Volume : 4 | Issue : 11 | November 2015 • ISSN No 2277 - 8179

Research Paper

Entrepreneurship Among Dalits: Stories of Strive, Struggle and Survival

Social Sciences

KEYWORDS : Untouchable, Education, Employment Opportunities & Migration

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ABSTRACT

The Dalits - formerly known as Unseeables, Unhearbles, Unapproachable, Untouchables and are moving forward to make a positive difference to themselves & society at large. They are proving that they cannot be dismissed easily, neglected conveniently, and managed comfortably. After Independence and its emergence as a Free Secular Socialistic Democratic Republic, things have changed marginally, where some have transformed through their strive and struggle. Many Dalits still suffer daily from a level of discrimination, Dalits - both the SC and ST Dalits - even in the Indian Society.

The article focuses on situational analysis of Dalits on some indicators such as education, employment opportunities, & migration. It gives foundation on why entrepreneurship should be developed, the critical qualities & skills of an entrepreneur. The two Case Studies have been included in this article. The first Case Study of Dalit Shakti Kendra is a joint initiative of Navsarjan and Janvikas, is located in Village Nani Devti, about 30 kilometers from Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It was founded in July 1999, and was given its current name in 2003. Dalit Shakti Kendra (DSK) is primarily a vocational training center serving economically and socially marginalized youth, though it also provides personality development, leadership skills, social and political education, and a space for self-reflection and growth. Despite the impact that Dalit Shakti Kendra has made towards making young entrepreneurs, it has challenges too.

Another case study gives insight into how community radio helps Dalits in transmitting messages or information. Now-a-days, Media Access of the Dalits reveals that Communication is fundamental to human life in every part of the world. The evolvement of modern technologies has made it more sophisticated and accessible than ever before, greatly increasing potential for economic and social impact. Today, many groups are working to harness the power of communication technology to bring social change. For example, community radio initiatives around the world are giving poor people enabling them to instigate their own change such as advocating for rights or promoting social learning and dialogue. For many remote communities, radio remains the most accessible technological medium available.

INTRODUCTION & MEANING

The term "Dalit"...

The term "Dalit" has different meanings for different people. The most common use of the term is to define people who were once known as "untouchables", separated from the rest of society by the caste system. Navsarjan redefines the ideological context of the word to mean three things.

Someone who believes in equality,
Practices equality in his or her life,
And protests inequality wherever he or she sees it.

The word "Dalit" comes from the Sanskrit root dal- and means "broken, ground-down, downtrodden or oppressed." Those previously known as Untouchables, Depressed Classes, and Harijans are today increasingly adopting the term "Dalit" as a name for themselves. The Dalits have historically been poor, deprived of basic human rights, and treated as social inferiors in India. They still face economic, social, cultural, and political discrimination in the name of caste. "Centuries of this 'hidden apartheid' that has perpetuated discrimination and denial of their human rights, has resulted not only in Dalits representing a disproportionate amount of the poor in India, but also in the creation of numerous other obstacles that hinder Dalit's ability to change their situation" (Artis, Doobay, & Lyons, 2003, p. 9).

For centuries, Dalits were not treated as part of the mainstream Indian society, and they were traditionally assigned menial and degrading jobs (Some traditional roles, such as removing dead animals or playing drums at religious ceremonies, are expected to be carried out without compensation. Despite protections in the Indian Constitution, attempts by Dalits to be treated fairly in the workplace are often countered by violence and social or economic boycotts by the other castes.

Situational Analysis of Dalits on Some Indicators

1) Education

It is often found that the quality of education in public schools is inadequate compared to private schools. The poor quality of education, especially in rural areas, can be attributed to inadequate infrastructure, lack of accountability of teachers to local community (teachers' salaries are controlled by the state), and inadequate work conditions of teachers (teachers are often compelled to teach more than one grade at a time). Of all Indian children, Dalit children suffer the most. For example, school attendance in 1998–1999 was 65.7% for Scheduled Caste children age 7-17, compared to 81.3% for high caste children (Jenkins & Barr, 2006). Furthermore, the completion rate of five years of schooling for Scheduled Caste from 2002-2004 was 34%, compared to 44% for higher castes (Jenkins & Barr, 2006).

