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Culture, Collectivism and Entrepreneurship among Poor Women in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of feminist ideologies in developing a culture of work and entrepreneurship among disadvantaged women. It draws on evidence from '*Lijjat'*, a women's cooperative in India where poor women were able to initiate, develop and successfully operate a women's only enterprise. Ideological influences exist both, at the individual level (motivation) and at the collective level (organisational practices). Pragmatist feminist ideologies are found to be particularly supportive of women's collective ventures. Women use collectivist strategies to resist the patriarchal corralling of the business. Through an intersection of feminist ideologies at individual and collective levels we explore how women have successfully engaged in economic activity while influencing the structures of patriarchy around them. We extrapolate the influence of feminist ideology further by drawing implications for women's work in patriarchal contexts.

Keywords: women's entrepreneurship, feminist ideologies, pragmatist feminist, collectivism, cooperative, *Lijjat*, India

Introduction

In recent years, research on women's work has risen sharply. Women's entrepreneurship received special attention as new research directions have emerged that frame it not only as an economic activity, but also as a social change activity with a variety of outcomes (Calás *et al*., 2009; Hughes *et al*., 2012). This is especially so in developing countries where women entrepreneurs often catalyse social change by tackling issues related to children, family, health and discrimination (McGowan, *et al.*, 2012). Much of research on women entrepreneurs in developing countries is focused on the financial challenges faced by them (e.g. Della-Giusta and Phillips, 2006; Amine and Staub, 2009; Field, Jayachandran and Pande, 2010). While these studies highlight important issues, a relatively under-researched question is how do women succeed in starting and running a business in the challenging socio-economic contexts marked by gender inequality and a general exclusion of women from economic activity? What are the motivations behind such work and entrepreneurship? How do these women get started and what factors influence their endurance and the strategic growth of their enterprise? What factors influence the organisational structures of women-owned enterprises? Is there a supportive set of values/beliefs that motivate women in such contexts? This study attempts to answer some of these questions.

Engaging with women from disadvantaged backgrounds, as part of this study, has led us to believe that answers may be found, at least partly, in shared values and beliefs which can be understood as *ideologies* (van Dijk, 1995). We adopt Trice and Beyer's (1993: 33) definition

of *ideologies* as: "shared, relatively coherently interrelated sets of emotionally charged beliefs, values, and norms that bind some people together and help them make sense of their worlds".[1] Within the wider institutional perspective, *ideology* can be viewed as an informal institution that helps individuals mediate their interactions with those around them.

The link between ideology and entrepreneurial behaviour is not new. For instance, Chung and Gibbons (1997) examine the role of ideology and social capital in corporate entrepreneurship. Similarly, Rose-Ackerman (1997) argues that ideologies and altruism are crucial in understanding the non-profit charitable sector. Research also suggests that ideologies matter for women's entrepreneurial activity, especially in building business networks (Scott *et al.*, 2012). However, the question of how ideologies influences work and entrepreneurship among women has not received much attention in the literature. This is the focus of the current paper. We examine the role of ideologies in mediating the entrepreneurial process; their role in negotiations with the family, at workplace and wider social institutions, including patriarchy.

We examine how ideology influences women's work and entrepreneurship despite gender norms and inequalities that largely exclude women from such activities among poor households in urban India. We do this by analysing the discourses of women entrepreneurs of *'Lijjat'*, a large worker owned-managed cooperative in India as they reflect on their individual entrepreneurial journeys and describe their managerial practices. The qualitative analysis integrates individual and organisational level discourses. The findings are illustrative of ideologies that can be described as *pragmatist feminist* that supports the motivational factors (at individual level); and, in organisational form and management practices (at collective level) that helps women develop and scale up successfully the cooperative enterprise. We argue that an understanding of the intersection of feminist ideologies with gender issues, at the individual and the organisational levels, is crucial to appreciate the motivations behind women's collective initiatives. There is a real need to experiment with the space of collectivist strategies to improve women's work participation in India which has very low female labour participation rates even when compared to similar countries.[2]

The remaining paper is planned as follows. We start with a survey of existing evidence on the socio-cultural determinants of women's entrepreneurship, with a focus on ideologies

[1] Here "beliefs refer to understandings of causal relationships, values refer to preferences for some behaviours or outcomes over others, and norms refer to behavioural expectations" (ibid).

[2] India's female labour force participation rate was 35% in 1995 and declined to 27% by March 2017. Compared to this, Bangladesh has a female participation rate of 33% and Nepal 83% (ILO, 2017). The fall in participation rate is especially significant in India's case given its high rates of economic growth in recent years (Lahoti and Swaminathan, 2018).

and their influences at the individual and the collective levels. Following this is a review of the current state of women's entrepreneurship in India. We then discuss the methodological approach that underpins the study before introducing our case study – *Lijjat*, a women's cooperative. The findings of our study are then discussed while considering implications for women's work and entrepreneurship. Concluding comments are presented in the final section.

