

“DELVING INTO INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE LANDSCAPE: AN INQUIRY INTO INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON SOCIO- ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT”

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Abstract: This study delves into the intricate nexus between indigenous knowledge, entrepreneurship, and socio-economic development, focusing on the context of Gujarat, India. Indigenous knowledge, deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of indigenous communities, encompasses traditional practices, skills, and wisdom passed down through generations. Using indigenous knowledge to promote sustainable development, indigenous entrepreneurship has been a powerful driver for socioeconomic reform in recent years. Gujarat is a great place to study the dynamics of indigenous entrepreneurship because of its thriving business environment and rich cultural history. Using their local knowledge to create jobs, add value, and promote inclusive growth, indigenous entrepreneurs in Gujarat are pursuing a range of business ventures, from eco-tourism to agro-based industries. This study employs a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on insights from anthropology, economics, and entrepreneurship studies to explore the interplay between indigenous knowledge, entrepreneurial endeavors, and socio-economic outcomes in Gujarat. By analyzing case of Mitticool Private Limited, this study illuminates the diverse ways in which indigenous knowledge informs entrepreneurial activities in Gujarat. Additionally, this research looks at the socioeconomic effects of indigenous entrepreneurship in Gujarat, analysing how it contributes to the reduction of poverty, the preservation of culture, and the empowerment of local communities. Indigenous entrepreneurs provide economic possibilities and promote social cohesion at the same time as they preserve indigenous knowledge systems through creative business structures.

Keywords: *Indigenous entrepreneurship, Indigenous Knowledge, Socio-Economic development, Community Empowerment*

Introduction

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According to Handle and Moroz (2010), entrepreneurship is regarded as a key tool for indigenous peoples' economic development and self-empowerment. This has shed light on the function of indigenous entrepreneurship, which is described as "the indigenous peoples' creation, management, and development of new ventures for their own benefit" (Hindle & Lansdowne, 2005, p. 132). According to Anderson and Giberson (2003), indigenous entrepreneurs play a key role in the socioeconomic growth of their community's empowerment. Social, economic, and cultural trends are shared by indigenous people (Peredo, Anderson, Galbraith, Honig, & Dana, 2004). People who are considered indigenous in sovereign countries because they descended from the populations that once inhabited the country or from a geographical location to which the country belongs are known as

indigenous people.

The process of extracting value from community-based resources—people, land, skills, culture, etc.—and reinvesting value that is sensitive to the unique socioeconomic circumstances of a community is known as indigenous entrepreneurship (Colbourne, 2017; Jack & Anderson, 2002; Kenney & Goe, 2004; Peredo & Anderson, 2006). Early studies in the emerging field of Indigenous entrepreneurship examined the dynamics of economic development in Indigenous communities and identified the conflicts, problems, and obstacles that face Indigenous economic development as a unique activity that operates at the nexus of social and economic development (Anderson et al., 2004).

Indigenous entrepreneurs can be found in developed countries as well, but they make up a larger share of the population in developing nations (Gupta et al., 2003). The unmet difficulties in their communities, for which there are either no answers or ones that are too costly or inappropriate to meet their needs, serve as an inspiration for the majority of indigenous innovators who work in the informal economy and in rural communities (Srinivas and Sutz, 2008). A strong ideological desire to protect their legacy is another motivator for them (Lindsay, 2005).

Indigenous knowledge is defined as a structured corpus of knowledge unique to a specific group and culture that is transmitted orally through tales, knowledgeable experiences, real-world examples, and idioms. Capel (2014). According to Mehta et al. (2011), indigenous knowledge has its own distinct methods of knowing, seeing, and thinking. It is a generation-by-generation accumulation of traditional knowledge about the method of production that has been discovered via trial and error, Ashak (2013). It has proven useful in addressing a range of community challenges (Onwuegbuzie 2017).

By their very nature, they are rarely dispersed among communities and are more deeply ingrained in the ones from which they come. Nonetheless, because of its adaptability, indigenous knowledge can undergo acculturation and external influences for alteration. It can also be accepted by the market because of its potential to offer value (Capel 2014).