2) Employment Opportunities

Although outlawed, approximately two-thirds of bonded laborers (debt servitude or forced labor) belong to Dalits. Of the 40 million bonded laborers in India, 15 million are children (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Bonded labor is the traditional expectation of free labor or inadequate compensation for work. Because they are unable to afford basic necessities, such as health care, Dalits often become indebted to employers after accepting loans which they are unable to repay due to insufficient wages (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The forced occupation of bonded labor was abolished by Article 23 of the Constitution and the Bonded Labour (System) Abolition Act of 1976, but the practice continues. According to the Act, all bonded laborers were to be released and rehabilitated, and their debts were to be cancelled (NCDHR, 2006). Women and children are primarily engaged in "civic sanitation work" (i.e., manual scavenging, even though this has been outlawed), followed by leather fraying in tanning and footwear manufacturing; many Dalit men are agricultural workers. Of the 1.3 million Dalits employed as manual scavengers, most of these are women Dalits whose duty is to clear human excrement from dry pit latrines. Those who engage in scavenging are seen as the lowest of the Dalits, being discriminated against within their own caste (Human Rights Watch, 1999). 80% of the students at Dalit Shakti Kendra are high school drop outs and feel an acute sense of cynicism and often suffer from lack of motivation when they join. Dalit Shakti Kendra has learnt that, along with good learning facilities, providing the right dosage of motivation is a key

catalyst to learning. "There are classes where you can find a third standard drop-out and a high school graduate. They have also found that once they pick up the skills and once they are motivated they learn even faster,"

3) Migration
Dalits often migrate in search of work. Although poor non Dalits migrate in search of employment, Dalits are much more afflicted by migration. The main cause of this migration is lack of land ownership, exacerbated by droughts. The majority of Dalit in rural areas have no financial recourses, such as loans, to survive economic hardships (Fernando, Macwan, & Ramanathan**,** 2004).

Why entrepreneurship should be developed
Entrepreneurs play very important role in socio-economic welfare of the country. They identify the needs of the business, purchase & other factors of production and coordinate them for some productive purposes. They are the innovators, researchers and risk-takers of the company. Due to the mixed economy in India, both public and private entrepreneurship exists here. Large scale sectors are under the public entrepreneurship. The middle and small scale sectors are under the private entrepreneurship. In order to develop entrepreneurship in this sectors, Government of India has stepped towards the Entrepreneurship Development Programmes. The reason behind the development of entrepreneurship in India is as follows:-

Increase in National Production and Productivity in Different Sectors:
Indian entrepreneurs should work to increase the national production in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. They should work to increase employment. They must be able to generate wealth from both national and international markets. They should produce such goods and services which can substitute the imports. They should give more effort for increasing export of goods and services.

Balanced Regional Development:
Most of the industries are setup in the urban and semi-urban areas. This has led to the migration of people from rural areas to big cities. This has created pressure on the Government to provide housing and other facilities to the people. In order to reduce this imbalance, Government has provided facilities to encourage entrepreneurs to setup new ventures in rural areas.

Re-investment of Profit:
The objective of re-investment of profit can be achieved when their will be developed indigenous entrepreneurs. They invest profits in the business for the betterment of the productivity and welfare of the community.

Decentralization of Economic Power:
The main drawback of large scale enterprises is the centralization of economic power. In order to achieve equitable distribution of wealth and balanced economic growth, the Government has targeted to develop competent entrepreneurs who can setup the small scale enterprises. This will help in the dispersal of wealth.

Solving the Problem of Unemployment and Under-Employment:
In large scale industries, the problem of unemployment and underemployment is more. It is so due to lack of capital and increase in labour force. The highly educated and technically experienced peoples get dissatisfied and frustrated with their job. In order to solve this socio-economic problem of India, Government has taken step towards the development of such programmes. Besides setting up of large scale industries, small scale industries are encouraged to setup, which can provide large number of employment with the same amount capital investment, compared to the large scale industries.

Harnessing Youth Vigor:
When government cannot provide work to the educated and highly qualified youths, to earn their livelihood, they turn up to violent activities. In order to reduce their frustration, anger and disappointment, the development of entrepreneurs is necessary in India. They provide self-employment work to the youth, to earn their living. Thus, they are diverted from destructive activities by entrepreneurial motivation to work for the country.

Thus many institutions have been setup to develop the entrepreneurship in India. These institutions provide finance to the entrepreneurs to setup and flourish their ventures.

Qualities of a Good Entrepreneur
1) Perseverance
Whatever business you might be setting up, there are times where you will face problems. It is moment like this that you will need to hold on and persevere. You will have to believe in yourself and your products and services in order to succeed.