Women's Work and Entrepreneurship: The Role of Ideologies

The existing literature on gender and entrepreneurship is quite extensive and there is a general consensus that among researchers that entrepreneurship is deeply embedded in the socio-culture context, influencing motivations, perceptions and entrepreneurial behaviour (for a review of this literature see Thornton, 1999 and Hayton and Cacciotti, 2013). Studies that focus on women entrepreneurs confirm this view but the focus is mainly from the perspective of an individual's entrepreneurial behaviour in particular social contexts (Engle *et al*., 2011; Díaz-García and Welter, 2011). More recently, we see a nuanced view of socio-cultural influences evolving around the idea of "*how culture provides justifications for individuals' actions…*" (Thornton *et al.,* 2011: 109), which have consequences for supporting or discouraging entrepreneurial behaviour. Studies have looked at a specific cultural influence, such as that of patriarchy (e.g. Uhlaner *et al*., 2002), or religion (e.g., Henley, 2017) on levels of entrepreneurship behaviour. This view has been extended to examine the influence of ideologies as informal institutions and their role in individual and social entrepreneurial behaviour/action.

Existing evidence suggests that the role of ideologies in shaping entrepreneurial behaviour is already well recognised. From the perspective of new institutional economics, ideologies are seen to underpin institutions and institutional change that essentially define the incentive structure for entrepreneurship (North, 1990). Chung and Gibbons (1997) describe organisational ideology using the notions of 'socio-structure' and 'superstructure' (Fombrun, 1986). The superstructure comprises the "*ideological facet of culture*" which includes the core beliefs, shared values and dominant assumptions in the organisation; and, socio-structure represents "the pattern of norms, trust levels, and extent of information sharing in the organisation" which create the 'social capital' shaping the relations between individual actors (Chung and Gibbons, 1997: 7). From this work emerges the idea that ideologies may matter for starting and shaping women's entrepreneurships. As entrepreneurship is socio-culturally embedded, ideologies that matter to women or feminist ideologies can shape the motivation and intention in individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activity that may not be evident in

another socio-cultural context. Understanding the influence of ideologies and their interaction with other contextual factors is important for refining our knowledge of how women think and act entrepreneurially in a particular context.

Feminist ideologies take different forms, but their unifying concern is women empowerment. In the literature on the influence of female ideologies on entrepreneurship, we find two broad feminist perspectives: liberal and social. Liberal feminists suggest that women are overtly discriminated which impedes their ability to succeed in business when compared to men (Fischer *et al*., 1993). This perspective posits that women are disadvantaged because the structuring of society is male-dominated (Calás *et al.,* 2009). In support of this view, studies report women receiving unequal treatment from various resource providers (Hisrich and Brush, 1984; Stevenson, 1986; Cron and Burton, 2006). Liberal feminist hence argue that lasting opportunities for women entrepreneurs can emerge only from social structural reforms that result in eliminating discrimination against them.

Social feminists, on the other hand, suggest that women and men are affected by early and on-going socialization and therefore may develop differently (Fischer *et al*., 1993). This socialist perspective focuses on gender relations in the structuring of society rather than separate notions of "women" and "men" (Calás *et al.,* 2009). For example, education and entrepreneurial experience considered important for entrepreneurship may be lacking among women (Hisrich and Brush, 1984). In the opinion of social feminist there is greater similarity than difference between male and female (Sexton and Bowman-Upton, 1990) and men's and women's businesses are equally likely to be successful (Kalleberg and Leicht, 1991). Whether or not there may be inherent differences in the traits and experiences of men and women that give rise to differences in observed entrepreneurial behaviours, the influence of ideology can only be understood within cultural context and power relationships (Hunt, 1990).

Pragmatist feminist ideology combines the two feminist perspectives with elements of pragmatism (Duran, 1993). It is an ideology where feminism is something that 'works', not divorced from reality and the goal to bring about change is shaped by practical circumstances. A notion central to it is the importance of women's unique gendered realities. It recognises everyday experiences lived by women and a belief in an active engagement in solving everyday problems. It is less concerned with the extent to which the 'conventional' gender roles are adhered to or rejected. It is perceived to have the potential to challenge male dominance in communities through the use of collective aptitude to pursue tangible goals. For example, in their study of Avon, a multinational that distributes its products through building networks of women entrepreneurs, Scott *et a*l. (2012) find that pragmatic feminism allowed women to

operate outside the constraints imposed by customary patriarchy and transcend the limits of infrastructural support, thus giving women agency and the income to meet their domestic needs.

From the pragmatist feminist perspective, what is important is how women define themselves and their relationships with others, both within their family/household and outside of it. There is a belief in "shared understanding and communal problem-solving" and "experience is inextricably personal and social" (see Siegfried, 1991). The emphasis is on a social rather than an individual path to transformation and priority is given to relationships (between each other) and actual experiences. There is an acceptance of the communal qualities that women are associated with such as expressiveness, connectedness, kindness and supportiveness (Gupta *et al.*, 2009) and the different expectations of gender behaviour while developing strategies to negotiate gender relations that affect them (Grünenfelder, 2013). Pragmatist feminism depicts the way in which life experiences affect modes of existence from the point of view of marginalized groups such as disadvantaged women (Duran, 1993; Mottier, 2004).

