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Traditional Entrepreneurship of Socially Disadvantaged Sections: An Ethnographic Study

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship is often seen as a way to improve social and economic life. It can also help cut poverty and strengthen local communities. Still, a lot of research on entrepreneurship has mainly looked at startups that chase new ideas and fast growth. It has tended to ignore business work that lives inside indigenous cultures, old trades, and communities that face exclusion. Newer studies ask for a more grounded view. They say we should look at how culture, shared history, and local rules influence how people start and run businesses. In this setting, traditional entrepreneurship means work that grows from skills passed down over time. It also draws on community know how, cultural practices, and ways of making goods that stay rooted in a place. You can find these efforts among artisans and craft makers. They include people who make cloth, weave items, shape pottery, and run other small local production roles. Tribal entrepreneurs also fit here, along with other groups that are often left out. These ventures do not always aim for profit first. Many have more than one goal. They may focus on steady income for families. They may also protect culture and keep skills moving to the next generation. In many cases, they support the wellbeing of the whole community. Around the world, indigenous and marginalized groups have used entrepreneurship to deal with unfair treatment and limited access to resources. It is not just money making. For many, it supports cultural strength, protects identity, and helps people choose their own path. Researchers now stress that entrepreneurship should be understood in its social and cultural setting. They argue it should not be treated as the same kind of thing everywhere.

New research on craft entrepreneurs' points to a real push and pull. People want to hold on to old ways. At the same time, they need new options to survive. Their sense of local pride can clash with the reach of global markets. There is also a constant worry about how culture gets used once businesses start selling it. In response, many traditional business owners change their approach. Some add new products so they can reach more buyers. Others use online ads and social media to draw attention. Some also set up social ventures that give back to the area. Many build plans around their own neighbors and local support. Still, they try to keep their work "true" to the craft and to the community customs. Because of all this, ethnography can help as a research method. It lets a scholar look closely at how people live day to day. It also helps explain what those people think is meaningful in their culture. It can show how they deal with others in their community while they run their businesses. This approach can reveal details that usual money-based measures might miss. So, this work studies how socially disadvantaged groups carry out their traditional business practices. It also looks at how cultural know how, social ties, and market pressures shape what they do.

Literature Review

Understanding Traditional and Indigenous Entrepreneurship

Traditional entrepreneurship has emerged as a distinct field within entrepreneurship studies, emphasizing the interaction between cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge systems, and economic activity. Indigenous entrepreneurship literature suggests that entrepreneurial activities in marginalized communities are highly contextual and deeply influenced by local cultural norms, geographical conditions, and historical experiences. Rather than being driven solely by economic opportunities, such enterprises are often motivated by collective welfare, cultural continuity, and social empowerment

Croce (2017) developed contextualized indigenous entrepreneurial models and argued that entrepreneurial ecosystems differ significantly across rural, urban, and remote indigenous settings. The study demonstrated that social and cultural contexts substantially influence entrepreneurial objectives, resource mobilization, and enterprise growth.

Similarly, AlMehrzi, Tipu, and Sarker (2024) conducted a systematic review of indigenous entrepreneurship and concluded that entrepreneurial success among indigenous communities depends upon a combination of cultural resources, social networks, institutional support, and community engagement. Their review further emphasized that indigenous entrepreneurship contributes toward sustainability, social inclusion, and local economic development.

Artisan Entrepreneurship and Cultural Preservation

In more recent years artisan entrepreneurship has been approached from a dual dimension of economic development and cultural safeguarding. In this regard, a systematic literature review on artisan entrepreneurship in the past five decades depicted artisan as entrepreneurs whose role and importance is two-fold: they serve as economic stakeholders and as cultural preservers. Their roles as bearers of traditional knowledge coupled with opportunities to earn a living and to promote cultural continuity are being explored. The current discourse of artisan entrepreneurship emphasizes that artisans are engaged in both individual and organizational management pursuing a variety of, and sometimes contradictory, objectives that span from economic survival, innovation, sustainability, and preservation of cultural heritage. This entrepreneurial dilemma between traditional production forms and changing market requirements create dynamism within the entrepreneurial context requiring constantly shifting approaches. As Ben Chikha and Jarboui (2025) discovered, institutional support, entrepreneurial training, business networks, and an increase in the awareness dimensions help significantly enhance sustainability for artisanal businesses. Therefore, enabling this specific type of entrepreneur through collaborations and policy support contributes to the resilience of artisan entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship among Socially Disadvantaged Communities

Recent literature has placed artisan entrepreneurship at the nexus of economic development and cultural heritage. A study with the systematic review covering fifty years of studies in the field indicated that artisan entrepreneurs operate as economic agents and at the same time are cultural guardians. Entrepreneurship as an activity not only promotes the preservation of indigenous knowledge but also livelihood opportunities.

