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Social Entrepreneurships in India: An Exploratory Study

Ashish Kumar

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Applied Economics, University of Lucknow, Lucknow (UP), India

Abstract

India has the world's second largest labour force of 516.3 million people and although hourly wage rates in India have more than doubled over the past decade, the latest World Bank report states that approximately 350 million people in India currently live below the poverty line. With an estimated population of 1.2 billion people, this means that every third Indian is bereft of even basic necessities like nutrition, education and health care and many are still blighted by unemployment and illiteracy. Social entrepreneurs can help alleviate these issues by putting those less fortunate on a path towards a worthwhile life. Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, they can solve the problem by changing the system. This research paper is based on exploratory research and study to the empirical evidence of social entrepreneurship in society and its implication for society development.

Key Words: India, Entrepreneurship, Society, Economic Development, Social-Entrepreneurs, Business, Employment

1. Introduction

That's what social entrepreneurship is about: creating business models revolving around low-cost products and services to resolve social inequities. And the realisation that social progress and profit aren't mutually exclusive has led to many social ventures taking root in India as well.¹

Examples of successful social projects like Amul or SEWA were few and far between. However, with the slowdown taking the shine off urban, higher-income target markets, organisations focusing on 'bottom of the pyramid' audiences have become a reality. But the days of easy funding are over. Given the employment squeeze, it would be natural for aspiring social entrepreneurs to stick to their secure jobs

instead. Surprisingly, they continue to launch social enterprises with a vengeance.

2. Definitions Of Entrepreneurship

Chandler (1990:8) defines entrepreneurship as dealing with uncertainty, making distinction between risk, which can be calculated, and uncertainty which can't be overcome.

Peter Drucker, defined entrepreneurship as 'a systematic innovation, which consists in the purposeful and organized search for changes, and it is the systematic analysis of the opportunities such changes might offer for economic and social innovation.' Schumpeter describes the entrepreneur as the bearer of the mechanism for change and economic development, and entrepreneurship as the undertaking of new ideas and new combinations, that is innovations. Drucker describes the entrepreneur as a person who is willing to risk his capital and other resources in new business venture, from which he expects

1. Frumkin, P. (2002). *Social Entrepreneurship on Being Non-profits*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press pp.129-162

substantial rewards if not immediately, then in the foreseeable future.

3. Literature Review

Adam Smith to Marshall, Concept of entrepreneurship as an organized knowledge came into being about hundred years ago. Though, the economists were talking about it, but without assigning the name of entrepreneurship. They used the terms as employer, the master, the merchant and the undertaker for carrying out different entrepreneurial activities now comprising of entrepreneurship. It was **Eantillon**, who first brought out the term entrepreneur and entrepreneurship was recognized in economic literature.

Murthy (1989)The traditional neoclassical theory of economic growth was first developed by **Robert Solow** in his 1956 paper “*A Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth*” (Todaro and Smith, p. 128 and p. 139). In this paper, Solow argues that economic growth is a function of two inputs- the levels of capital and labour in a given area.

The exact nature of this function is determined by the technological possibilities available to the society in question (Solow, p.66). Thus, under this theory, the economic growth of a given country is determined by the amounts of labour and capital that country possesses and the technological possibilities to which that country has access (i.e., the level of knowledge within that country).

Richard T. Ely and Ralph H. Hes, (1937).The entrepreneur organizes and operates an enterprise for personal gain. He pays current prices for the materials consumed in the business, for the use of the land, for the personal services he employs, and for the capital he requires. He contributes his own initiative, skill, and

ingenuity in planning, organizing, and administering the enterprise. He also assumes the chance of loss and gain consequent to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances. The net residue of the annual receipts of the enterprise after all costs have been paid, he retains for himself.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the roll of social entrepreneurs in society development.
- To study the concept of social entrepreneurship in India.
- To explore positive impact of social entrepreneurship in economic development of India
- To analyse the empirical evidence of the social entrepreneurship in the society.

5. Methodology

The study is exploratory by nature, where attempt has been made to explore the concept and its relevance in society, and aspect of its development by entrepreneurship in the social development of India.

