

Impacts of Culture, Institutions, and Social Networks on the Entrepreneurial Pathways of Tribal Women: A Sociological Study in Odisha

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a catalyst for innovation, income generation, and socio-economic transformation. Yet, the entrepreneurial journeys of tribal women in India remain under-researched and weakly theorized. This study examines the intersections of culture, institutions, and social networks in shaping the entrepreneurial trajectories of tribal women in Odisha. Based on a sociological inquiry among 192 respondents across six villages in Mayurbhanj district comprising Sabai grass workers, Bamboo artisans, Dokra metal craftswomen, and petty business entrepreneurs, the research analyzes production systems, triggers of engagement, duration of enterprise, seed capital, and support structures. Using structured schedules, in-depth interviews, and field observations, the study reveals a strong predominance of batch production (73.43%) among Sabai and Bamboo artisans, reflecting resilience through adaptive continuity, while Dokra women employ hybrid strategies combining tradition with market-oriented production. Government agencies appear as key initiators, but family and community networks are central to sustaining Sabai and Bamboo ventures, whereas NGOs play a catalytic role in the Dokra sector (43.75%). The embedding of enterprises is evident in longer engagement spans, notably within the 5–10-year range (47.39%), reflecting cultural and experiential sustainability. Heavy reliance on government funding (41.14%) and middle men (29.68%) persists financial asymmetries. Entrepreneurial support remains largely family-centered (55.14%), with limited external linkages, restricting wider market expansion. The study argues for a hybrid support framework integrating cultural knowledge, institutional mechanisms, and expanded social networks to foster inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems for tribal women.

Keywords: Tribal women, entrepreneurship, artisanal production, social networks, institutional support, Odisha

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a vital driver of innovation, employment generation, and long-term socio-economic development (Leutner et al., 2014; Dimov, 2020). However, the emergence of entrepreneurial activity is not spontaneous. It is shaped and triggered by a complex interplay of individual aspirations, socio-cultural environments, and institutional frameworks (Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007). Among these influences, cultural orientations play a particularly decisive role in shaping entrepreneurial pathways. Hofstede's (1991) seminal work remains as the foundational insight of this article where the author demonstrates that individualist cultural contexts, such as those in the United States, often encourage greater risk-taking and innovation, whereas collectivist orientations, more prevalent in parts of Europe and Asia, tend to reinforce preferences for stability and structured employment.

In the Indian context, these cultural dimensions acquire further complexity when examined in relation to indigenous and tribal communities. Tribal women, in particular, engage in entrepreneurship under distinctive cultural, economic, and gendered constraints (Naveen, 2023; Karthikeyan 2025). Their entrepreneurial endeavours often evolve not in a vacuum, but through a confluence of inherited artisanal knowledge which can be labeled as transgenerational knowledge, collective community practices, and varying degrees of institutional support. In the present study, for a good number of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship is intricately tied to craft-based traditions and subsistence economies, where cultural values and social bonds act both as enablers and preventers.

This study situates the entrepreneurial journeys of tribal women in Odisha within the broader cultural, institutional, and social frameworks. By adopting a sociological lens, it seeks to understand how cultural traditions, institutional interventions, and community networks collectively shape opportunities, challenges, and trajectories of women's entrepreneurship in tribal societies.

Objectives of the study:

The paper focuses on the following objectives.

- To analyze the production systems and patterns adopted by tribal women entrepreneurs and assess their negotiation between tradition and market demands.
- To identify the key initiators of entrepreneurial engagement and in shaping enterprise start-ups.
- To examine the duration of entrepreneurial involvement across different crafts and businesses in relation to embedded social relations and experiential sustainability.
- To investigate the sources of initial seed capital.
- To assess the role of individuals, institutions and social capital in facilitating or constraining women's entrepreneurial growth.

Methodology

The study was situated in the district of Mayurbhanj Odisha, specifically targeting the blocks of Baripada, Khunta, and Morada where entrepreneurship among tribal women is visible. It covered the villages of Guhaldihi, Sanraikali, B.C. Pur, Tabhagadi, Ghodabandha, and Chikitamatia within these blocks. It surveyed 192 tribal women entrepreneurs engaged in Sabai craft (N=104), Bamboo craft (N=48), Dokra metal craft (N=32), and petty businesses including poultry and goatery (N=08). Primary data were collected via structured schedules, interviews, and field observations. Respondents were analyzed across two dimensions:

- Production Models: Categorization of enterprises into mass, batch, and service production.
- Entrepreneurial Triggers: Identifying initiators of entrepreneurial ventures, grouped into interpersonal agencies (family, community, NGOs) and institutional agencies (government departments, district industrial centers, cooperative missions).

Data were systematically tabulated and interpreted and have been compared with the relevant theoretical and empirical literature.

