

Entrepreneurship among Tribal Communities in South Gujarat Region: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Socio-Economic Change

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Abstract

Historically grounded in agriculture, tribal communities are now shifting into small entrepreneurial ventures. The South Gujarat's rural economies have also shown tremendous potential of transformation. The main driver behind this socioeconomic change is tribal entrepreneurship. Despite many challenges, these enterprises are thriving to survive. The current study attempts to do reflective thematic analysis by using an inductive approach of in-depth examination of lived experiences of 14 tribal entrepreneurs in three districts of South Gujarat. The data analysis was conducted using Nvivo software, which facilitates in-depth examination of qualitative data and Microsoft Excel. The findings of the paper indicates that the sharp shift towards micro, small and medium manufacturing and service enterprise has positively impacted the lives of entrepreneurs and their family. There is immense economic and social upliftment can be seen in rural economy due to this enterprise. Further, low education level and absence of systematic knowledge of business administration constraints towards to holistic development and scalability of these enterprise, a handholding support to existing entrepreneurs should be incorporated by the Government agencies with various Non-profit organization instead of creating new entrepreneurs. Because survival and long-lasting impact is important than having number of enterprises. As tribal entrepreneurship evolves, it is expected that it can play a crucial role in driving sustainable economic growth and livelihood opportunities of rural populations. This transformation highlights the likelihood of becoming a key contributor to reduce the economic disparities withing the south Gujarat region and can empower the tribal community.

Keywords: Tribal Community, Socio-Economic Change, Tribal Entrepreneurship, Reflexive Thematic Analysis

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Introduction

The south Gujarat region popularly known as “tribal belts of south Gujarat” consists of seven districts Surat, Tapi, The Dangs, Narmada, Bharuch, Navsari and Valsad. As of 2011 population data, tribal Gujarat consists of 89.17 lakhs which is 14.7% of total population of Gujarat state. This region is popularly known for its diverse tribal communities such as Konkani's, Bhil's and Warli's. The total literacy rate of Gujarat state is 78% while the total ST populations literacy rate is 62.5%. Traditionally they were into agriculture and still they are associated with agriculture but along with it, gradually they are adopting Agri based micro enterprises and modern businesses as well. (Meena et al., 2024) have identified in research study that many tribal entrepreneurs are constantly changing the profile of tribal areas with development. Now they are currently establishing self-sustainable enterprises. They are enriched with natural resources and along with technical education among tribal youth, many entrepreneurs have come up with an innovation that may be considered as remarkable progress towards fostering tribal economy. Due to the support of the government, agriculture innovation and the market of organic products have emerged. Dang is the home of many agripreneurs predominantly run by SHGs. The interventions of BAIF and AKRSPI (Aga Khan Rural Support Program – India) in the development of this district. (Singh & Sonwani, 2023) stated in their study that “by offering financial assistance, technical support, and capacity building, these initiatives empower individuals, especially marginal farmers and unemployed youth, to venture into livestock-based businesses. It is essential for the government to continuously assess and improve these schemes to address emerging challenges and create new opportunities in the livestock sector, ultimately contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the country.”

The current study aims to understand the type of businesses adopted by tribal entrepreneurs, its impact on rural economy, transformation and challenges and opportunities available within.

Comparing Conventional and Modern Businesses

Tribal communities are mostly known for their traditional small businesses, unique art, tribal textile, cane and bamboo art and cuisine. But the exploration of global market and availability of these products, food has also attracted tribal entrepreneurs. Earlier forest produce was only for home consumption but now they are selling forest products such as wild honey, Mahuva, Bamboo etc. Traditional businesses mostly depend on personal references and contacts for customer acquisition while modern businesses can explore various platforms such as social media, internet, advertisement. Traditional businesses are also less innovative compared to modern businesses. Even traditional businesses show slow growth it does give benefits of steady growth and calculative risks. Many industries such as handmade jewelry, handicraft, pottery and bamboo artifacts, the traditional methods give competitive advantages. Traditional businesses have more potential to bring immediate satisfaction by bringing tangible experience for customers. While modern business requires cutting edge technology, continuous innovations in their services and products. For both types of businesses, the most important aspect is a positive market and commitment of customers. Conventional businesses and modern businesses are depicted in Table-1

