

Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Business Models

Anirudh Agrawal • Payal Kumar
Editors

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The Case of India

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*This book is dedicated to all social entrepreneurs who make it their
business to transform society.*

Foreword

India is a land of contrasts: while it is one of the fastest growing economies with increasing GDP, it also features amongst the lowest on Human Development index, Hunger Index and Multi-Dimensional Poverty. While the country boasts of the third largest technically qualified manpower, it is unable to provide basic primary education to its children. As a food-surplus nation, it also hosts the largest proportion of malnourished children in the world. India features among the countries with the largest number of millionaires, but it also has about one-third of its population living below the poverty line of Rs 47/day. It is one of the “youngest countries” with the advantage of demographic dividends, but most of its youth are also uneducated, unskilled and unemployable. Moreover, during the last few decades, this gap has widened since the government has been decreasing its welfare role in providing services to the “bottom of the pyramid” segments. In order to help address these massive problems, social entrepreneurship is one of the most favourable strategies for both society and the government.

Unlike traditional entrepreneurship literature, where the definition is widely understood and established, social entrepreneurship as a construct is struggling to establish well-defined boundaries in academia. Both as an area of research and as practice, the diversity of its manifestation poses a challenge in arriving at a uniformly accepted definition of what social entrepreneurship is.

If one goes through the profiles of people who have been recognized, celebrated and quoted in research and case studies as social entrepreneurs (e.g., *Ashoka Fellows*, recipients of *Schwab Social Entrepreneur of the Year*, *Echoing Green Fellow*), it is difficult to find a common conceptual thread. These individuals work in very diverse fields (energy, human trafficking, agriculture, worker's rights, rural markets, etc.); use very different strategies to make the social impact they intend to achieve (e.g., providing affordable access to social goods and services, building value chains, or social mobilization, activism and advocacy); and create different kinds of organizational entities which range from pure for-profits to donation-based NGOs while they have dissimilar backgrounds in terms of their educational qualifications, work experience and family. It is not surprising that the academic discipline too is replete with very different definitions of social entrepreneurship. As Broader (2009, p. 30) observed: "*Social entrepreneurship is allergic to definitions, many of us can't describe social entrepreneurship, but we know it when we see it.*"

There are many reasons why defining social entrepreneurship is such an important task. As a field of academic study, social entrepreneurship is still in its formative stage. Researchers in the field represent a wide range in their academic background (e.g., public policy, economics, marketing, finance, social development, agriculture), and are guided by the lenses of their disciplines in understanding the phenomenon. In addition, the practice of social entrepreneurship itself is evolving with the emergence of newer social issues and problems (e.g., impacts of climate change, refugee crisis) which need to be, and can be, addressed by individuals.

But perhaps the most important reason for this diversity of definitions is that by its very nature, social entrepreneurship is embedded, and finds manifestation, in the local social and cultural context. Societies differ in terms of the significant social problems, which need to be addressed, and therefore provide different kind of opportunities to the social entrepreneurs (Mair, 2010). Many problems, which are significant in the Indian context (e.g., caste discrimination, substantial size of the ultra-poor segment, lack of access to basic social services such as primary education or health care) would not be irrelevant in many other countries. Moreover, societies also differ in terms of the enabling ecosystem mechanisms (e.g., sources of funding, regulatory environment, social and institutional

structures) which both constrain and enable the kind of solutions which are possible and relevant in the local context.

While the term ‘social entrepreneurship’ is of recent origin and its academic pursuit even more recent, the *practice* of social entrepreneurship in India has a long history (Shukla, 2010a). As a culture which reinforces the values of “giving” and duty towards the collective well-being, Indian society provides a fertile ground for active engagement with social issues. Moreover, historically, the Independence Movement in pre-independent India, and later social movements led by Vinoba Bhave and Jai Prakash Narain, provided a strong impetus to building an empowered society through creating social leaders who would facilitate economic and social change. Many individuals who participated in such movements or got inspired by them went on to establish social organizations which were later recognized as social entrepreneurial ventures (e.g., SEWA, Amul, Barefoot College, Sulabh International). These ventures have influenced many social enterprises in other regions of the world.

* * *

It is in this background that this volume aims to provide a more contextual understanding of social entrepreneurship in the Indian socio-economic-political discourse. While Indian society shares many social issues and venture models with other regions (e.g., microfinance, solar energy enterprises), it is also characterized by its specific socio-economic problems and institutional voids. This collection of studies provides a more nuanced insight into this distinctiveness.