According to Onwuegbuzie (2014) and Agwu et al. (2018), indigenous entrepreneurs in this context are those who incorporate traditional knowledge into their business operations. They have in-depth knowledge of how to use the resources at their disposal, the ability to alter present production processes, and grassroots knowledge that makes them aware of the local market and recognises the demand. (Agwu and Me 2018). Similarly, Ganguli (2000) proposed that native business owners learn about resources that could result in creative solutions. Capel (2014) provides evidence that the distinctive indigenous knowledge held by these entrepreneurs can contribute to the development of innovations and indigenous entrepreneurship, as well as shape the future of indigenous markets. As a result, people acknowledge that individuals can learn how to create grassroots innovations (Capel 2014; Agwu and Me 2018).

The globe needs to preserve cultural heritage in order to support local economies (Cantacuzino, 1990; Winter and Daly, 2012; Bhatta and Chan, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2018; Sankaran, 2018; Ahmed, 2019; Marques et al., 2019). A strong creative spirit that infuses soil with life is essential for the pottery

business (Thistlethwaite, 1958; Huyler, 1996; Perry-Smith and Coff, 2011; Sarma, 2018). Clay, ivory, and terracotta were among the natural resources used by potters to create their craft and other terracotta artefacts (Alonso and Bressan, 2014; Gangopadhyay and Sen, 2019). The term "Kumhars," which derives from the Sanskrit word "kumbhakāra," is widely used to refer to Indian potters. Another name for the "Kumhar" community is the "Prajapati" community.

According to Indian tradition, Prajapati is referred to as the "lord of creation"; yet, although Prajapati shapes creation, the "Kumhar" creates clay items. Clay is a naturally occurring resource that potters utilise to create artefacts (Menon and Varma, 2010; Rice, 2015; Panda et al., 2019). People consider Clay to be a goddess (Huyler, 1996). If food is kept in pottery objects, it retains its nutritious value (Bodke, 2016). Potters Village preserves the art of Indian terracotta. Terracotta pottery is traditionally made by hand, which involves refining clay to remove impurities, kneading clay, throwing it on a wheel, drying, colouring, and firing the earthen artwork. The traditional method of creating terracotta pottery involves using clay as a base material. This method is highly distinctive in and of itself, but it hasn't received much

attention or documentation in the literature as of yet (Kuzmin, 2013; Alonso and Bressan, 2014; Panda et al., 2019).

Through an analysis of Mitticool Private Limited, this study illuminates the manner in which indigenous knowledge informs entrepreneurial operations in Gujarat. Furthermore, the socioeconomic impacts of indigenous entrepreneurship in Gujarat are examined in this study, with an emphasis on how it helps to lower poverty, preserve cultural heritage, and strengthen local communities. Indigenous entrepreneurs conserve indigenous knowledge systems through innovative business models, while also creating economic opportunities and fostering social harmony.

Review of Literature

According to Gakuru (2006), traditional knowledge was only kept alive as superstitious folklore for a long time and was viewed as little more than wistful memories of different eras. He does, however, maintain that as long as the culture exists, indigenous knowledge will always be a part of it.

According to Chitere (2011), it is important to validate indigenous knowledge as it relates to technology. It constitutes a significant portion of the worldwide knowledge base on development-related topics. The extension of human capabilities for the purpose of achieving socioeconomic goals is known as technology for development. It also means that it is the creation, alteration, application, and understanding of tools, machines, techniques, crafts, systems, and organisational methods in order to accomplish a task, solve an issue, enhance an already-existing solution, handle an applied input/output relationship, or carry out a particular function.