Findings and Discussion

Production Patterns

A nuanced assessment of production systems among microenterprises in Sabai, Bamboo, Dokra, and petty businesses reveals the presence of distinct operational modalities, each shaped by complex interplays between resource availability, market forces, and inherited artisanal traditions. By categorizing production according to type such as: mass, batch, and service, this analysis offers insight into the objectives, scale, and organizational frameworks that determine the sectoral adaptation within the broader context of microenterprise development. The production pattern in vogue among the tribal entrepreneurs is comprehensively presented in Table No. 1.

Table No. (I)
Distribution of Sample Respondents on the Basis of types of Production

Indicator	Type of production	Sabai Craft N=104	Bamboo Craft N=48	Dokra N=32	Petty Business N=08	Total Percentage N=192
Types of Production	Mass Production	19	09	15	5	48(25)
	Batches of Production	85	39	17	00	141(73.43)
	Service Production	00	00		03	03(1.56)

Source: Primary data collected from respondents

The table above is clearly indicative of a heightened orientation towards batch production (73.43%) among Sabai and Bamboo crafts which is consistent with Sennett's (2008) argument that the sustainability and transmission of artisanal knowledge are most effectively maintained through small-batch (Sennett, 2008). Within this context, Sabai artisans (81.73%) exemplify an adept utilization of traditional techniques to deliver distinct items due to the cyclical nature of the availability of raw materials, closely reflecting contemporary practices observed in Indian craft collectives (Rangсутra, 2024). Bamboo artisans, similarly, demonstrate resilience as they negotiate flexibility with cultural continuity, supporting Basu's (2019) view that adaptive strategies reinforce artisanal survival amid market fluctuations.

The production strategy of Dokra artisans illustrates a sector in flux. They have adopted to batch production (53.2%) acting as a safeguard of heritage whilst mass production (46.8%) signals an emergent shift towards standardized processes, aligning with MacPherson and Raghavan's (2018) observations on craft modernization as a response to intensified market forces. Bourdieu's (1977) social field theory is similarly invoked here which states the capturing of the dynamic negotiation between traditional skills and the imperatives of product standardization. Thus, the craft practice among tribal women entrepreneurs in this sector has adopted hybrid adaptation.

By contrast, petty businesses prioritize mass production (62.5%) and only marginally participate in service production (37.5%). This divergence from the craft-based paradigm is well-represented in Gerschenkron's (1962) theory of latecomer industrialization, which suggests that non-artisan enterprises frequently pursue economies of scale and

responsiveness to consumer demands rather than artisanal distinctiveness. The notably low aggregate level of service production (1.56%) further reflects persistent institutional barriers such as inadequate incubation, ineffective marketing, and limited technological access that constrain the emergence of knowledge-driven entrepreneurship (Bose & Kumar, 2020).

Thus, the overall impression derived with regard to the types of production perused by the tribal women entrepreneurs establish that Sabai, Bamboo, and Dokra artisans maintain cultural continuity through batch and hybrid production methods, while petty businesses emphasize mass production to achieve scale and meet market demands. Thus, the crafts sector reflects resilience and adaptive hybridity, in contrast to service-based entrepreneurship, which remains constrained by structural challenges.

Entrepreneurial decision-making is a complex process. It is influenced by individual characteristics, social relations, and institutional contexts. Education plays a significant role by enhancing knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy and thereby fostering opportunity recognition and venture creation (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). Conversely, strong risk aversion tends to suppress entrepreneurial motivation and reduces the likelihood of enterprise formation (Caliendo et al., 2009). Beyond formal education, informal networks of family, peers, and role models shape entrepreneurial intentions by influencing perceptions and attitudes (Krueger, 1993). Early exposure to entrepreneurial practices particularly within families and communities facilitates intergenerational transfer of values, confidence, and practical know-how, reinforcing entrepreneurial orientation (Carr & Sequeira, 2007).

At the structural level, supportive welfare policies and targeted entrepreneurial programmes stimulate venture creation. On the other hand, hostile conditions such as financial insecurity, and unstable markets discourage new initiatives (Aidis et al., 2008). In this context, the present study investigates the key motivators and triggering factors underlying the entrepreneurial engagement of tribal women in the study region. Findings are summarized in Table 5.2.