This volume is very much needed, given that the academic discipline of social entrepreneurship has started growing in India. Many academic institutes have started offering a full-time course (e.g., Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Ambedkar University, Delhi) or specific courses (e.g., IIM Ahmedabad, IRMA, XLRI) on the subject. Furthermore, research scholars have started doing their doctoral thesis specifically on social entrepreneurship, thus creating the first generation of academicians with a specialization in the discipline. This book may mark the beginning of more such India-centric academic books on social entrepreneurship.

A large number of social entrepreneurial opportunities exist in socio-economic disequilibrium. Indian social entrepreneurship is primarily focused on addressing these large social and economic disparities. A large number of Indian social entrepreneurial ventures work on the issue of “providing access” to basic social goods and services (e.g., education, health care, markets, energy, water) to the less-resourced and low-income communities. These “markets of the poor” pose unique challenges, since they are mostly characterized by low and irregular income, low savings and access to credit, are often remote, dispersed and lack basic infrastructure, and so on. The challenge is even more for Indian social entrepreneurs since they mostly operate with limited funding and investments. Therefore, to service these markets, the social entrepreneurs have to innovate new solutions and models, which are unique in the Indian scenario. In her chapter, Runa Deepika (“What Kind of Business Models Lead Social Enterprises to Sustainability?”) compares two such business models which aim to negotiate these ambiguities.

Another major reason for definitional dilemma within social entrepreneurship is the lack of shared and standardized impact measures. Social value creation and impact generation is the defining characteristic of social entrepreneurship. However, without the shared impact measure or normalized social impact measures, the definitional dilemma will continue to persist. In this context, the chapter by Anar Bhatt (Why Worry About Your Impact? Rationale, Challenges, and Support for Indian Social Enterprises’ Impact Measurement) discusses different impact measures and highlights the bridging point in this very conceptual conversation.

In a larger context, if social entrepreneurship as a practice has to make any noticeable impact on the society, it needs people with empathy and motivation to engage in social entrepreneurship. There is a need to attract more talent who can leverage on the opportunity/gaps, develop large-scale solutions and address these disparities in access. This makes the question, “why do people become social entrepreneurs?” quite relevant in a societal context. The chapter by Preeti Tiwari (“Foremost Motivational Factors to Become a Social Entrepreneur”) explores this issue and highlights how tapping into the potential of youth as social entrepreneurs can make a significant contribution in solving these societal problems.

Provision of public goods through private for-profit social enterprises, however, also highlights a moral and political dilemma, which is relevant in contemporary India. Constitutionally and legally many of these services (e.g., education, health care) are basic rights of the people, and the state is mandated to provide them. Providing these services even for a small fee/price, which the social enterprises do, goes against the spirit of the rights-based approach. Isabel Salovaara (“Is Social Enterprise the Panacea for School-Education-for-All in India?”) explores this debate between private provision versus basic rights in the context of primary education. Education in India is getting privatized creating gaps in the quality of education delivered to children from lower income families. A social entrepreneurial lens on education in India is vitally important.

The large inequalities and disproportionate distribution of access in India has also given rise to another model of social entrepreneurship. These are social ventures in which bridging the rich-poor, urban-rural, and class-, gender- and caste-based disparities is a key mission. They aim to build empowered, self-sustaining communities and do so by social mobilization and collectivization of communities to become self-reliant in meeting their own needs. This empowerment of less-resourced and disadvantaged communities has also given rise to the uniquely Indian phenomenon of “collective entrepreneurship” or “community-based entrepreneurship”. The study by Balram Bhushan (“A Need-Based Innovation Cycle to Serve the Poor: A Case of the Mann Deshi Mahila Group”) provides interesting examples of such innovation in empowering the community through collective action. The study by Ashok Prasad and Mathew J Manimala (*Circular Social Innovation: A New Paradigm for India's Sustainable Development*) gives useful insights into how collective entrepreneurship, social innovation and circular economy creates the ground for more sustainable development. These studies are uniquely Indian in context and practice, and one may observe knowledge externalities in other contexts and practices.

In fact, one of the very unique and indigenous social innovations in India are the Self-Help Groups (SHGs). These are small groups of the poor, which tap into their social capital and thus empower them to make changes in their own lives. SHGs started emerging during the 1970s–1980s

through the initiatives of a number of organizations such as Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA), Deccan Development Society (DDS), Association of Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA), Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), and so on, by mobilizing village communities (mainly women) to form small groups to help each other and take collective community actions. Later in the 1990s, with the facilitation from NABARD and government, these SHGs started proliferating and have morphed into an invisible, yet powerful, social movement for social change (Shukla, 2010b). Presently, there are about 9 million SHGs covering more than 100 million (or more than 40%) households in India. Many of these SHGs have also transformed themselves into social enterprises which cater to the needs of local development through sustainable models.