Although motivated, like men, to enter entrepreneurship for reasons such as financial gain or independence, a sizeable number of women also choose entrepreneurship to balance work responsibilities and earning potential with domestic/familial commitments (McGowan et al., 2012). This is reflected in the literature on women entrepreneurs where many women who start enterprises see themselves as feminists undertaking non-traditional roles (Brush, 1992; Fischer *et al*., 1993; Moore and Buttner, 1997; Mirchandani, 1999). It has also been observed that women entrepreneurs tend to link work, family and the environment in which they operate (Mirchandani, 1999). These women, we can argue, are motivated by pragmatist feminism ideology: "women whose pragmatism bolstered their feminism" (Siegfried, 1991). In order to understand the cohesion between the 'individual' motivation, traits and cognition associated with being an entrepreneur and the development of a 'social' collective entrepreneurial behaviour as an outcome at the organisational level.

Studies on women's entrepreneurship have observed that, in comparison to men, women entrepreneurs place more emphasis on a cooperative network of relationships rather than profit-generation *per se* (Brush, 1992) and their self-image is often defined in terms of "we" and not in terms of "I". Women tend to engage in collective forms of entrepreneurship more than men to promote internal and external collaborations (Sorenson *et al*., 2008). Empirical research conducted in India supports these claims. For instance, successful women's groups from India mentioned in literature include SEWA - Self-Employed Women's Association (Alvord *et al*., 2004) and Lijjat (Datta and Gailey, 2012). In these organisations,

thousands of women are engaged collectively in entrepreneurial efforts. Similarly, the microfinance package of the Grameen Bank enabled millions of poor women in Bangladesh to set up micro-enterprises (Zahra *et al*., 2009). Cross-cultural research shows that the management style in women-owned enterprises emphasise open communication and participative decision-making (e.g. Gundry and Ben-Yoseph, 1998).

The preference for collectivist versus bureaucratic organisation, and/or participatory or democratic leadership versus hierarchical authority is symbolic of the distinct values and goals of feminist enterprises (Orser *et al*., 2012). It is recognised that such an approach is influenced by the values and beliefs in a particular society (Steensma *et al.*, 2000; Van de ven *et al.*, 2007). Collectivism is seen as necessary for both the creation and the pursuit of new entrepreneurial opportunities through the sharing of ideas, knowledge and expertise (Ketchen *et al*., 2007; Felin and Zenger, 2009). Indeed in collectivist societies, people consider themselves to be interdependent and committed to pursuing group goals (Shinnar *et al*., 2012).

The influence of ideologies and their interaction with other contextual factors may refine our knowledge of how women think and act entrepreneurially in specific contexts and this may in turn influence grass-root activism to enhance women's entrepreneurship. Building on Chung and Gibbons (1997) work, we extend the idea that pragmatist feminist and collectivist ideologies underpin the socio-structure and superstructure and can thus shape entrepreneurial behaviour among women. Drawing on the case study of *Lijjat*, we find that pragmatist feminist ideologies shape the motivation and intention of individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Further we find that at organisational level, pragmatism manifested in a collectivist strategy that helped them expand and grow. The influence of pragmatist feminism, both at individual and organisational levels become especially crucial in the backdrop of an entrenched patriarchal socio-cultural context.

Women's Work and Entrepreneurship: The Indian Context

The World Bank estimates that there are about 8-10 million small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with at least one female owner, mostly in the informal and traditional female sectors.[3] Estimates suggest that globally, at least 30% of women in the non-agricultural labour force are self-employed in the informal sector (ibid.). Their contribution to household incomes and national economies is significant. Nonetheless, in the developing countries women

[3] http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTGENDER/0,,contentMDK:23392638~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:336868,00.html

entrepreneurs continue to face barriers and constraints which limit their participation in economic activity. While their experiences are as diverse as the countries themselves, there are some common challenges, such as limited access to capital and training and lack of self-confidence, mainly due to socio-cultural restrictions. Among the challenges facing women entrepreneurs are systemic gender inequalities (e.g. Arun and Arun, 2002; Field *et al*., 2010). Empirical studies have also found that women suffer from weaker collateral position and unequal treatment by financial institutions (Della-Giusta and Phillips, 2006; Franck, 2011).

In India, notwithstanding the economic advances made over the years, gender balance for entrepreneurship remains amongst the lowest in the world. Statistical data on women's entrepreneurial activity level in India is dated and scarce; however, the last GEM report on India estimates that men were twice as likely to engage in entrepreneurship (Manimala *et al*., 2002) and more recent estimates suggest that women comprise less than 10% of entrepreneurs in India (Tambunan, 2009). Moreover, women's entrepreneurship has generally been necessity-based in low productive sectors such as agriculture or informal cottage industry. Other than poverty, some of the reasons advanced include low levels of education and skills training (Ghani *et al*., 2011), lack of mobility and adequate infrastructure and a deeply entrenched commitment to family obligations (Spierings, 2014). The preconditions faced by women entrepreneurs in India reflect system-wide gender discrimination. Women are heavily constrained by social restrictions in a male-dominated traditional society through gender norms, religious sects and the perception of women in wider society (Field *et al.,* 2010). Women are often seen to engage in collective entrepreneurship to overcome these patriarchal barriers (Datta and Gailey, 2012).