Table No. (2)

Key Initiators of Entrepreneurial Ventures among Respondents

Classification of Respondents Initiator of the Process	Sabai Producer N=104	Bamboo Producer N=48	Dokra Producer N=32	Business, Poultry & Goatery farmer N=08	Total Percentage N=192
Family Members	05(4.80)	18(37.5)	04(12.5)	02(25)	29(15.10)

Community & Neighborhood	13(12.5)	16(33.33)	05(15.62)	00	34(17.70)
Panchayat, Anganwadi Worker, Block Members (Supervisor)	25(24.03)	4(8.33)	02(6.25)	00	31(16.14)
Govt. Officers& Agencies (DIC, Mission Shakti, ORMAS, TDCC, TRIFED, ITDA, LDA OPELIP)	53(50.96)	07(14.58)	07(21.87)	06(75)	73(38.02)
N.G.O and Other Agencies (Mayuri Shilpa, AMBADC, Anwasha, Mayuri, Mauna Dhoni, Sikyanusadan, Ramnath Cottage Industry)	08(7.69)	03(6.25)	14(43.75)	00	25(13.02)

Source: Primary data collected from respondents

The table illustrating the key initiators of entrepreneurial ventures among various rural producer categories highlights critical dynamics in rural entrepreneurship. Government officers and agencies emerge as the primary initiators overall (38.02%), followed sequentially by community and neighborhood members (17.7%), panchayat/anganwadi workers (16.14%), family members (15.1%), and NGOs/other agencies (13.02%). Notably, government agencies dominate the initiation process for Sabai producers (50.96%) and business, poultry, and goaterly farmers (75%), while families and communities hold greater influence among Bamboo producers (family 37.5%, community 33.33%). NGOs are particularly prominent among Dokra producers, driving 43.75% of entrepreneurial initiations.

This distribution aligns with the striking entrepreneurship literature of the past few years. Notable among them are Families are Sieger's (2023)observation that families are the pivotal transmitters of entrepreneurial knowledge and legacy within joint family structures, Jisem Journal's noting(2025) that community networks provide essential social capital and trust, cultivating conducive environments for enterprise development , Tripura Study of (2022)and Ministry of Rural Development, (2023) that Government programmes

play an indispensable role by delivering infrastructure, financial resources, and training, although their impact varies regionally due to disparities in implementation and awareness (Tripura Study, 2022; Ministry of Rural Development, 2023). Complementing these efforts, Thus, the study ascertains that tribal entrepreneurial endeavours result from intricate interactions between institutional actors and social units. Government bodies predominantly initiate formal or larger-scale ventures (e.g., business and poultry sectors), whereas families and communities sustain and legitimize enterprises rooted in natural resources and traditional crafts (e.g., Sabai and Bamboo producers). NGOs function as vital catalysts for craft-based entrepreneurship like Dokra production.

The dynamics of entrepreneurial engagement in traditional crafts such as Sabai, Bamboo, and Dokra are shaped the relationship between the duration of involvement and the strategies for acquiring resources. They together highlight the pivotal roles of embeddedness and human capital in enterprise sustainability. Time, understood as more than a chronological marker, emerges as a key factor influencing the survival and resilience of these ventures. The prevalence of entrepreneurs active for 5 to 10 years (47.39%), and the significant proportion with more than a decade of engagement (36.45%) especially in Sabai and Bamboo crafts. They demonstrate the strong anchorage within socio-cultural networks, as articulated by embeddedness theory (Granovetter, 1985). These sustained periods of activity suggest that deep-rooted community ties, relationships, and social capital are fundamental to business continuity.

Human capital theory further illuminates this process. This theory proposes that the cumulative experience and tacit knowledge acquired by entrepreneurs over extended timeframes are crucial for adaptive capacity and enduring success (Becker, 1964; Jack et al., 2008; Mohanty & Sahu, 2018). The pronounced longevity observed among craft entrepreneurs attests to the value of skill accumulation and local know-how in sustaining rural enterprise.

In parallel, patterns of initial financial resource mobilization reflect the interplay between tradition and evolving practices. Sabai artisans predominantly access government scheme funding, signaling the impact of policy interventions on venture initiation. Conversely, sustained reliance on informal credit sources, particularly through middlemen remains characteristic of Bamboo and Dokra artisans. This syndrome echoes persistent barriers to formal institutional finance in tribal contexts (Rao, 2020; Singh & Mishra, 2021). Though family inheritance plays a lesser role than in prior eras, its ongoing relevance illustrates a gradual shift from traditional familial financing toward external institutional support, paralleling observations by Cooper et al. (1994) and Holtz-Eakin et al. (1994).

The data captured from the field in these two parameters are presented in Table No. 3&4

Table No. (3) Information on the Time Period of Involvement of Entrepreneurs in the Enterprises

Classification of Time	Sabai Craft (N=104)	Bamboo Craft(N=48)	Dokra Art (N=32)	Goatery, Poultry, Petty Business(N=8)	Total Percentage(N=192)
2>5 years	15	4	9	3	31(16.14%)
5>10	59	12	15	5	91(47.39%)
More than 10 years	30	32	8	0	70(36.45%)

Source: Primary Data Collected from respondents.