While SHGs have been studied in the context of poverty alleviation and financial inclusion, their role as vehicles of social change has not been fully explored in the research on social entrepreneurship. In this volume, the study on two SHGs by Sangita Dutta Gupta (“Social Entrepreneurship Through Micro Entrepreneurs of Self-Help Groups”) looks at this aspect of SHGs as social entrepreneurial ventures.

One distinctive aspect of social entrepreneurship in India is the emergence of the support ecosystem. For social enterprises, even with proven innovative models, it is essential to scale up to make any significant social impact. For this they need financial support mentoring and access to the market. Traditionally, such support used to come in the form of grants from the government or the donor agencies, government-organized events or just plain hard work. However, these traditional systems of ecosystems are gradually receding and are getting replaced by the impact investors and accelerators who provide holistic ecosystem approach to social entrepreneurial development.

In particular, the impact-investing firms use venture capital like investment method while navigating the competing logics of financial prudence and social impact creation. One article in this volume explores the nuances of impact investing in India and its impact on sustainable development. The study by Anirudh Agrawal (“Effectiveness of Impact Investing at the Bottom of the Pyramid”) identifies the operating principles of successful impact investing and the qualities they focus on in the

ventures, which create social impact while giving the financial returns to the investor. Similarly, the chapter by Shambu Prasad and Joseph Satish V (“Embedding Diversity in Social Entrepreneurial Research: India’s Learning Laboratories”) provide an insightful narration of how such social movements form the backdrop of social entrepreneurship in India. Given the emergence of impact investing, sustainable accelerators and the role these new forms are likely to play in the scaling up of social ventures in India, these studies provide useful pointers towards developing a social entrepreneurial ecosystem in India.

This book aims to open a conversation on social entrepreneurial studies, its impact and its possibilities in the government policy. However, there are many things that the book does not cover, and I hope it would in the later volumes. Some of the things that are not covered in the book are how automation and digitalization will impact the social fabric; how and what strategies Indian policy makers must choose to leverage the social impact bonds in social value creation, how government policies can rejuvenate micro-entrepreneurs in India and what role can social entrepreneurship play in job creation in India. Finally, the field needs more quantitative studies on social impact and externalities. These studies would further resolve the definitional dilemmas and would also move the field ahead.

* * *

Overall, this book is a useful contribution to research literature on social entrepreneurship with a specific focus on the Indian context. It covers a vast canvas of areas and issues which form a distinctive feature of the Indian landscape of this practice and discipline. More importantly, it delves into those aspects of Indian social entrepreneurship which normally do not feature in studies on this subject. As one goes through the chapters and studies, they open up new perspectives and lenses through which one can, and needs to, understand this sector in India.

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Preface

There are many reasons that inspired us to put our heads together to bring out this edited volume. The overriding driver was that India has some distinctive social, economic and cultural characteristics that provide a contextualization of the social entrepreneurship that is fairly unique.

In recent times, India has been moving towards a market-driven economy, which means that government-sponsored public services and public subsidies are slowly diminishing. This, coupled with rising inflation, has caused tremendous stress among those living below the poverty line in India. The question that arises is, what market-driven solutions can be devised to alleviate their hardships? Furthermore, the forces of climate change are having an adverse effect on agriculture, weather and fresh water availability. The agricultural sector accounts for 60% of employment in India. So how do we address the increasing problems of people associated with agriculture?

To add to the complexity, the public healthcare system in India is poorly managed while private healthcare is expensive. Any individual on the margins may lose his entire savings if his loved one gets sick and needs to be treated in a private hospital. Again, how can one create simple, efficient healthcare solutions to ensure that people do not get ensnared in the poverty trap? Finally, dwindling resources and a rising population in general, coupled with massive migration to cities such as Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, have created huge social problems. How can the

people and the government address these problems? We believe that one of the most prominent strategies to address these multifarious problems is innovative social entrepreneurship. It has been acknowledged that social entrepreneurship, using sustainable development models, can address these problems and help society greatly (Hockerts, 2010; Hockerts & Wüstenhagen, 2010; Mair, Mart, Iacute, Ignasi, & Ventresca, 2012).

Historically, India has led the way in social entrepreneurship through the Sulabh Toilet Project, Seva Café, SEWA and also a plethora of self-help groups. Most recently, social enterprises like the TAPF, CRY and Aravind Eye Care are striving hard to innovate and address social issues in an effective manner. The increasing acceptance of social entrepreneurship as a viable option can be seen not just from the rise of such enterprises but also by the trend in the top higher educational institutions in the country, such as IRMA, TISS, IIT Chennai, IIM Bangalore, IIM Calcutta, which have developed dedicated programmes on social entrepreneurship.