2) Interpersonal Skills
Business is all about dealing with people and you will need to be good at communicating if you want to succeed. Whether it is with your customers, suppliers or employees it is important that you learn how to communicate in an effective way to make sure that your business is run as smoothly as possible.

3) Willingness to Take Calculated Risks
A good entrepreneur should be ready to take calculated risk if he or she wants to succeed. Sometimes in business you will need to trust your gut feelings and walk on water. This may prevent you from having some unpleasant surprise in the future.

4) Motivation
It is important that an entrepreneur remain motivated at all time. This is indeed more important when you are pioneering a business or activity as you will have no one else with you. You should not let yourself down and make sure that you keep going forward.

5) Time Management
This is another important quality that you will need to have as a good entrepreneur. Time management will allow you to organize yourself and make sure that you get all your work done effectively.

Poornima M Charantimath (2008) in her book Entrepreneurship Development and Small Business Enterprises narrates some of the characteristics that every successful entrepreneur must possess in adequate measure. They are – creativity, innovation, dynamism, leadership, team building, achievement motivation, problem solving, goal orientation, risk taking and decision making ability and commitment. According to the author, ideas usually evolve through a creative process whereby imaginative people bring them to reality, nurture them and develop them successfully. The creative process for an idea involves five stages – germination, preparation, incubation, illumination and verification.

CASE STUDIES
1) Dalit Shakti Kendra
Dalit Shakti Kendra (DSK), a joint initiative of Navsarjan and Janvikas, is located in Village Nani Devti, about 30 kilometers from Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It was founded in July 1999, and was given its current name in 2003. Several thousands of students have now completed courses at DSK. Dalit Shakti Kendra (DSK) is primarily a **vocational training center serving economically and socially marginalized youth, though it also provides**

personality development, leadership skills, social and political education, and a space for self-reflection and growth. A central part of DSK's philosophy is a redefinition of the word "Dalit", thereby including Dalits from various economic, social and religious backgrounds. Most of DSK's students are landless, and have dropped out of school to work in the labor sector. Typically, their parents are farmers. DSK mobilizes such youth for economic and social empowerment—helping them leave the cycle of agricultural labor and caste-based occupations—and simultaneously fosters better grassroots leadership. DSK offers more than 20 different courses, including tailoring (pants, shirt, blouse for sari, salwar kameez, and industrial), furniture, driving, beautician, basic computers, computer tally, secretarial training, handicrafts and decoration, electric wiring, auto mechanic, police training, mobile phone repairing, videography, photography, machinist, motor rewinding, metal fabrication and welding. An array of courses is offered including mobile repair, tailoring, driving, videography, police training and carpentry. All students stay on campus for 2 months. A recent study determined that in comparison to vocational training centers run by the government—many of which have courses that stretch as long as two years—graduates of DSK have a higher rate of job placement. More importantly, it gives them a sense of identity and empowers them with the confidence to take charge of their own lives Once termed a misfit and social reject by society around him, Uttam, aged 23 is now brimming with a new found sense of confidence. He values the way his life has changed in DSK in terms of discipline, self-belief and focus. In his native village at Mitapur in Jamnagar District, after dropping out of school after Class 9, he worked for 8 years, lending a hand once in a while to his family occupation till he realized that if he had to support a family independently he would need to be financially better off. Now he is attending a course on mobile repair as part of a group of sponsored students at the DSK- an institute which is helping him and other students equip themselves with life and job-oriented skills to move beyond caste-based occupations and look forward to a more dignified life and career.

Below, please find information on the impact DSK has made, as well as some of the challenges it has faced.

Impact

- Students take DSK's message of equality back to their homes and communities.
- More and more students are coming to DSK, because they see the success of their friends who have come to DSK.
- It has reached the point that students for some courses have to be turned away because there is not enough space for them, even though we have increased capacity (for example, from 15 students to 45 in the computer course).
- More female students are attending DSK: the 50% mark has been achieved, and a reduction in gender bias can therefore be seen.
- More parents are now pushing for their daughters to come, because they are seeing positive changes in their daughters. They are less afraid to send their daughters because they see that they come back with more maturity.
- Students come from more sectors of society, including Muslims, OBC, and Tribals.
- About twice a month, visitors from other organizations who want to emulate DSK and use it as a successful model visit the campus.
- Industries of the private sector who want affirmative action instead of reservation have been approaching DSK to help absorb students as employees (TATA, Ambuja Cement, etc.).
- Employability of students: about 50% plus of students find employment immediately after training.
- It is difficult for DSK to find new teachers from the pool past students, because many are employed and do not want to leave their jobs.
- Many youth who had been unemployed in their villages have now become income earners for their families.