A number of recent findings reveal that the objectives of the entrepreneur-artisans are manifold, and many at times conflicting - Economic viability, innovation, sustainability, culture; while modern market

demands pose a challenging reality against traditional ways of working, thereby, the entrepreneurial milieu becomes dynamic and necessitates constant adjustments.

In their study Ben Chikha and Jarboui (2025) conclude that support from institution, training for entrepreneurship, market alliances and increasing the awareness significantly raise the sustainability of artisanal activity, and resilience among entrepreneur-artisans is possible due to collaboration among artisans.

Research Gap

Despite great advancements in the research on artisan and indigenous entrepreneurship, there is still space for development in terms of three fundamental gaps in literature.

1. Although conceptual and quantitative approaches are well adopted in research, research including ethnographic explorations of entrepreneurial journey is comparatively fewer in number.
2. Few researchers and limited work has been carried out on socially disadvantaged communities with specific references to India which also combines the elements like caste, exclusion and traditional occupation
3. Entrepreneurship is analyzed through economics without paying due attention on cultural identity, intergenerational sharing of knowledge and social resilience.

Methodology Adopted:

Qualitative ethnographic research design is utilized for this study aiming to examine and understand the traditional entrepreneurial practices among socially disadvantaged groups in traditional and artisan occupations. Selected artisans and traditional occupational groups located in rural and semi-urban areas of Pune District which sustain their traditional enterprises as an important way to earn their livelihood and identity in the context of livelihood and identity were studies. Ethnography design is best fitted for studying the lives and activities with cultural understanding as it reveals the experiences, social relationships, practice and ways of life of individuals within their familiar surroundings and natural conditions. For collection of primary data the researcher has applied participant observation for a long time observing work of an artisan and trader on day today operation; production processes, their businesses, involvement of family members and their working pattern during production, marketing and daily business operations. Researcher also used semi structured in-depth interview technique for interviewing traditional artisans, elders of a family, people of trading communities, and co-operative members. Open- ended interviews gave scope to know business, entrepreneur, cultural significance of occupational traditions and its contribution to livelihood in a broad as well as in-depth manner. Informal conversations and interactions have been adopted by the researcher to obtain specific cultural information on practices, values and issues not normally found through the study. Data collected were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Analysis identified recurring themes, common values, narrative and stories about occupational traditional behavior.

Ethnographic Findings

Traditional Entrepreneurship as Cultural Heritage

The survey reveals that for deprived communities, entrepreneurship is highly based on cultural values. Skills are transmitted and acquired across the generations, by watching and practice in the family's setting. For a large number of the respondents, the occupation is a source of identity, self-respect and perpetuation of the parents and ancestors' jobs.

Participant Observation

A traditional potter remarked:

"This wheel is not merely my livelihood. It is the legacy of my father and grandfather."

Such narratives illustrate the emotional attachment entrepreneurs maintain with their traditional occupations.

Family as the Primary Entrepreneurial Institution

Entrepreneurial learning in traditional artisan enterprises primarily takes place within the family structure, in which knowledge of the trade, technical and business skills, and management practices are transmitted across generations via on-the-job learning, through observation, participation and practice. From childhood, children participate in various functions of the family business and progressively learn the mechanics of the enterprise with the help and guidance from other members of the family. In this context learning may initiate from resource identification and acquisition at initial stages to handling processes and production, marketing and selling of the products as they grow, to gain not only technical and operational knowledge about production but also understanding of consumer demands and appreciation for the cultural aspect of craft. Thus, the family enterprise becomes a joint family venture in which individual members contribute according to his/ her skill level. Such form of joint participation not only facilitates the continuity of inherited knowledge and skill of trade and occupation but also enhances its sustainability by ensuring a household system of entrepreneurship by communal effort of taking decisions.

