

## Understanding the Construction of Social Enterprises in India: Through Identity and Context of Social Entrepreneurs

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**Abstract :** India is one of the largest democracies in the global south, which demonstrates the highest social enterprise activities in the subcontinent. Although there has been a meteoric rise in social enterprise activities, it is not a new phenomenon, as it dates back to Vinoba Bhave's Land Gift movement in 1950. India also has a rich history of a welfare mix where non-governmental organisations played a significant role in the public welfare provision. Lately, the government's impetus on entrepreneurship has contributed to a burgeoning social enterprise sector in the country; however, there is a lack in understanding of how social enterprises are constructed in India. Social entrepreneurship as practice has been conceptualised as a multi-dimensional concept, which is predominantly explained through the characteristics of a social entrepreneur. Social enterprise organisation, which is a component of social entrepreneurship practice are also classified through the role of the social entrepreneur; thus making social entrepreneur a vital unit shaping organisation and practice. Hence, individual identity of the social entrepreneur acts as a steering agent for defining organisation and practice. Individual identity does not operate in a vacuum and different isomorphic pressures (resource-rich actors/institutions) leads to negotiation in these identities. Dey and Teasdale's work investigated this identity work of non-profit practitioners within the practice of social enterprises in England. Furthermore, the construction of social enterprises is predominantly understood through two approaches i.e. an institutional logic perspective emerging from Europe and process and outcome perspective derived from the United States. These two approaches explain social enterprise as an inevitable institutional outcome in a linear and simplistic manner. Such linear institutional transition is inferred from structural policy reforms and austerity measures adopted by the government, which led to heightened competition for funds in the non-profit sector. These political and economic challenges were specific to the global north, which is different from transitions experienced in the global south, thus further investigation would help understand social enterprise activities as a contextual phenomenon. There is a growing interest in understanding the role of the context within the entrepreneurship literature, additionally, there is growing recognition in entrepreneurship research that economic behaviour is realised far better within its historical, temporal, institutional, spatial and social context, as these contexts provide boundaries to individuals in terms of opportunities and actions. Social enterprise phenomenon too is realised as contextual phenomenon though it differs from traditional entrepreneurship in terms of its dual mission (social and economic), however, the understanding of the role of context in social entrepreneurship has been limited. Hence, this work in progress study integrates identity work of social entrepreneur and the role of context. It investigates the identities of social entrepreneur and its negotiation within its context. Further, how this negotiated identity transcends into organisational practice in turn shaping how social enterprises are constructed in a specific region. The study employs a qualitative inquiry of semi-structured interviews and ethnographic institutionalism. Interviews were analysed using critical discourse analysis and the preliminary outcomes are currently a work in progress.

**Keywords :** context, Dey and Teasdale, identity, social entrepreneurs, social enterprise, social entrepreneurship

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