The literature on women entrepreneurs in developing countries also shows that cultural values and norms play a critical role in explaining behaviour (Berger, 1991; Naffziger and Terrell, 1996; D'Cruz, 2003; Handy *et al.*, 2007). While the motivation for women's entrepreneurship is generally profit-making and financial independence (Everingham, 2002; Crowell, 2003; Handy *et al*., 2007), like the non-profit sector, it is also ascribed to a desire for doing things for others and responding to community needs such as the provision of health, education and legal services (Bilodeau and Slivinski, 1996; Glaeser and Shleifer, 2001).

Drawing on a specific case like *Lijjat* can help us understand how women from severely disadvantaged socio-economic women could initiate and grow a successful enterprise. Our focus of course is on the role of ideology – part of the contribution of this work is to better understand women's entrepreneurial behaviour but it is also useful to understand forms of

collective action for the economic empowerment of women, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Lijjat: A View From The Field

As the financial capital of India, Mumbai attracts millions of poor migrant workers from all over India. Poor migrant women came to Mumbai either in search of work or accompanied men as housewives. Our study focuses on the latter category of women who were not in formal employment. As wives of blue collar workers, they had little education, lacked higher skills with almost no opportunity to enter formal sector, had many children and lived in crowded '*chawls*' (crowded network of apartment blocks with access to small courtyard, with living conditions only slightly better than slums).

In the year 1959, seven such women, semi-literate poor urban housewives, from the Gujarati peasant community who lived in one such *chawl* as neighbours, decided to use their spare time and their cooking skills to set up a collective initiative. On the terrace of their building, they started rolling out a crispy-wafer like popular savoury snack called '*papad*' widely used in India (popularly referred to as '*papodums*' in the west). They sold their product in the local market. Merely, by word of mouth, the demand for their product swelled and in the course of a few years their terrace-enterprise had grown into a large business with numerous 'household-based enterprise' across the country. Their business model was simple: to ensure quality, raw material was disbursed to women who enrolled as members of *Lijjat* and payment was made according to the amount of *papads* they rolled. Every member's house was thus turned into a 'manufacturing unit'.

Going beyond simple economic decision-making, the entrepreneurial process was influenced by both the socioeconomic condition of the entrepreneurs and the nature of entrepreneurial opportunities. By identifying a market opportunity where they could use their culinary skills to make and sell consumer goods of high quality, by organizing their own labour and their own capital to create economic value, the seven women became entrepreneurs. In 1962, the name *Lijjat* (Gujarati for "tasty") was chosen by the group for its products. The Mumbai model was replicated across India providing self-employment to thousands of urban poor women with very little education or professional/technical skills and no other employment opportunities. The main objective of the organisation is empowerment of women by providing them employment opportunities. A few men are employed, as accountants or drivers, but they cannot be members. As of 2010, the cooperative had developed into a successful cooperative exclusively managed and run by the women members who are also owners and workers.

Lijjat's success is captured in the fact that by 2010, it's seed capital of Rupees 80 (1.5 USD) had an annual turnover of around Rupees 6.5 billion (over 100 million USD), with Rupees 290 million in exports (Sakaal Times, 2010). By 2015, it was employing 43,000 women in 81 branches and 27 divisions all over India in semi-manual production of a portfolio of products which includes savoury snacks, spice mixes, etc. making *Lijjat* one of the most recognised brands in India and abroad, especially among the India diaspora.

Set against the theoretical backdrop of our study, what underlies the success of the women who are engaged in the entrepreneurial activity in the wider socio-cultural context of India? What helped them overcome the constraints of patriarchy all around them? Over the years, as the cooperative expanded to include women from other communities, castes, religions and classes, what has kept this collective going and establish itself as a successful model of women's entrepreneurship?

To answer these questions, we use multiple methods for data collection including direct observations, semi-structured interviews, field-notes and secondary sources like company archives. This paper is drawn from selected material within a larger field study conducted between 2009-2010. As the study was exploratory in nature, we chose an interpretive approach as it allows the researcher to get close to the participants and interpret their realities (Klein and Myers, 1999; Weber, 2004). This approach is concerned with how social reality is constructed, accomplished and sustained.

In the first instance, we observed two production centres of the cooperative over 3 days in one of the branches situated in Mumbai. We noted our observations in a less formal manner compared to that advocated by ethnographers (Yin, 1994). We observed the daily routine of activities in the production centre, which included activities such as the production of consumer goods, their packaging, sales and the disbursement of daily remuneration to the members for the work they did. We also observed a *chapati* (Indian flat bread) making venture of the cooperative, which was a new product launched by the cooperative that year. We noted the communication between the women entrepreneurs and their managerial practices. We also observed the meetings between managers, which gave us an insight into the decision-making and management practices.

Next, to gain an understanding of the worker's cooperative, a formal request was made to the gatekeeper (also a member of *Lijjat*). The gatekeeper then identified key informants and organised meetings and visits to the headquarters as well as production centres in Mumbai. As per our research interests, participants chosen were those who were working in the cooperative for a long enough time and were willing to describe to us their experiences. The sample

included seven participants in three categories – an administrator in the head office, four associated with the cooperative's management committee in addition to working as members of the cooperative; and two women who were just members (owners-workers). A profile of these seven participants containing the highlights of their entrepreneurial journeys is presented in Table 1. The seven women we interviewed had joined the cooperative when they were in their 20s. They were housewives, with very little education, no previous business experience and no other technical/professional skills except their domestic culinary skills and experience of managing their homes/families. They all came from low socio-economic backgrounds where family income was insufficient for their needs. They were 'mothers' – with children and family responsibilities. Although they hailed from different parts of the country and from different communities, in other socio-economic aspects their background was similar to the founding members of *Lijjat*.