Economic Challenges, Social Exclusion, and Adaptation Strategies

Even though having a store of knowledge, know-how and useful traditional expertise. Entrepreneur from less favored groups find themselves facing a complex set of economic and social problems limiting the growth and sustainability of their enterprises. A key obstacle they endure is their meager access to finance. The entrepreneurs rely more on self financing and informal loans from relations and friends and from local money lenders with no collaterals, lack of financial awareness, support from formal financial institutions being negligible; less access to low cost credit diminishes their scope to raise their production level, innovate their ventures by investing in modern techniques or access bigger markets.

Similarly, due to the competitive pressure on mass-produced and machine-made goods that are cheaper and easily accessible than those handmade. Market share has dwindled for traditional entrepreneurs, adversely impacting their revenue and revenue stability, fluctuation prices due to seasonal patterns in consumer demand causing precarious revenues and livelihoods.

Besides constraints that result from economic conditions, majority of the interviewed individuals cited social exclusion and ostracism because of the traditional caste occupation they depend on for business. Social exclusion appears as unequal access to markets, educational deficit, limited mobility and low involvement of entrepreneurs from these communities in decision-making arenas and policy formulating

platforms. It limits business growth and it results in negative effect on the entrepreneurs' confidence, dreams and competitiveness.

This study further noted that, although faced with challenges as illustrated, these traditional entrepreneurs are not passive players and adapt themselves and innovation occur, though limited.

A substantial number of artisans introduced new techniques by adding designs, modernity and current needs in their crafts with the traditional essence kept at prime place. Young entrepreneurs, today, are well on the road, adopting modern technological strategies such as smart phones, virtual market such as WhatsApp, facebook, instagram etc and website-based shopping marts in the market by offering them to the customers at remote locations thus increase market outreach. The community-based cooperative model has helped entrepreneurs in these communities in increasing bargaining power, easy availability of resources and information about the market, reduced dependency on intermediaries and improved reach.

Women's Role in Traditional Entrepreneurship

Women engage in productive but often non-visible entrepreneurial activities.

These include: -

Production operations

Resource management

Sales promotion support

Customer relations

But decision-making continues to be mostly controlled by the male fraternity.

Thus the findings clearly show the necessity of gender-responsive entrepreneurship development programs.

Discussion

The study finds that traditional entrepreneurship by socio-disadvantaged groups is not only an economic process. It plays a crucial role as a vehicle of cultural reproduction, community solidarity and community resilience.

Based on ethnographical data, it can be argued that entrepreneurial activities are rooted in kinship ties and community structures; the forces of modernization pose significant constraints on, but also offer considerable opportunities for enterprise to organize, brand itself, and expand to larger markets. The continued existence of traditional enterprises shows the innovative ability of disadvantaged groups even amidst inequality that results from structure constraints.

Policy Implications

The following interventions are recommended for the sustenance and improvement of traditional entrepreneurship by the disadvantaged communities:

1. Improve access to affordable institutional credit on easy terms.
2. Encourage the establishment of entrepreneurship development centers for artisan sector.
3. Facilitate digital literacy and support e-commerce activities in small enterprises.
4. Register GI wherever it is applicable.
5. Strengthen producer co-operatives/producer organizations.
6. Enable market linkage to different exhibitions and trade fairs.
7. Encourage participation of women to enhance female entrepreneurship.
8. Facilitate integration of indigenous knowledge systems into local development planning.

Conclusion

Traditional entrepreneurship in social marginalization is a complex configuration where economics, identity and society converge. Based on ethnography, it becomes clear that this type of enterprise cannot be analysed solely from economic perspective; the activities in the indigenous setting of business development are closely related with life of community and family. Even though they face competition from market, excluded from network with social difficulties and financial insufficiency, the entrepreneurs nevertheless achieve their successes with creative abilities of survival.

Sustainable policies shall pay particular attention for indigenous entrepreneur as bearer of local traditional knowledge and cultural heritage. "Inclusion" on entrepreneurship strategies should allow for livelihood improvement while for saving the knowledge of traditional craft in the future.

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