Table 1: Conventional Businesses v/s Modern Business

Aspect	Conventional Business	Modern Business
Technology	Use of traditional methods, rely on labour, limited use of technology	use of modern and advance technology, automated process, use of digital platform
Customer Base	Serves local customers and limited market	beyond local market, serves at national level as well
Employment	Generates less employment and more involvement of family or community members	Hires skilled professional
Investment	Small loans, SHGs, Savings	More options for investment and scale up
Challenges	Scalability issues, competition from modern businesses, Skilled labour issues, Operational issues	High competition because of standardization, need for continuous innovation, high capital investment
Opportunities	Development of rural economy, Employment generation, Traditional quality products, Price competitiveness	Able to meet high demand, Increased productivity

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

“An important step on the path to knowing TA practice is appreciating diversity within TA and understanding what type of TA you are practicing. Some of the papers reviewed implicitly or explicitly presented TA as a singular method (*e. g., through references to “standardized TA”*), where TA is better thought of Family of methods” (*Braun & Clarke, 2023*). The Researcher has used a collaborative approach to inductively generates codes according to the data and the diverse perspective of which varied in terms of age, gender, and disciplinary background (*Davis et al., 2023*). The researcher has primarily used the inductive approach of doing thematic analysis as it gives more flexibility and ideas of the themes. QSR Nvivo 14 software is the most powerful qualitative data analysis and visualization tool.

Review of Literature

Thematic analysis helps researchers to identify theme base narratives in qualitative data. This analysis is considered as most flexible as it allows

researchers to identify and analyze themes by using inductive and deductive approach. The inductive approach consists of data that allows you to identify themes free from any pre-existing theories or frameworks. While the deductive approach is completely based on pre-existing theories and frameworks in a more structured way. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is a technique for identifying and extracting themes in the text. Such as people's experiences or perceptions and interviews of participants. The inductive reflexive thematic analysis is best suitable when you need to explore the fresh perspective on the data. This method allows the data to naturally reveal its inherent patterns and themes within rather than emphasizing existing theories. When it comes to qualitative data analysis, Braun and Clarke's approach has most significant implications. (*Braun & Clarke, 2019*) defines that “themes are analytic outputs developed through and from the creative labour of our coding. They reflect considerable analytic 'work,' and are actively created by the researcher at the intersection of data, analytic process and subjectivity. Themes do not passively emerge from either data or coding; they

are not 'in' the data, waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher. Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves. Quality reflexive TA is not about following procedures 'correctly' (or about 'accurate' and 'reliable' coding, or achieving consensus between coders), but about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process." Further (Campbell et al., 2021) has suggested an "important feature of reflexive thematic analysis, particularly when used in applied research contexts, is that the final themes should be able to point to actionable items." (De Bruin & Mataira, 2018) emphasis on fostering self-employment and indigenous owned and operated small enterprises, is viewed as an integral part of any package to provide employment opportunities, as well as reduce the high levels of welfare dependency among indigenous people. while (Sahu, 2021) suggest formulating a cohesive strategy to promote tribal entrepreneurship. Towards this goal, the first step is to undertake a mapping or profiling exercise (of skills, capabilities and experience, potential for entrepreneurship) of STs Communities. It is also necessary to ensure coherence of tribal entrepreneurship approach with the broader entrepreneurship approach. All local stakeholders (e.g. private sector, panchayats, line departments, community centers, incubators and accelerators) that could support entrepreneurship must be identified and work in close partnership. –(Kumar, 2015) A large population of tribals and other forest dwellers depend on various NWFPs (Non-Wood Forest Products) (which have great socio-economic significance in the context of employment and income generation for very large population especially the weaker section of society including tribals. Some of these items namely Timru leaves and Mahuda lowers are nationalized,