6. Positive Impact of Entrepreneurship in Economic Development

Following are the positive impact of entrepreneurship in India in the economic development of India:

6.1 Capital Formation

Entrepreneurs by placing profitable business proposition attract investment to ensure private participation in the industrialization process. Entrepreneurs promote capital formation by mobilizing the idle savings of public. They employ their own as well as borrowed resources foresting up their enterprises. Such type of entrepreneurial activities leads to value

addition and creation of wealth, which is very essential for the industrial and economic development of the country.

6.2 Generate Employment

Entrepreneur is not the job seekers but job creators and job providers. With the globalization process the government jobs are shrinking leaving many unemployed. In the circumstances, the entrepreneurs and their enterprises are the only hope and source of direct and indirect employment generation. Entrepreneurs provide immediate large-scale employment to the unemployed which is a chronic problem of underdeveloped nations. With the setting up of more and more units by entrepreneurs, both on small and large-scale numerous job opportunities are created for others. As time passes, these enterprises grow, providing direct and indirect employment opportunities to many more. In this way, entrepreneurs play an effective role in reducing the problem of unemployment in the country which in turn clears the path towards economic development of the nation.

7. Social Entrepreneurship

The degrees to which social entrepreneurs pursue social impact as opposed to profitability vary, but in all cases financial sustainability is fundamental. One approach is to create business models revolving around low-cost products and services to resolve social problems. The objective is to create a social benefit that is not limited by personal gain.

Social Entrepreneurship is the process of bringing about social change on a major and more effective scale than a traditional Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). They differ from NGOs in that they aim to make broad-based, long-term changes, instead of small-scale and time-limited

changes. Furthermore, a NGO raises funds through events, activities and sometimes products. However, raising money takes time and energy, which could be spent in direct working and marketing processes. Above all, Social Entrepreneurs consider the affected people as part of the solution and not as passive beneficiaries.²

Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change.

Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps.

Social entrepreneurs often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives to changing the direction of their field. They are both visionaries and ultimate realists, concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above all else.

Each social entrepreneur presents ideas that are user-friendly, understandable, ethical, and engage widespread support in order to maximize the number of local people that will stand up, seize their idea, and implement with it. In other words, every leading social entrepreneur is a mass recruiter of local change makers—a role model proving that citizens who channel their passion into action can do almost anything.

Over the past two decades, the citizen sector has discovered what the business

2. <http://en.reset.org/knowledge/social-entrepreneurship-india>

sector learned long ago: There is nothing as powerful as a new idea in the hands of a first-class entrepreneur.

Devashri Mukherjee, Ashoka's, says Although social entrepreneurship has been practised in India for some time now, social business is a comparatively new phenomenon in the country, Social entrepreneurs in the country, however, have had substantive success in addressing social problems. The reason for their success, and that of social businesses, according to Mukherjee, is the fact that the solutions are realistic. "They address existing gaps in society which are in need of practical solutions, and more importantly, the solution initiatives are driven by visionary, tenacious and ambitious persons who are ready to strive to ensure their dreams do come true."

8. Need of "Social" Entrepreneur

Just as entrepreneurs change the face of business, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions to change society for the better. While a business entrepreneur might create entirely new industries, a social entrepreneur comes up with new solutions to social problems and then implements them on a large scale.

9. Historical Examples of Leading Social Entrepreneurs

- Susan B. Anthony (U.S.): Fought for Women's Rights in the United States, including the right to control property and helped spearhead adoption of the 19th amendment.
- Vinoba Bhave (India): Founder and leader of the Land Gift Movement, he caused the redistribution of more than

7,000,000 acres of land to aid India's untouchables and landless.

- Dr. Maria Montessori (Italy): Developed the Montessori approach to early childhood education.
- Florence Nightingale (U.K.): Founder of modern nursing, she established the first school for nurses and fought to improve hospital conditions.
- Margaret Sanger (U.S.): Founder of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, she led the movement for family planning efforts around the world.
- John Muir (U.S.): Naturalist and conservationist, he established the National Park System and helped found The Sierra Club.

Jean Monnet (France): Responsible for the reconstruction of the French economy following World War II, including the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The ECSC and the European Common Market were direct precursors of the European Union.

