

Dalit entrepreneurs and their attempts to reconstitute socio-economic relations

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Place of fieldwork: India

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Key Words

Dalit, Entrepreneur, DICCI, Reservation Policy, Bank, Lobbying

• Research background

In pre-modern India the system of division of labor was based on caste.

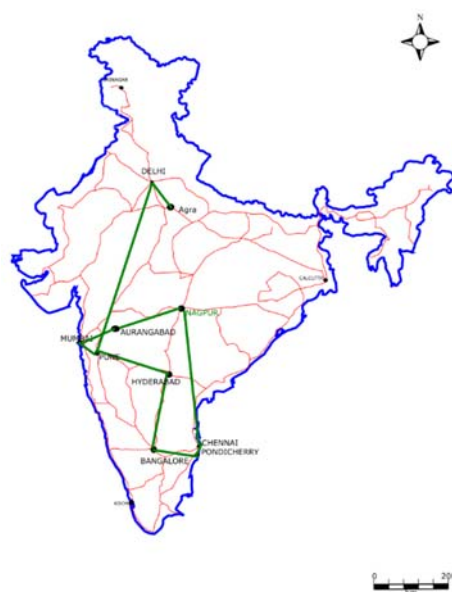
Trade and commerce were conducted by the merchant caste people, classified as Vaisya. Dalits person, who were placed outside the four varnas, engaged primarily in agricultural labor, cleaning and sweeping, leather craft and, butchery. They were the discriminated class in society. For example, they were prohibited from using public wells and entering Hindu temples. However, recently, some Dalits person have undertaken entrepreneurship. Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce Industry (DICCI) was established in 2005, and their Expo was held in Pune in 2010.

Thus I would like to pursue the following research questions 1) Who are the Dalit entrepreneurs? 2) What kind of businesses do they engage in? 3) What is the role and function of the DICCI? In India, after the 1980s and especially the 1990s, economic liberalization and globalization accelerated. From the colonial times, there was reservation measure for Dalits (the depressed classes) who were granted special access to public education and public employment. I would like to examine the impact of reservation on the rise of Dalit entrepreneurs and the attitude of Dalit people toward these policies.

• Research aim

I aim to determine the characteristics of Dalit entrepreneurs and the role of the DICCI. Previous research on entrepreneurs, has focused mainly on entrepreneurs' personalities, but recently, more attention has been given to the social significance of entrepreneurship. Therefore, this study examines the social significance of Dalit entrepreneurship in India. For this purpose, I will analyze not only the market and government, but also networks of entrepreneurs and their organizations, religious communities, and supply chains, including both the Indian and international markets. This study contributes to research on capitalism, contemporary Indian economy, caste, poverty, and social development.

Maps of fieldwork



Results of the fieldwork.

I conducted fieldwork from 1 August to 5th October 2015 in Delhi, Agra, Pune, Mumbai, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Chennai, Pondicherry, Bangalore, and Hyderabad. In these cities, I conducted interviews with Dalit entrepreneurs and persons related to the DICCI. I also participated in several meetings and conducted participant observation.

The main findings of my fieldwork are as follows.

First, Dalit entrepreneurs engage in diverse types of businesses. A Chamar (leatherworker caste) engages in the leather industry and export of leather goods to foreign countries. In a 3D-design business in construction, a Dalit person entered into business with non-Dalit persons and employed people belonging to different castes. Other Dalits undertook diverse businesses such as construction, resort hotel, and cultivating prawns.

-Second, Dalit entrepreneurs often face difficulty in financing initial funds. One entrepreneur, said that it is difficult to arrange collateral, and banks do not want to finance Dalit people. Further, a Dalit banker, mentioned that some bankers take client's caste into account when considering loan, and in rural areas some banks do not finance Dalit people. However, in some cases, Dalit entrepreneur were able to obtain a loan from the bank easily owing to their careers and skills, and one entrepreneur received investment from another entrepreneur whom he was acquainted with at the DICCI.

-Third, the reservation policy also played a role in the emergence of Dalit entrepreneurs. Several Dalit entrepreneurs have parents with public employment. It can be thus inferred that owing to reservation policy, their economic situation improved and enabled them to start a business.

-Fourth, the DICCI has three roles: 1) is supporting entrepreneurs, 2) acting as a mediator to connect entrepreneurs with the other entrepreneurs, existing organizations, and existing institutions. 3) lobbying.



DICCI South India meeting in Hyderabad.
Each branch manager reported their activities.
12.08.2015



Leather shoes factory run by a Dalit entrepreneur in the suburbs of Agra. They produce it on an assembly line. 02.09.2015

• Implications for future research

-This study has three implications for future research. First, the research methodology should be reconsidered, as only interviews were conducted in this study. In the future, I wish to be more closely involved in Dalit persons' businesses and conduct participant observation. Second, an analysis should be conducted on government and political parties in future research. One of the important activities of the DICCI is lobbying. Thus, I would like to study the lobbying process and its effects. Third, I would like to include other business organizations in the study. The DICCI gets support from other organizations such as Tata group and CII, which I intend to investigate in the future.



The DICCI Pune office. 06.08.2015