and these are collected and supplied to Forest Development Corporation. (Gupta et al., 2022) observed in their study that "the tribal youth in the TSP (Tribal Sub Plan) area of Southern Rajasthan confront a variety of problems ranging from financing to human resources, as well as from launch to sustained development, but it is the culture and tribal community that poses the greatest barrier. The firm had several rejections and had no money as a business, but according to him, the fundamental difficulty was not access to capital or policy design but rather culture and attitude." (Chatterjee et al., 2017) Entrepreneurship growth is positively influenced by the motivation, socio-cultural and skill factors. (Chakraborty, 2020) The entrepreneurial education is also one of the most required dimensions for tribal entrepreneurship development in the state. (Hazarika & Goswami, 2018) identify the needs of follow-up programs and access to formal credit are felt by most of the tribal women in the adoption of technology and micro-entrepreneurship development. (Rathod & Devi, 2018) Micro-finance through the self-help groups has developed entrepreneurial skills among tribal rural women communities and helped them to be self-employed. SHGs are responsible for significant positive changes in economic variables like self-income, employment generation, asset building, productive investment, repayment capacity, and savings. The role and contribution of NGOs in the formation and functioning of SHGs is noteworthy. Therefore, these NGOs should concentrate on providing training and awareness programs for the benefit of members of SHG. (Vangad & Pandey, 2024) Entrepreneurs involved in cultural and traditional knowledge-based enterprise are motivated by their parents and society. The Tribal entrepreneurs indulged in contemporary entrepreneurial activities credit the interest in their respective field or work to be the source of motivation. (Patel et al., 2018a) "In the district of Dangs at Vaghai, Ahwa, Saputara and some other villages, several bamboo-based cottage

industries, co-operative societies, and bamboo products' selling co-cooperative societies exist." Some of the livelihood options adopted in finger millets and its value added product in south Gujarat are Nagli Products such as Biscuits, Papad, Papadi, Laddu, Nankhatai, Makhaniya, Sev, Sakkarpara, Multi-grain flour/Composite flour, Puffing or popping Papad, Puffed finger millet mix and other Extruded products prepare by women in Dang area. (Pravesh, 2016) recommended in their study that "the government should ensure that Tribal entrepreneur have access to update entrepreneurial skills. The access of smart capital for Tribal entrepreneurs is also compulsory. A networking and exchange system should be promoted by government or Tribal entrepreneurs for exchanging their services and consultancies among them. Both the Central and state government will take more interest in promotion and development of Tribal entrepreneurship. A separate Tribal chamber of commerce should be established by government or Tribal entrepreneurs in the country." (Nayak & Patra, 2023) studied that tribal entrepreneurs more focused to start MSMEs (Micro Small Medium Enterprises) rather large business due to the lack of finance and managing capabilities by this they also touching sky in business and benefit the tribal community at large the tribals mainly prefer quality product to supply and they are more into products supply than service. (Deshpande & Sharma, 2013) stated in their study that "Scheduled caste and scheduled tribe businesses are under-represented, except in the north-eastern states. However, the share of female-owned and managed enterprises is significantly greater among SC-ST owned enterprises."

Research Gap

This is a very first kind of study in south Gujarat which focuses on tribal entrepreneurship. The previous study pertaining to tribal entrepreneurship in Gujarat does not reflective of

current trends and adoption of modern enterprises. Also, the author believes that the existing research focuses more on the enterprises and its profitability comparing with non-tribal enterprises while this study investigates on entrepreneurship within socio economic changes such as income, education, investment patterns/capabilities which deeply transform social fabric within tribal communities. The literature heavily relays on quantitative methods such as survey and census. while the of qualitative approach provides more insight to understand the lived experiences and socio-economic changes brought by tribal entrepreneurs in this region. This study aims to fulfil these gaps by conducting reflexive thematic analysis to explore how the entrepreneurship is transforming the socio-economic landscape and challenges perceived by tribal entrepreneurs.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of the study are as follows:

- To examine the socio-economic impact of entrepreneurial ventures among tribal communities.
- To analyze the lived experiences and challenges faced by tribal entrepreneurs.
- To explore the nature and dynamic of entrepreneurial venture among tribal entrepreneurs

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative analysis of 14 entrepreneurs of different districts of south Gujarat region. The tool QSR NVivo 14 is used for analysis of semi structured transcribes of the interviews. The researcher has collected a variety of experiences and richness of individual experiences which has played an important role in their

entrepreneurial journey. After importing data, highlight important sections in the text and assign them a code. Codes usually represent themes, concepts or categories. After generating initial codes, identify patterns and relationships with the codes. Ensuring the accuracy of the data, group the related themes into broader themes. Reviewing themes is an essential stage of Reflexive thematic analysis. Visualization tools are used such as word cloud, project map, text search queries.

Researcher has also used Pivot table to draw the background information and the contribution of these business in rural development such as employment generation, increased income from the business which will enhance the lifestyle of the entrepreneur and family.

Analysis and Discussion

The table below indicates that the graduate and postgraduate have made higher level of investment which also shows the more income and greater financial investment capacity may be linked to higher potential income and the risk-taking ability of entrepreneurs. Those who have graduate and post graduate degree, their parents may have more financial strength. The data suggest that higher education may have higher potential of earning, but this may not be applicable universally. Type of industry, experience, skills can play a vital role in determining the income. The important insight from this table is, almost all the businesses are 2 years old, and they have recovered their initial investment.

Table 2: Education, sum of monthly income and sum of initial investment done by tribal entrepreneurs

Education	Sum Of Monthly Income	Sum Of Initial Investment
10th Pass	175000	60000
12th Pass	250000	300000
12th Pass and ITI	30000	10000
9th	200000	300000
Diploma	40000	400000
Graduate	400000	3660000
Postgraduate	153000	1950000
Grand Total	1248000	6680000

Table 3: Educational background of tribal entrepreneurs

Education	Count Of Education
10th Pass	3
12th Pass	1
12th Pass and ITI	1
9th	1
Diploma	1
Graduate	5
Postgraduate	2
Total	14

management of daily operations of enterprise such as procurement of raw materials, day to day operations and marketing of products or services for better customer reach and some practical aspects of business.

Pride and Successful:

The words “proud”, “initially”, “Sacrifice”, “failures”, “lessons”, “succeeded”, “greatest”, “toughest”, “issues”, “represents”, “initially”, “issues”, “”, represents the initial journey and hurdles. It also reflects the throughout years the hardships and sacrifices made to be to run the business. Although they have not become high profit yielding businesses, this business is able to make significant differences in their life and contribution to the economy. Many entrepreneurs feel proud of themselves that they were able make a difference in others' lives, giving livelihood opportunities to rural communities.

Financial Aspects:

The words such as “money”, “employment”, “salary” show self-employment and job creation within rural economy. Financial aspects of any business are very important. Many entrepreneurs had a struggle for investment in the initial days of

business but because of family support and continuous efforts they were able to survive in the business because of this, they are currently ripping fruit of it. Words “Invested”, “expenses” point out the ongoing financial chores and initial investment in the business.

Skills and Knowledge:

Words like “training”, “learned” also indicate the awareness towards necessary skills acquired during the entrepreneurial journey and importance of continuous learning to run an enterprise.