In line with the interpretive approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the participants lasting just over an hour. To capture their experiences as well as their views, the interview was done in two parts. In the first part, the participants were asked to describe their entrepreneurial journeys. In this phase, they described and reflected in detail their experience right from the day they joined and how their career developed over the years. In the second part, we asked questions on the managerial practices within their women's only cooperative. Further, direct participant observations were used to supplement interview information, as were field notes.

The information collected from multiple sources was put together and since our purpose was to tease out the influence of ideologies on entrepreneurial behaviour, we used discourse analysis (DA) to understand the discourses embedded in the lives and work of the women. In line with DA techniques, our analysis focused on examining the interview transcripts and accounts of the women entrepreneurs through intertextual understanding of the wider socio-cultural currents of the Indian society.

Following Grunenfelder (2013), we use the analytical tool of language games developed in discourse theory (Mottier, 2005). We examined the ways women view their work and interaction with others and how they communicate about managerial practices. We looked at the ways they handle disputes in specific situations. Via the discourse facilitated by the language games, we could further understand the motivations behind their decision to join *Lijjat*. We also examined archival material and corporate videos to add to our analyses. In the narratives of their individual entrepreneurial journeys, we identified a significant influence of

pragmatist feminist ideology. We also identified that the organisational strategies strike a resonance with collectivist activism.

<Table 1>

Pragmatist Feminist Ideology at Work

We identify two themes that emerged repetitively during the course of our interviews. We used the themes to construct two language labels: "*I do it for the family*" and "*We are a family*".[4] The first label identifies women's motivation to take up entrepreneurial activity (socio-structure) and the second label identifies organisational practices that aspire to collectivism as a strategy to grow and expand (super-structure). Using these labels we trace the influence of pragmatist feminist ideology both at the individual level and at an organisational level. We find that the influence of ideology helps women give meaning to their personal agency and at the organisational level helps identify strategies that can resist patriarchal corralling of business opportunities.

"I do it for the family": Ideology and individual's agency

A critical factor for entrepreneurial activity is motivation (Handy *et al*., 2007; Schjoedt and Shaver, 2007). When asked about their reason for engaging in work, the women mentioned their primary motivation, like the founders of *Lijjat*, was to be self-reliant, to have their own income and importantly "*to support their family"*. Within their discourse, we developed an understanding of their realities and the meaning they gave to their own experiences that bore a clear sense of defiance for woman's traditional role as 'homemaker' and not 'breadwinner'. The ideology of being as capable as a man to earn an income was clearly of great relevance to these women. Some excerpts from our interviews that convey these ideas:

-*"…my husband has been long term unemployed. I run the family entirely from my income…I am the 'man' in this family"* (L2)

-"*I and my family roll out 25-30 kilos of papad on a daily basis*. *The income helps to run our family. For my daughter's marriage, the gold coins I received as distributed profits were very useful*" (L7)

[4] Language labels were constructed after careful consideration of the interview material. We initially grouped them into several labels, but as we became more familiar with the material these two distinct labels stood out.

Insufficient family income as the primary motivation to engage in entrepreneurship supports the assertion about the predominance of 'necessity entrepreneurship' among women in developing countries (Pines *et al*. 2010). It has been observed that economic need often provides the only reason widely accepted in society as a justification for a woman taking up work (Grunenfelder, 2013). From archival materials about the organisation, we also found that the women who had founded the enterprise had the same motivation of self-reliance and this has continued to inspire women even today as they associate their everyday actions with it.

-*"The women founders did not take any form of charitable donations or other support offered to them. We do not take any donation from any external agency."* (L1)

-*"We have not taken any form of donation or charity. The organisation has grown because of the hard work of all the sisters."* (L2)

Lijjat was founded a decade after India's independence when the Gandhian ideals of self-reliance and harnessing of women power (*stri sakti*) held a sway over the masses. The hold of these ideals also explains the support the women received from their family and community in starting the enterprise. As L1 explained to us, the founding members of *Lijjat* started their initiative "…by borrowing money from their community". Additionally, two male social workers are said to have provided support in organising the business accounts, as the women lacked this knowledge. Clearly, there was a shared belief within the community, which viewed women's entrepreneurial activities for supporting family incomes positively. While the need to earn an income was the paramount sentiment found within the language label of *'I do it for the family'*, we find that discourse elements of pragmatic feminist ideology were mobilised by the participants in our study in various ways. Several of the practical concerns that are important to them and have motivated their choice of work are discussed here.

Working from or close to home

Flexibility in work-hours and being able to keep to family commitments as a mother, wife, or daughter joined the discursive elements of financial necessity in this language label. Despite wanting to earn a living, women were conscious of their household duties. For them, 'earning' was only possible when it did not take them away from home. Moreover, as women in the cooperative were not all in the same age group, their priorities differed. The organisation's practices therefore accommodated diversity in their needs and experiences while remaining family, community and women centred.