Social entrepreneurship in India has progressed significantly over the last decade. More and more people are using entrepreneurial skills in building sustainable enterprises for profit and non-profit to effect change in India, says Deval Sanghavi, a former investment banker and now president of Dasra. Based in Mumbai, Dasra is a non-profit organisation which bridges the gap between those investing in social change and those spearheading the changes.

"Social entrepreneurship in India is emerging primarily because of what the government has not been able to do. The government is very keen on promoting social entrepreneurship - not necessarily by funding it or by advising on it or

enabling it. What they do, is not disable it,” Sanghavi, who brings the rigour and discipline of an investment banker to the social sector, told INSEAD Knowledge on the sidelines of the International Social Entrepreneurship conference held here recently.

For example, in Mumbai alone, non-profit organisations educate more than 250,000 children on a daily basis. The government has not told these organisations not to do it, he says. Whereas in some countries, when someone takes it into their own hands to start a facility for education or healthcare or empowerment, the government often puts in place barriers to prevent this from happening. “In India, there is this drive and commitment to take change upon yourself. There are no inherent barriers to begin with in India.”

10. The Elements Necessary for Social Entrepreneurship to Flourish in India

First there needs to be an awareness of and concern about the social problems and issues to be addressed, and committed entrepreneurs interested in addressing them, says Hans Wahl, executive director of INSEAD's Social Entrepreneurship Initiative. A policy and regulatory framework within which social entrepreneurs can obtain status without compromising their objectives is also very important.

“It would be good to have a collaborative network to be used among social entrepreneurs that enables them to share ideas and spread innovations, ideally linked to an academic institution interested in, and committed to, promoting awareness and creating knowledge and insight into the best functioning of social enterprises,” he adds.

On the ground, Mukherjee says that financial assistance, social legitimacy and acknowledgement are the most important factors necessary to enhance the growth of social entrepreneurship in India. “The process has begun, but a lot more needs to be developed, especially by social, educational and government institutions.”

According to Wahl, with the current economic climate, it is very likely that social needs will increase and, consequently, the number of people committed to addressing them will increase. He sees innovations increasing, especially in the field of examining and applying technology to social needs.

For Mukherjee, work in the field of human rights will continue since violations are unlikely to go away. Natural resource management and alternate energy initiatives will gain prominence, as will livelihood and migration. “Social entrepreneurship and social businesses will be mainstreamed substantially, so we will have many options to follow the course of one or the other which will hopefully impact society positively.”

11. The Key Role of India in Social Entrepreneurship

Some well-known Indians became aware of the potential of Social Entrepreneurship quite early. Two of them were the Social Entrepreneurs Dr. Govindappa Venkataswamy and Thulasiraj D Ravilla who established the in 1976. Since then, they have treated more than 2.4 million patients, often free of charge. Many others have also contributed to the comparatively high levels of Social Entrepreneurship which have been reached in India.

As the **Swiss Klaus Schwab**, founder of the World Economic Forum and of the Schwab Foundation, pointed out in an

interview with the Hindustan Times: “India has some of the most advanced and innovative social entrepreneurs. We believe and already see that many of the models developed in India, for instance rainwater harvesting for schools pioneered by Barefoot College, are exported around the world.” Thus, India is a key country in developing social entrepreneurs. Several institutions help people to become involved with Social Entrepreneurship, such as UnLtd India.³

Furthermore, the Schwab Foundation and its Indian counterpart, give the Social Entrepreneurship Award to prominent visionary Indian social entrepreneurs. In 2009, the winners of the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award included Brij Kothari of “Planet Read and Bookbox” who found to combat illiteracy, Padmanabha Rao and Rama Rao of “River” which focused on the primary education of children and Rajendra Joshi of “Saath” who created inclusive societies by empowering India’s urban and rural poor. The next winner will be announced in a ceremony coinciding with the in November 2010.

Another important organisation that is linked to India is Ashoka, which is the global association of the world’s leading social entrepreneurs. Since 1981, they have elected over 2,000 leading social entrepreneurs as Ashoka Fellows, providing them with living stipends, professional support and access to a global network of peers in more than 60 countries. India is home to Ashoka's first Fellow and for the past 25 years, India has served as a

testing ground for most of Ashoka's international Fellowship building programs and other key initiatives. Since 2003, Ashoka and the American India Foundation (AIF) have partnered to co-invest in social entrepreneurs in India. This partnership has enabled Ashoka to increase the number of Fellows elected in India to 250.