This temporal distribution illustrates that traditional crafts witness longer entrepreneurial engagement compared to petty businesses, supporting the socio-cultural and experience-based foundations of these ventures.

Table No. (4) Distribution of Sample Respondents by Sources of Initial Seed Capital for Production Activities

Sources of Initial Capital	Sabai Craft N= (104)	Bamboo Craft N= (48)	Dokra Art N= (32)	Goatery, Poultry, Petty Business N= (8)	Total Percentage N= (192)
Inherited from Own Family,	7	3	3	1	14(7.29%)
Bank	16	7	5	0	42(21.87%)
Middleman	17	17	21	2	57(29.68%)
Government Policy Funding	64	07	3	5	79(41.14%)

Source: Primary data collected from respondents

Thus, the study could clearly observe both the critical role of state intervention and the continuing exploitative influence of middlemen in sustaining traditional and small-scale entrepreneurial ventures.

Social capital is still another essential booster in shaping the entrepreneurial journeys of tribal women. It acts as both a source of empowerment and a support system to overcome the unique socio-cultural and economic challenges they face. It refers to the networks of trust, mutual aid, and shared norms that provide tribal women entrepreneurs with vital

resources such as financial help, emotional support, mentorship, and access to market information resources that are often scarce in their communities (Baron & Markman, 2003; Guiso et al., 2004; Ferris et al., 2019). Family support and wider social connections boost women's confidence, encourage risk-taking, and inspire innovation, all of which contribute to the sustainability and resilience of their enterprises (Jisem & Markman, 2025; Lavine & Lombardo, 1984). Moreover, social capital helps to counteract traditional gender-based barriers by fostering trust, reducing information gaps, and providing access to external funding and business networks (Guiso et al., 2004; Javakhadze et al., 2016; Ferris et al., 2019). In tribal communities, collective bodies like self-help groups, federations, and NGOs strengthen not only the economic standing but also the social recognition and decision-making power of women entrepreneurs (Naveen, 2023; Baron & Markman, 2003). This is particularly important for marginalized women who often face intersecting disadvantages due to discrimination and limited mobility (Baron & Markman, 2003; Jisem & Markman, 2025).

Thus, social capital is more than just a resource. It is a transformative element that cultivates identity, skills, and collective progress in tribal women's entrepreneurship. This significance of social capital propelled the researcher to note the support system of the tribal women in the studied locale to such capital and the observation is presented in Table No. 5.

Table No. (5) Support Systems in Women's Enterprises: Family, Community, and Social Network Access (in %)

Indicators	SabaiProduction	Bamboo Production	Dokra Art	Petty Business, Poultry, Goatery	Total Percentage
Percentage of Women Getting Help & Encouragement from Family	65.38%	58.33%	59.37%	37.5%	55.14%
Percentage of Getting Help from Community (Resources/Information)	24.03%	22.91%	28.12%	25%	25%
Percentage of Accessing Social Network for Business Expansion	39.42%	16.66%	6.25%	12.5%	18.7%

Source: Primary data collected from respondents

The table highlights that family support remains the strongest enabler for women's enterprises, with over half of the respondents (55.14%) receiving encouragement from household members. Women engaged in Sabai craft (65.38%), bamboo work (58.33%), and dokra art (59.37%) reported relatively higher family backing, whereas those involved in poultry, goatery, and small business received far less (37.5%). By contrast, community support was minimal across all sectors, averaging only 25%, with dokra practitioners engaging slightly more (28.12%). Similarly, opportunities to expand through wider social networks such as SHGs, cooperatives, or market linkages were very limited (18.7%), though Sabai producers benefited more (39.42%) due to their cooperative history.

Thus, the findings indicate that women's enterprises are largely family-centered and weakly connected to community or institutional networks. Traditional crafts like Sabai and Dokra appear culturally embedded and hence attract more household and community endorsement, while non-traditional ventures such as poultry or small business face greater skepticism. The low levels of social network access indicate the persistent structural barriers to entrepreneurship, despite SHG and government initiatives. These patterns reaffirm that patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's economic agency, keeping their initiatives highly localized and dependent on household approval rather than wider institutional linkages. The primacy of familial support as bonding capital emerge as prominent while revealing limited bridging capital from community and social networks that restrict entrepreneurial growth opportunities.

Conclusion:

The entrepreneurial pathways of tribal women in Odisha transcend simple market-driven explanations. They are rooted in cultural heritage, shaped by institutional interventions, and reinforced through family support. Irrespective of such developments, till date tribal women encounter constraint set by structural barriers. These barriers limit their market access and wider network integration. The study recommends the need of a hybrid support system that not only safeguards cultural wisdom but also enhances institutional outreach and strengthens social linkages to foster truly inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship. Such an approach holds the potential to unlock the transformative role of tribal women's enterprises in broader socio-economic development.

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