-*"I joined (Lijjat) because I could earn an income while maintaining my home, doing my duties as a wife and mother. My house turns into a 'micro-enterprise' every evening as my daughters and daughters-in-law also join in the activity"* (L2)

-*"This flexibility is important to me as I can to run my family while doing my job*" (L3)

-*"…I manage to earn a regular income by working in the mornings for a few hours and then continue with my studies by attending evening school" (*L4).

-*"….working close to my residence attracted me to work here in the first place. My children and now my daughters-in-law help me roll papads every evenings at home"* (L6)

-"*…as I work from home and with other women, my husband does not object".* (L7)

-*"I started off by helping my mother. Later…when I became a member, I started taking on a lot more work. I had to stop for a while because my mother-in-law was not well but now I do a lot more again, as I have my own daughter helping me with the papads."*

Living in a patriarchal context meant that the entire household reproductive burden had was on these women. It is not surprising then that finding work that fit in with their family commitments and allowed them to negotiate 'social appropriateness' was important for them. Their entrepreneurial activity was 'integrated' rather than separated from family and societal expectations (Brush 1992). Given their constraints, for most of these women the job of rolling *papads* at home or some such other household industry was clearly a pragmatic choice. It is possible that more availability of such work will pull more women into work in a country like India which has suffered historically low female labour participation rates (see Bhattacharya, 2015; Lahoti and Swaminathan, 2016). Evidence also suggests that having an entrepreneurial family member affected other's decisions to join the business, as they are already familiar with the role, expectations and networks.

Lack of education and other skills

As the profile in Table 1 shows, all the women came from a disadvantaged background. When they joined the enterprise in the 1970s they had little prospects for employment because of their limited education and lack of technical skills.

-"*When I joined, I lacked education or skills so there were no jobs for me…*" (L2)

-*"I am not educated, so finding meaningful work in Mumbai was out of question* " (L5)

-*"Earnings here depend on the labour you put in. Women from my background that lack education and skills can earn a regular income throughout their lives"* (L6)

-*"Although I was illiterate, my family has benefited from my income as I was able to educate my children and send them to university"* (L3)

In the context of poor education and skills training, an industry that used everyday skills that women developed in their reproductive sphere was the only viable work option for most of them. They met the practical need of supplementing family income through a flexible work routine "*doing what they knew best*" (L2). Their entrepreneurial activity was important to them in two ways: to meet family's economic needs and to overcome constrains imposed by lack of education while overcoming work-family conflict. This was also their opportunity to be the 'agents of change' by influencing their children's education and betterment.

These women forwarded their intention to earn an independent income and do something for their families but whilst remaining pragmatic about their constraints. Given the constraints of patriarchal family responsibilities and lack of training and capital, the only vocation available to these women was one that exploited their culinary skills in a way that did not call into question their familial and social roles. The attitudes, motivation and values that prompted them to take up this venture has elements of pragmatist feminist ideology. An ideology that prompted them to turn to the one vocation that would allow them to meet all their complex needs – to earn an independent living but to work within the constraints of their realities. It is described that in societies with a pragmatic orientation, people show an ability to accept disadvantages, adapt to their circumstances and persevere in achieving results.

Recognising the importance of ideologies in the lives of disadvantaged women gives us an insight into the core issues that are relevant to them. This also gives us an insight into how such women find agency. Agency here includes '…the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity…' (Kabeer, 2001: 21). The manifestation of this agency is central to the pragmatist feminist ideology that drives the work culture among these women. Their ideology of self-reliance and the motivation to overcome their gendered constraints using practical solutions is the manifestation of agency among these disadvantaged women.

The next language label we came across suggests that pragmatist feminist ideology is also important at the collective level – to create a collective agency that helped women expand and grow their enterprise. Our research suggests that the main reason why a collectivist strategy is adopted is to resist the patriarchal corralling of business.

"We are a family": Ideology and organisational agency

For women to start a business in a highly patriarchal context is challenging, but growing this business without having it taken over by the men at the organisational level requires almost a militant strategy. This is exactly what the founders of *Lijjat* seem to have aspired to when they

decided to restrict the membership to women only: men could be employed as salaried staff but not allowed to become members of *Lijjat*. The influence of pragmatist feminist ideology at an organisational level is manifested in this dual strategy: membership for women only and collectivist ownership. Through these strategies *Lijjat* could not only avoid the patriarchal corralling of business but also expand its business concerns as women became committed to the ideology of belonging to a cooperative that is exclusively owned and managed by them. When asked to describe *Lijjat* as an organisation, all the seven participants in our study referred to the organisation as their "family".

Company documents also suggest that the sense of 'family' was endorsed as an organisational practice to improve trust and fraternity amongst its members. It was common to come across excerpts such as "…*the organisation is like a family with a feeling of mutual trust and friendship"* (Lijjat 2009a: 2). Furthermore, explicit strategies that strengthened commitment to the organisation were adopted. As L1 explains, the cooperative's constitution requires every woman member to sign a pledge of devotion to the basic tenets of *Lijjat*: "*Commitment to earn legitimate honest income, through work on a cooperative basis"* (*Lijjat*, 2007). The philosophy behind this pledge constitutes its unique managerial structure.[5]

We argue that the discourse of the organisation as a 'family' and the pledge that woman take when joining the organisation are all pragmatic strategies to avoid the patriarchal corralling of their growing business A feminist collectivist strategy that restricts membership to women and provides collective ownership and profit sharing ensure that the fundamental objectives of the business model: "to provide livelihood to vulnerable women", remained unchanged (Lijjat, 2009a). Furthermore, as joint owners, there is congruence between individual goals of each woman with the organisation's goal that fosters cooperative behaviour. From the feminist perspective, they had "common, not competing, goals and interests" (Jaggar, 1983).