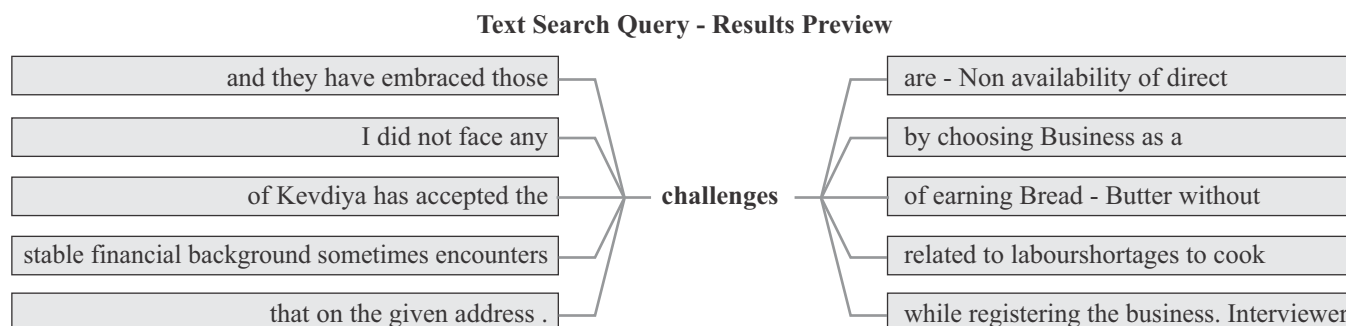
Initiation of Enterprises and Growth:

Words like “start”, “registering”, “started”, “ownership”, “private”, “proprietorship” in the word cloud suggest the status of the enterprise. “achievement” words also share their attachment with hard won success in the face of difficulty considering personal and professional growth.

These themes further suggest the contributions towards rural economy such as divarication from agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry as a main livelihood sources.

Thematic Analysis

Figure 2: Text Search Query for the word “Challenges”



The word Text search query for the word "Challenges" dwells into challenges faced by tribal entrepreneurs while starting the business and during the business. It shows the issues of labor shortage for cooks or chefs. Many entrepreneurs

have stable financial backgrounds, but cultural and societal mindset hinders a little. Issues related to timely delivery of raw materials were initially hindering the smooth operations of the business but later they were able to systemize it.

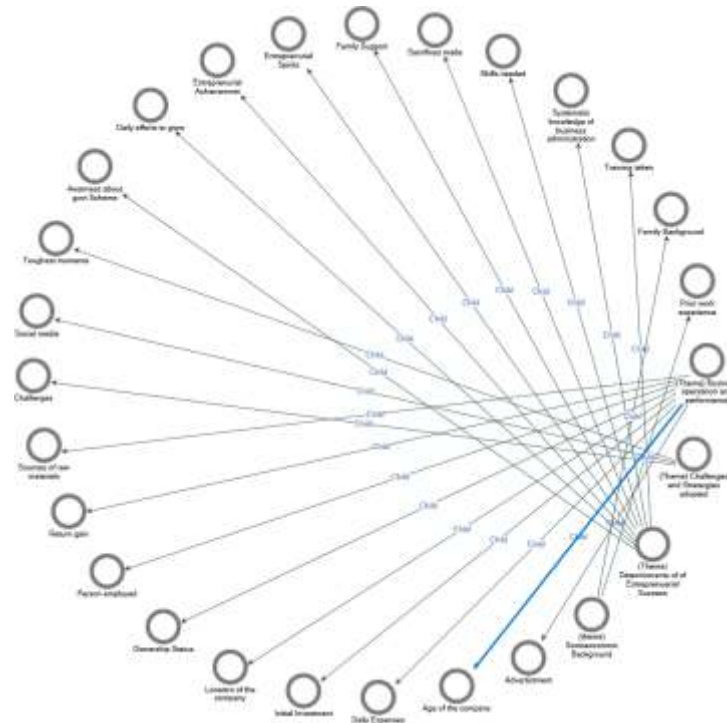


Figure 3: Project map of major themes and codes

The project map represents a comprehensive framework of entrepreneurial success and factors influencing it. The central themes of the study are "Business operation and Performance", "Challenges and strategies adopted to overcome those challenges", "Determinants of entrepreneurial success" and "Socio-economic background of the entrepreneur" including various sub - factors. Each sub factors influenced the central theme labelled as "Child" indicates a hierarchical relationship. The multi-faceted impact on themes Prior work experiences and Family