According to Gorjestani (2000), indigenous knowledge is not exclusive to indigenous people. He makes the argument that over generations, every community has created its own body of knowledge. In light of this, even the most sophisticated countries possess accumulated indigenous knowledge that only they are able to recognise and comprehend. Indigenous knowledge has been remarkably

identified as a catalyst in the context of technology for advancement and development in rural university settings, where communities hold fast to and own the values that are important to them for sustainable development and higher living standards. Entrepreneurship to promote savings, talent, and company ideas; leadership to unlock people's potential; community involvement to promote people's inclusion and initiatives; and gender and inequality to acknowledge people's inherent potential.

In their study, AlMehrizi, A.A., Tipu, S.A., & Sarker, A.E. (2023) found that a variety of factors, including societal stratification and patriarchy, familial and clan relationships, government backing, and supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems, were important drivers of indigenous entrepreneurship. Procedures pertaining to partnerships, IE development programmes, expenditure processes, resource mobilisation, and equitable benefit sharing. Economic growth, sustainability, a rise in the economic involvement of indigenous people, improved living standards, self-determination, and the preservation of cultural heritage were among the results of IE.

According to Lindsay (2005), indigenous entrepreneurs have a different perspective on entrepreneurship than the individualistic one that is typically seen in mainstream entrepreneurship studies. The early research on indigenous entrepreneurship emphasises how important it is for indigenous values to motivate entrepreneurial activity inside indigenous communities. This indicates that indigenous entrepreneurs' goals and viewpoints are very different from those found in the majority of entrepreneurship literature. This distinctive viewpoint highlights the significance of indigenous beliefs, customs, and community well-being in influencing entrepreneurial endeavours, demonstrating a more collaborative and community-focused approach to business.

Scholars such as Peredo et al. (2004) have suggested that indigenous entrepreneurship offers a more organically driven and sustainable path for economic growth inside indigenous communities. The literature also emphasises the significance of indigenous entrepreneurship as a tactic for indigenous economic development. It runs counter to popular belief regarding indigenous communities' economic development, which typically depends on outside assistance and interventions. Local communities can take control of their economic futures by promoting indigenous entrepreneurship, which will increase empowerment and self-reliance, as opposed to totally depending on outside help.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the relationship between indigenous knowledge, indigenous entrepreneurship, and their effects on socioeconomic advancement. Qualitative methods work well when delving deeply into complex events and understanding the subtleties of the subject. A thorough analysis is conducted of the literature pertaining to entrepreneurship, indigenous knowledge, and socioeconomic advancement. To learn more about the dynamics of indigenous entrepreneurship and how it affects

socioeconomic growth, the case study method is used. The focus point is Mitticool Pvt Ltd., a well-known company that is well-known for using traditional expertise in its clay-based goods. In order to

get data on Mitticool archival materials has been analysed.

Discussion: Case Study of Mitticool Pvt Ltd

Mansukhbhai Prajapati, a traditional clay craftsman from the Nichimandal town of Morbi, Rajkot, has used age-old clay-making techniques to produce an innovative line of products under the Mitticool brand. Mansukhbhai began his business career by modifying a hand press used for roof tile production to be utilised for clay pan production. He experimented with clay mixtures to try to improve durability and heat resistance. All-clay "MittiCool" refrigerators are inexpensive, energy-efficient cooling options. It uses the same principles as conventional earthen pots to function without the need for electricity. Water evaporation and porosity are key components of the cooling mechanism. Foods are kept fresh and their inherent flavour is maintained. Mitticool has developed a sustainable and environmentally friendly replacement for traditional refrigeration systems by incorporating indigenous wisdom¹². He established his own company in 1990, and by 1995, he had gotten an order for water filters in bulk from Nairobi, Kenya. Following the terrible 2001 Gujarat earthquake, the Mitticool refrigerator was created. "Garibi Ka Fridge Tut Gaya" (The Poor's Fridge Broke) was the caption for a photo feature that featured a broken water filter. Mansukhbhai improved the refrigerator design in association with the Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network (GIAN), resulting in an energy-free natural cooling solution. (mitticool.com, n.d.)