Collective ownership with restrictive membership has long been associated with social enterprises. For instance, Haugh (2007) investigated social ventures in Scotland and found that these ventures were typically owned and controlled only by the members of a community. Peredo and Chrisman (2006) report on similar community-based ventures in remote areas of Peru. The cooperative in our study is unique as its membership and ownership was restricted

[5] The organisational values of the cooperative are also reiterated regularly in all its meetings, gatherings and newsletters. The newsletter is published in English and three Indian languages, Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi, and it is distributed to all the branches in the country. As a discursive practice, these reiterations of the organisational value can be seen as the 'glue' sustaining the ideological drive behind the organisation.

to women. Situating this venture within India, where there are social and economic barriers to women's ownership of resources, women's owning the organisation is more than symbolic, it explicitly challenges the subordinate status of the women in a traditional society.

The discourse of organisation as 'family' is also seen in practices that it upheld. It provided to the sister members employment for life, conducted literacy campaigns, set up housing schemes and provided other associated benefits as explained by the administrator,

-*"We run literacy campaigns for our members, give scholarships to children and organise health check-ups from time to time"* (L1)

These welfare measures facilitated a deeper involvement of the women with the organisation through on going constructive change in their own lives and inculcated a group loyalty. The productive potential in turn that was created from the 'collective' structure of relations between the members can be described as giving rise to 'social capital' (Coleman, 1988). The organisation created a community which is an interconnected and mutually interdependent group that considers others' needs, engages in dialogues to enhance the cooperative venture but also and develop ways in which member's welfare could be enhanced for personal and organisational good. In such an organisation, the members' "worth" is more than that of an employee and personal goals are subsumed into organisational goals, where member's welfare and a need to impart a strong sense of belonging among them are valued in organizational life. Within the language label of *'we are a family'*, we find that participants used other sentiments that resonate further with the pragmatist feminism.

Belonging to a sisterhood

The women in the cooperative address each other as *behn*, meaning 'sister'. We argue that the use of the word is a discursive practice shaped by a pragmatist feminist ideology. Its influence is to construct the organisation as a family collective and establish deep interpersonal relationships among the worker-owners. It also translates to helping each other in times of need.

-*"… we are like a large family of sisters. The sister members come from every religion, castes and background. We support each other through difficult times in our lives –survive unemployed alcoholic husbands, educate and settle our children"* (L7)

-*"I enjoy working here in the company of other sister members. The friendships we develop here help us to tide over difficult times in our lives"* (L6)

-*"I like that I am able to interact with other women and develop lifelong friendships. Some of these sisters belong to my community and live near my family home"* (L3)

By opposing relationships of power and organisational power structures, the discursive strategy of 'sisterhood' used by the women is essentially feminist. The self-image or 'feminist identity' of the women members is constructed in terms of "we" and not "I'" and this works to form a close-knit collectivist group in which they can expect loyalty and support from each other. Sisterhood provides the 'social glue' (Chung and Gibbons 1997: 18) acknowledging the divers socio-economic backgrounds that members come from.

Empowering by spreading the culture of work

Work and entrepreneurship contributes to women's empowerment by enabling them 'to take action'1. In the cooperative, the women from lower income groups "became active agents in the process of their empowerment" (Ramanathan, 2004: 1689). All the women interviewed report that they had a relative or friends who was also a member of *Lijjat* suggesting that members spread a culture of work among women.

-*"I joined …in 1975. My mother was a 'behn' since 1970 and she encouraged and helped me join the organisation."* (*L3*)

-*"I was introduced by a behn from the neighbourhood" (L2)*

-*"My neighbour and sister-in-law introduced me to the organisation" (L5)*

By offering self-employment opportunities, the cooperative contributed to women's social inclusion and empowerment (also see Rindova *et al*., 2009; Datta and Gailey, 2012). There was empowerment in this form of entrepreneurship through the ability to earn an independent income via entrepreneurship, but also from the feeling of belonging to a collective. The discourse that emerges is the emancipatory potential of women's collective endeavour, especially in a situation of poverty and entrenched gender inequalities.