Background both affect Business operation and Performance. The project map's holistic view helps to understand the ripple effect and entrepreneurial ecosystem of all other significant sub factors such as "providing better training" leads to fulfilling the "skills needed" to run the enterprise successfully. Significantly, the map shows a complex network of dependencies and influences and interconnectedness of economic factors, social factors, personal factors influence the success of entrepreneurial journey.

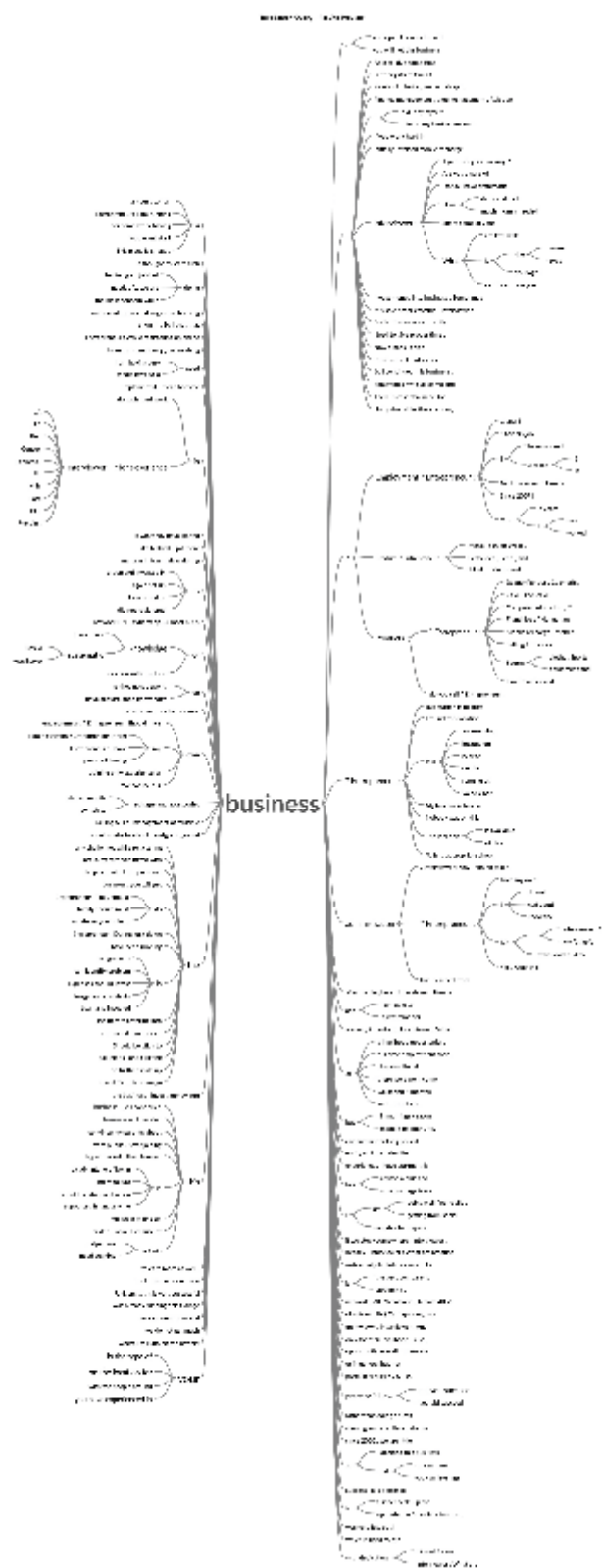


Figure 4: Text search Query for the word “Business”

Text search query results for the word “Business.” It provides comprehensive overview of various factors which is relevant to the business such as financial management, entrepreneurial knowledge and experience, family and support, social impact, products and services offered by entrepreneurs, employment and income which includes job creation. The main theme that arises from the mind map is the prior experience in the business which has played an important role in navigating the

challenges and initial changes while starting the business. Social capitals or network with community people have greater advantage in the business which helps to leverage the repetitive purchasing of products and services. Also, business administration knowledge plays a crucial role in success or at least in expansion of businesses, but these entrepreneurs do not possess the core business management knowledge which may affect the business slightly.