Challenges

- Developing plans to set up additional satellite centers to reduce the reliance on DSK.
- Finding resources to fund DSK is difficult; the students cannot afford to pay the total cost required.
- Finding new vocational courses to keep pace with changing market demands.
- Most students who come to DSK are school dropouts, so finding a balance in competitiveness is difficult.
- The correlation between primary education and vocational education is close, so tailoring primary education initiatives to positively affect the vocational training initiative is a challenge.
- The disparity between boys and girls in both urban and rural societies provides a constant challenge, especially in terms of education level.
- It is difficult to maintain technical expertise while not leaving behind girls and boys with low education levels.

2) Community Radio

The message is the medium

Ravi Ghate's new SMS Project aims to create a knowledge grid

- He started a pilot project called SMS one in Baroda IN 2005. Six years later, he started a new SMS project – edu vartawhich aims to create a knowledge grid that connects a rural and urban youth. He spreads community news in villages through cell phone by employing school and college dropout.
- Edu-varta aims to empower the rural youth by acquainting them with educational and career options they have after finishing school. It will spread information to youngsters throughout state.
- Edu-varta identifies 5-10 youngsters in every taluka and sends them messages related to educational news that can be circulated in the respective taluka's.
- He also circulates news regarding village development projects and national alerts among youngsters so that they can display or spread the information in villages.
- This year he started new concept "Prayaas". They found that youngsters in the cities have always shown an inclination for social service but have not found a way to do so, and the youth in the rural areas have difficulty getting guidance regarding their careers.
- They circulate numbers to youngsters who can call for their queries. Since youngsters can connect with one another better, all we do is putting them in contact with one another".

Community Radio

A community radio station can be roughly defined as a short range radio station that caters to the information needs of communities living in surrounding areas. Community radio stations often involve local community members in program production, centered around topics including discussions on civic amenities in the area, health and hygiene, advice on common economic activities such as agriculture, and even local folk songs and cultural events.

This notion of community radio is somewhat restrictive because it specifically defines communities along geographic boundaries. A community can however be geographically dispersed and Internet radio can be used to connect community members not collocated with each other.

Although technically a community radio station is just like a normal AM or FM radio station, its focus on locally relevant

content, often socially motivated, distinguishes community radio from private and commercial radio stations most of which generally broadcast songs and entertainment related content. Community radio, although new to India, has been known to be an empowering medium since a long time. Radio Sagarmatha in Nepal played a seminal role in restoring democracy.

Community Radio in India

India has been a latecomer to community radio. Although educational institutions were allowed to set up a community radio station on their campus, typically referred to as a campus radio station, a specific community or group or non-profit organization was not given a broadcast license. However, in late 2006 a new community radio policy was drafted and non-profits were allowed to apply for licenses as well. India has seen a steady growth in community radio stations since then, and as of Oct 2009 there are now almost 45 community radio stations out of which some 8 stations are being run by non-profit organizations.

Training and narrow-casting

Even if you do not have an FM broadcast license, you can still narrow-cast transmissions through loud speakers or by playing them on transistors in women listener groups. This is called narrow-casting. The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sansthan (KMVS) has done this very successfully in Gujarat, where being located close to the India-Pakistan border they were not given a license. They instead used women self-help-groups to share information and get feedback.

How to run a radio station

Running a radio station is not easy in any way. Your team will have to multitask across many jobs. Right from travelling into the field to take interviews, to intelligently putting together an interesting script, doing audio editing, answering phone calls, sales and marketing for advertising revenues, and a lot more. Learn as you go along, and be prepared to change! That is the mantra. A number of manuals are available to make you aware of the different issues in community radio_

A rural radio revolution

A small community radio started by illiterate rural women of zahirabad in medak district is making itself heard in villages afflicted by domestic violence, crop failures and frequent droughts. It is the only Dalits women in the country operated and maintained entirely by Dalits women, none of whom has studied beyond class X. It all began when women of machnoor village came up with the idea of having a radio two years ago. Algole narsamma and G narasmma become the first women radio anchor and jockeys here. They have trained at least 12 other women. Radio programme gives information about this crop with regard to soil, weather and weather conditions here. In this way, radio has become the medium of expression. It has given villagers dignity and confidence.

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