AIF is a leading international development organisation charged with the mission of accelerating social and economic change in India. Since 2001, it has raised over 30 million US-Dollars and awarded grants to education, livelihood, and public health projects in India with an emphasis on elementary education, women’s empowerment and HIV/AIDS.

12. The Way to Forward

One example of highly motivated young Indians wishing to promote Social Entrepreneurship is Rikin Gandhi. After working for the US space program as an aeronautical engineer he decided to help Indian farmers with his project “”. The project is sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and interacts with different NGOs. It produces and distributes community-centric, locally relevant videos about best agricultural practices. In the future, “Digital Green” plans to develop a technology platform where farmers can share data and videos.

There are some challenges that Social Entrepreneurs must address in India. They often face situations that are unpredictable, constantly changing and hard to control. In 2008 for instance the terror attacks in Mumbai forced Social Entrepreneurs to re-think their general strategies. Furthermore, although there are many opportunities in the Indian welfare sector, most social

³ Christie, M. J., & Honig, B. (2006). Social Entrepreneurship: New Research Findings. *Journal of World Business*, pp 1-5, 44

entrepreneurs still focus on traditional areas such as education and healthcare.⁴

13. Incubation Support for India's Social Entrepreneur

Another shift that has happened over the last ten years is that the Indian government and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) have realised that they not only have to co-exist but to work with each other to effect change, says Sanghavi.

India still has a long way to go compared to the West where governments are funding non-profit organisations by outsourcing social sector services. "In India that is not going to happen," he says. "It will be overambitious for us to think that they will be funding all these initiatives but the fact that they allow these organisations to operate within the government structure - albeit with conflict, as they are operating with one hand tied behind their back - is progress."

At the same time the few organisations who have decided to play this role have realised that even with one hand tied behind their back they can effect great change because they have access to hundreds of millions of people that they will never be able to access on their own.

"So it's the shift in the NGO mind-set, where we'll never get 100 per cent of what we really want to do but working with the government, if we get 70 per cent that's better than the 20 per cent efficiencies that the government is currently operating at," he argues.

14. Impacting Society but So Much More to be Done

Social enterprises are definitely making an impact on Indian society, says Sanghavi,

⁴ <http://en.reset.org/knowledge/social-entrepreneurship-india>

but with a population of 1.1 billion, it is very difficult to see that impact on a macro level. "However, in organisations we have worked directly with, we have seen growth 15 to 100 times in their beneficiary base in a five- to seven-year period. Clearly growth is possible. They are at numbers of tens of thousands and realise they need to get to hundreds of thousands, if not hundreds of millions. But that is taking time. It is the mindset more now than ever of the need to scale and the ability of the organisation to do so."

Mukherjee concurs that the impact is significant enough to be meaningful. "Our country does not have a homogenous people or geography, so the impact largely remains regional." Devashri Mukherjee, Ashoka's director of its Venture Programme which is also based in Mumbai.

15. Conclusions and Recommendations

The economy has been witnessing rapid growth since the onset of liberalizations from 1991 onwards. Unfortunately social and environmental problems of the country are increasing year after year which necessitates the extensive application of multidisciplinary approaches and entrepreneurial energy in the social and environmental sectors. As discussed earlier, India is experiencing an increase in social entrepreneurship and attempts by social entrepreneurs to find affordable solutions to various social problems of society. With changes in technology and increasing competition, social entrepreneurs have to become more dynamic. Some suggestions for Indian social entrepreneurs in achieving their objectives are as under:

- ❖ Social entrepreneurs should help higher education institutes in India in developing curriculum that create social

entrepreneurship habits in their students so that high quality managers and promoters can be produced.

- ❖ Social ventures should educate the consumer and set market standards by following network approach. This may increase demand for their products.

❖ Regional disparities or imbalance should be removed by the growth of social entrepreneurship in the country. Balancing the growth of social entrepreneurship in the country can solve the social problem of large population and health of the country.

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