Table 4: Word Frequency Query Results for Stemmed Words

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
Business	8	147	2.90	business, businesses
Product	7	72	1.42	product, production, products
Start	5	69	1.36	start, started, starting
Support	7	57	1.13	support, supported, supporting, supportive, supports
Company	7	56	1.11	Company
People	6	52	1.03	People
Registering	11	50	0.99	register, registered, registering
Family	6	46	0.91	Family
Entrepreneurial	15	40	0.79	Entrepreneurial
Financial	9	40	0.79	financial, financially
Employment	10	37	0.73	employed, employment
Investment	10	37	0.73	invest, invested, investment
Needed	6	33	0.65	needed, needs
Daily	5	31	0.61	Daily
Entrepreneurs	13	30	0.59	Entrepreneurs

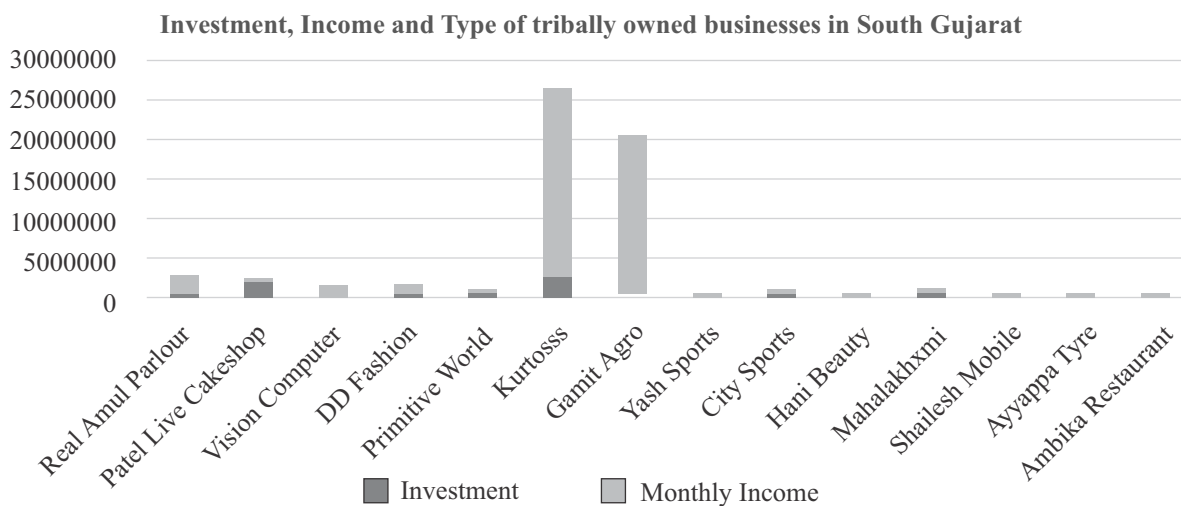


Figure 5: Investment pattern, type of tribally owned businesses and income generation

The charts below reveal the correlation between the initial investment and earned income in a year. The charts represent the type of enterprise that has more potential. The agro chemical and food service enterprises have more potential to gain a return on investment. As the south Gujarat region mostly consists of agriculture, so the agriproducts and Agri fertilizer and seeds has more market. Another reason that also plays a crucial role is the age of enterprise. Some of the enterprises are just 2-3 years old while others are 8-12 years old. So, the total year in the business has high income over a period compared to those which are in initial stage.

