bigger priority than money:

The chefs interviewed unanimously stated that customer satisfaction is far more vital to them than profits. They do not want to compromise on quality.

They firmly believe that the energy and state of mind with which one cooks are passed on to those who eat it. This aligns with the Indian belief system. As said in Sanskrit, "यद् भवति तद् भवति" (Yad bhavam tad bhavati), meaning if the person who cooks is calm and happy, then the energy also affects the consumer positively.

2) Home-based business provides flexibility to women entrepreneurs

Working from home allows them to take care of their household duties while also continuing their business. Time management becomes better. For example, they can cater to the demand for early morning breakfasts among their customers, as the entire setup is at their disposal at any point of the day. Extra cost is avoided, which works in their favour. Operations from home help them avoid rent. The electrical appliances and utensils used in the kitchen can also be used for catering purposes.

3) Home chefs promote Responsible Consumption through following practices:

- Procurement of local produce
- More use of seasonal fruits and vegetables in their preparations
- Promotion of homegrown spices
- Buying raw materials from local kirana stores
- Providing discounts to customers for getting their own utensils as an alternative to plastic packaging
- Creating awareness about the health benefits of local cuisine

4) Wastage is minimised:

Home chefs try to minimise waste by cooking against order. This doesn't leave them with much extra food. Still, if anything remains, it is consumed by family members and staff.

Jayshree Achary, one of our respondents, offered extra food at a temple, which served a dual purpose: promoting her business and distributing food to the needy.

Regina Shetty, composts wet waste generated at her terrace and uses egg trays for growing saplings.

5) Passing on of entrepreneurship skills

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that learning occurs through observation, imitation and modelling. Home chefs, through their activities, naturally instil entrepreneurial skills into their children. Their learning experiences through observation help develop business acumen and risk-taking ability. Homes become natural entrepreneurial incubation centres for their children.

6) Women entrepreneurs empower each other.

Home chef entrepreneurs, through various WhatsApp communities, connect and support one another by placing collective orders. This helps them expand their consumer base and form strategic alliances.

7) Use of government initiatives to support women entrepreneurs

A gap was identified in availing of government schemes. Jayshree Achary is aware of the schemes but did not actively apply for them. Regina Shetty is not aware of government schemes, but she showed interest in obtaining more information about them, whereas Balvinder ji finds any government-related work to be cumbersome.

8. Suggestions

Based on the study, the following points come to the forefront:

- Promotion of women entrepreneurship initiatives and schemes by the government will make women more aware of the incentives being provided by the government.
- Dedicated policies focused solely on the home chef industry would help in ensuring quality standards from consumers' perspectives and also boost home chefs' confidence while taking orders.
- Home Chefs themselves need to market their ventures a little more aggressively rather than just relying on word-of-mouth.
- On the technological front, apps that exclusively promote and sell home chef food will contribute to the overall expansion of the home chef industry.

9. Future Scope of the Study

By increasing the sample size of home chefs, new perspectives can be gained and relevant metrics can be calculated. A study of three home chefs provided valuable insights into their motivations, challenges, and prospects. Research involving more women chefs from different states of India could yield more comprehensive insights.

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