Products from Mitticool go beyond refrigerators. They consist of earthen thermos flasks and non-stick tawas, among other things. Local artisans are empowered by the business concept, which gives them a means of support and preserves their traditional talents. Mitticool is a prime example of indigenous knowledge driving innovation because of its dedication to affordability, health benefits (meal cooked in clay), and environmental friendliness.

Geographic Embeddedness and Cultural Roots:

- **Indigenous Knowledge:** Mitticool honours the knowledge that has been inherited over the years. In Gujarat, India, Mitticool maintains a close tie to its native environment. The items are made with age-old ceramic skills that have been inherited from previous generations. The authenticity and continuation of culture are guaranteed by this dependence on indigenous knowledge.
- **Local Artisans:** By empowering local craftspeople, the business model makes sure that their abilities are preserved in the face of industrialization. The goods of Mitticool provide witness to the creative heritage of the area.

The "MittiCool" Fridge: Sustainable Cooling Innovation:

- The ground-breaking MittiCool fridge is the company's flagship product. It uses clay's porosity and water evaporation properties to naturally cool its compartments without the need for electricity.

- This invention originated from the financial hardships that impoverished and backward societies experienced, when the price of energy and refrigeration served as a barrier to accessibility.
- Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations are supported by the MittiCool refrigerator:
 - a. Good health and wellbeing: It offers a way to preserve food without the need for energy.
 - b. Gender equality: Its production employs women from rural areas.
 - c. Clean and reasonably priced energy: It provides an energy-saving cooling option.
 - d. Sustainable towns and cities: By encouraging hand- craftsmanship.
 - e. Conscientious manufacturing and consumption: by creating environmentally sustainable clay items.

Environmental Sustainability:

- **Natural Clay:** Mitticool uses natural clay, an abundant and sustainable material, to make its goods. Clay is non-toxic and biodegradable, in contrast to plastic or metal.
- **Energy Efficiency:** The battery-free MittiCool refrigerator is a prime example of sustainable cooling. It uses evaporative cooling, which minimises the impact on the environment and lowers energy usage.
- **Reduced Plastic Use:** Mitticool indirectly lowers the usage of plastic packaging and containers by endorsing clay-based substitutes.

Social Inclusion and Livelihood Generation:

- **Empowering Artisans:** Mitticool gives local potters—especially women—job opportunities. It fills the void left by traditional skills in contemporary marketplaces. By putting the welfare of the community ahead of profit margins, Mitticool subverts the established corporate paradigm. It runs on social entrepreneurship principles.
- **Affordability:** The affordability of Mitticool's products ensures that even economically disadvantaged communities can access sustainable solutions.
- **Health Benefits:** Clay-cooked food in Mitticool utensils offers health advantages, emphasizing well-being and inclusivity.

In conclusion, Mitticool's journey exemplifies a well-balanced combination of social effect, environmental conscience, and cultural pride. In addition to producing useful goods, preserving indigenous knowledge makes the globe more inclusive and sustainable.

Conclusion

With an emphasis on Gujarat, India, this study explores the complex relationship between entrepreneurship, indigenous knowledge, and socioeconomic growth. Indigenous knowledge is made up of abilities, facts, and customs that have been passed down through the ages and are ingrained in the cultural fabric of indigenous societies. Indigenous entrepreneurship has been a driving factor behind socioeconomic transformation in recent years. It harnesses indigenous knowledge to enhance sustainable development. Analysis reveals that Mitticool's journey is a harmonious combination of cultural pride, social effect, and environmental conscience. Indigenous knowledge contributes to the sustainability and inclusion of the globe in addition to producing valuable goods.

It has been suggested that local governments monitor developing technologies closely and support the formation of early communities around potential new technology in order to strengthen the positive externality. This can be mainly accomplished by disseminating information on legislation (taxation, standards, and customs duties), setting up mentoring programmes through the Journal of Innovation Management in Small & Medium Enterprises, and planning networking events. The establishment of media outlets where the results of small businesses can be publicised, aids in the problem-solving of technological issues, and fosters innovation among the other supporting initiatives. Incubator units are designed to provide space and infrastructure for start-ups and innovative companies.

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