Research Findings

This research highlights the significant economic transformation occurring because of this shift, particularly in areas such as employment generation, income diversification, and the empowerment of tribal communities. In recent decades rural areas have shown tremendous potential not only by contributing to the agriculture sector but also gradually and sharp shift in micro, small and medium manufacturing and service units yet Since ages, rural economy or rural entrepreneurship has not received well in literature. Tribal entrepreneurs have also benefited from rural tourism by offering local products and services

which includes millet-based products, bamboo crafts, tribal food services. It has created a lot of economic opportunities. entrepreneurs but the NVivo 14's Qualitative analysis reflects that after a few years in the business, they can make huge differences financially and economically also the type of business they own is a modern requirement of the people. Despite very low initial investment, they can make significant regular income which shows that rural economies are flourishing even in limited resources. It conveys that rural entrepreneurs are also able to hardness the opportunities in entrepreneurship. Also, the business idea and convert and able to sustain as well. Almost 95% of entrepreneurs have accepted during the interview that “One must abide in business.” They have given importance to building a network, communication, quality of services – products as a major reason succeed and sustain in business. The study has also found that many entrepreneurs have started their venture after their primary education.

Conclusion

The rising generation of tribal communities in south Gujarat understand the importance of business and marketing management. Entrepreneurs in rural areas may have difficulties

in managing finance, leveraging more investment and securing funds for expansion etc. as most of these are first generation entrepreneurs. Most entrepreneurs use social media to promote their products and services they offer. Another reason that tribal entrepreneurs cannot be seen earning huge chunks of profits is because in most of the businesses there is a greater role of family members, so some part of profit earning goes to family expenses instead investing in current business for expansion etc. Through the reflexive thematic analysis, this study highlights the unique opportunities and challenges faced by them. The small sample size and qualitative analysis indicates the need for further research for comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship in tribal contexts. There are several reasons such as drop out in education, or low socioeconomic status made compulsion to take up any skill related work in small establishment but after gaining good experience those who paved their journey towards entrepreneurship likely to succeed.

Recommendations

With the increased participation in vocational training program tribal youth are expected to start small businesses and can become self employed by taking independent projects. Enhanced education, skills and financial resources may boost entrepreneurial activities in rural areas. We can anticipate more diverse business ventures in agriculture, organic farming, trading and service businesses. Access to microfinance and government subsidies have increased yet tribal entrepreneurs still struggle to take advantage of these schemes because they do not consider it is necessary and not ready to take the financial burden while doing business. This can be the reason that most of the businesses in rural are happy with whatever they make out of business. So, there is still a need to address these issues as they do have potential but under fear, they are not ready to take financial risk.

Government interventions in this area by doing capacity building can further excel rural entrepreneurship. The economic diversification of rural areas in south Gujarat can become a critical component of south Gujarat's long term development strategy. This study also reflects that many entrepreneurs have been employed in small businesses for many years and after 8-10 years of job experience, they started their venture which plus point but there is need to promote early start up.

Scope for Future Research

There are lot of other areas which can be the potential research areas to understand the fundamental of tribal entrepreneurship. Some of these topics are as follows:

- A comparative study between tribal and non-tribal communities can also give greater understanding about cultural context, economic, societal aspects, skills, decision making and region-specific challenges.

The future study can explore technology integration and role of social media among tribal entrepreneurs.

- This study focuses on Reflexive Thematic Analysis of 14 tribal entrepreneurs from different districts of South Gujarat region, hence future researchers can undertake larger sample size. This will help to understand the broader conclusions and scenario in terms of socio-economic impact within tribal communities.

Limitations

This study specifically focuses on tribal communities of South Gujarat region, which limits the findings of this study in other part of India.

Also, it does have limited sample size which may not fully capture socio economic aspects of tribal entrepreneurs. A reflexive thematic analysis is subjective, and it also relies on researchers' interpretation of data. Researcher's personal views can influence the coding and thematic development.

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