Flat organisational structure and democratic management

Our evidence from the discursive practices adopted at *Lijjat* supports the claims that 'ventures founded by feminists reflect their founders' ideology resulting in relatively flat, non-hierarchical structures' (Handy *et al*., 2007). A central management committee that was responsible for all strategic decisions such as expansion and product launches was chosen from amongst the sister members on the basis of consensus once every three years. Their strategic decision making process was described by L1 as follows:

"The committee considers proposals for new ventures or branches. These proposals are then evaluated for their market feasibility and the potential in generating self-employment for

local women. The proposal with maximum market potential and the ability to maximise employment opportunities for women is then selected." (L1)

The head-office of the cooperative at Mumbai coordinated activities such as procurement; business with dealers/exporters; auditing of branch accounts, advertisement and operational strategies at the national level. At the branch level each branch operated as a self-administering unit managed by a '*sanchalika*' heading a committee of 11 members chosen by consensus every three years to look after the local operations. All the branches send their accounts to the central office on a regular basis. However, each branch shared its profits and losses among its own members, thus making each branch responsible for its own performance (Lijjat, 2007). The cooperative was mainly managed by the active participation of the sister members in all aspects of its running. There were a few salaried employees, both men and women, who worked in administration, or as accountants and drivers. The cooperative's lack of hierarchical differentiation among the sister members made it a collectivist organisation where promoting careers in a way that was valuable to them became important to women rather than hierarchical advancement. So 'value promotion' rather than 'career promotion' became part of the organisational culture.

- *"As sister member and co-owner in the organisation, I have no boss as such. This means that I have the freedom to choose my work, the number of working hours I want to work so that this fits in with my lifestyle and family situation"* (L3)

There was horizontal and vertical mobility which meant that the women not only took up work that they could do best with the skills and time they had, but through hands-on experience, they also gradually acquired higher skills and confidence to manage aspects like banking, making inventories of raw materials and finished goods, financial accounting etc.

-*"... in a real sense (it is) a school to learn how to develop oneself by imbibing the spirit of unity and cooperation"* (*Lijjat*, 2009b, p. 3)

- "*There is a relaxed atmosphere there are no bosses…. Nobody is discriminated whatever work they may do. We all enjoy the work" (L7)*

-*"The informal set up …meant that I was my own boss and at the same time my regular interactions with other sister members helped me to develop lifelong friendships"* (L2)

An 'informal and relaxed atmosphere' in the workplace is in tandem with the discourse of organisation as a family. This was observed in the production centres in Mumbai where the women are involved in doing different types of work in an informal, relaxed manner.

The influence of feminist ideologies on making a constructive change in the lives of sister members is evident from the personal histories, self-evaluation, and the experiences of

our research participants. The women working in the cooperative perceive themselves as empowered at the individual and collective level. The mediatory role of pragmatist feminism ideology becomes clear when set in the context of the socio-economic background of the women and the socio-cultural context within which the cooperative is embedded. The cooperative exemplifies empowerment of women which is much more than just in terms of an earning capability: "It is also about the individual lives of women affected in terms of their personal equations at home, their reproductive rights as well as the right to education and personal space in a patriarchal society..." (Ramanathan 2004 p. 1696). Instead of waiting for wider structural change to take place in the society or being recipients of benefits through the trickling down effect of welfare measures, these women became active agents of their empowerment at an organised cooperative level. Feminist ideologies facilitated the initiation, development and scaling phase of the cooperative that made entrepreneurs out of socio-economically marginalized women. Overall, our findings suggest that women's economic interaction in a repressed socio-cultural context can be mediated through feminist ideologies. Within a broader institutional perspective, ideology is an informal institution that mediates the socio-cultural influences on entrepreneurship.

Concluding Comments

Our findings highlight how pragmatist feminist ideology has helped women create and nurture entrepreneurship in a specific socio-cultural context. It shows that feminist ideology can play an important role in legitimising and enabling work and entrepreneurship under challenging conditions. For *Lijjat*, it worked at two levels – at the individual (socio-structure) level and the collective (superstructure) level. At each level, the ideologies affected behaviour in a different way. At the individual level, they shape motivations and at collective level, they shape organisational structure/practices. This assertion is consistent with the feminist organising theme of cooperative business ventures (Meier zu Selhausen, 2016).

In a women's cooperative like *Lijjat*, feminist ideologies facilitated entrepreneurial processes among women who came from a disadvantaged background to provide incomes, build skills, and instil agency. The inspiration and motivation to 'change things' within a constrained environment comes from pragmatic feminist ideology. This is leveraged through their integration into a cooperative enterprise and a collective social identity. Their shared belief in self-reliance, cooperation, collective ownership and profit-sharing based on personal experiences creates the 'entrepreneurial ideal' (Mirchandani 1999: 226) as it encourages women, even under challenging conditions, to step out of traditional gendered roles while still

giving priority to their relationships – familial and social. Although the women's cooperative enterprise offered financial security to the women, the motivation for entrepreneurship, as exhibited by the managerial practices, was more complex than just profit.

Our study is limited to a specific entrepreneurial context. Given this limitation, it is difficult to generalise. Nevertheless, there is evidence emerging from other contexts that suggests that feminist ideologies may help motivate women towards work and entrepreneurship. For instance, Ozkazanc-Pan (2015) finds that in Turkey, Islamic feminist approaches to entrepreneurship are a means to challenge gender inequality and . The specific success story of the women's cooperative directs our attention to two points. First, although ideologies alone cannot explain enterprising behaviour, they appear to condition the potential for entrepreneurship, and in this way generate differences across groups/societies. Second, an insight from the entrepreneurial journeys of the women suggests women going beyond aspiring for 'work-life balance' to 'work designed by women for women' which is centred on women's lives and accounts for their gendered realities. This will have policy implications in terms of required institutional support that need to look into entrepreneurial design, especially in collective initiatives, and see how women work and how their work can be designed around their everyday lives, with consequent implications for organisational/managerial practices.

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