Much of the work by scholars on social entrepreneurship in the Indian context was published after the seminal book, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*, by C. K. Prahalad (2004). The book considered the poor as a potential market and explained how firms should innovate business models and products to monetize this market. Since then social entrepreneurial research looked at social business models addressing goods and services to the poor (Linna, 2012; Olsen & Boxenbaum, 2009; Seelos & Mair, 2007). The downside of this research was that many firms ended up marketing inconsequential products and services to the poor, of little utility, such as Fair and Lovely Cream and microfinance products, lowering their savings (Garrette & Karnani, 2009; Karnani, 2009).

More social entrepreneurial research came to light after the IPO of SKS microfinance (Gunjan, Soumyadeep, & Srijit, 2010). In both the Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) business models (Karnani, 2011; Seelos & Mair, 2007) and the SKS microfinance case (College & Baron, 2011; Joshi, 2011), the social impact was considered implicit to the business model. In other words, if a firm creates socially and sustainably relevant products and services and sells them to the poor, this was considered to constitute social entrepreneurship. The downside is that it does not cover baseline studies and impact measurement post intervention, which is an

essential element for the legitimacy of the field in India. The work by Sonne (2012) dwells on the emerging class of social entrepreneurs and impact investment, which provides a neoliberal market perspective on the emergence of the social entrepreneur while the study by Sonne and Jamal (2014) maps and contrasts various social entrepreneurial initiatives.

Recent institutionalization of social entrepreneurship practice and impact investment in the UK and Europe (Harkiolakis & Mourad, 2012; Heyman, 2013; Spear, Cornforth, & Aiken, 2009), clarifying financial disclosures, social impact and development of both the social and market space, calls for further theorization and operationalization of various elements of social entrepreneurship. Drawing from the institutionalized history of social entrepreneurship in the UK and Europe, this edited volume strives to present empirical and theoretical peer-reviewed chapters, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the social entrepreneurial ecosystem in India for scholars, entrepreneurs and policy makers (ICSEM, 2017). In terms of scholarship, this volume is a humble beginning, limited to exploratory and qualitative studies. We hope it will contribute in some way to inculcating both the social entrepreneurial intentions and social entrepreneurial business acumen across strata, from school and university level, to village management and central government level initiatives.

This volume is divided into two sections: Theoretical Contextualization on Social entrepreneurship and, Sustainable Business Models and Impact Investment. Each section has a series of dedicated conceptual and empirical papers. The chapters in the first part largely focus on conceptual debates around social entrepreneurship in India, such as entrepreneurial intentions, entrepreneurial empathy, dilemma around standardized social entrepreneurial measures and problems with the social entrepreneurial solutions to primary education in India. The chapters in the second part study the self-help groups, impact-investing firms, circular economy, accelerators and disruptive social entrepreneurial themes, weaving emerging trends and theory with the social enterprise cases from India. We strive to provide empirical work that not only looks at the social innovation from the market disequilibrium perspective and also presents a more realistic perspective of the social entrepreneurship landscape in India.

While this research work is of significant value, India still lacks specific theorization and robust empirical validation and quantitative research in social entrepreneurship (British Council India, 2015).

Future studies on social entrepreneurship in the Indian context would do well to theorize and develop solutions around the following research gaps. First, research must study different scaling models of social enterprises. It must study how social impact by social enterprises can be scaled without grants or subsidies but through markets. Second, more research is needed on the cooperative movement in India, beyond the dairy and agriculture cooperatives, into newer areas of community self-sufficiency and empowerment like renewable energy, education, healthcare and water sharing. Finance is an important aspect of social entrepreneurship and future research could explore newer models of impact investing, quantitative and risk modelling of impact investing, microfinance and public-private partnership (PPP) finance models, looking beyond impact investing to public-private funding of social enterprises and social impact bonds. Social entrepreneurs need support and guidance.

In this direction, research should also focus on how and what models can be developed to support social enterprises. One such example is self-help groups, which can be replicated at different socio-economic levels of society. Furthermore, we also need to research how to increase the productivity and income of the members associated with the SHGs. Another support mechanism is through the accelerators and incubators focusing on social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship in India is in its infancy. It needs extensive support and a social movement to develop at each level of society, including national associations for social enterprise to engage with government for redefining the tax breaks and incentives in order to scale up social entrepreneurship.

To sum up, social enterprise addresses social problems and helps those at the margins by using creative means (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010; Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010) while simultaneously leveraging the personality of the social entrepreneur (Smith, Besharov, Wessels, & Chertok, 2012) and seeking rents both from the social problem and markets to ensure that the dividends generated while running the enterprise are used for the benefit of the marginalized and not channelled towards the shareholders (Yunus & Jolis, 1999). The promise of social

entrepreneurship in a country like India is enormous as there are large vicissitudes. We hope this volume is a window to that promise.

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