

Exploring Darjeeling's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT : Darjeeling, renowned globally for its scenic beauty and rich cultural heritage, harbors a burgeoning entrepreneurial ecosystem ripe with potential. This article delves into the multifaceted landscape of entrepreneurship in Darjeeling, aiming to elucidate the opportunities and challenges that shape its growth trajectory.

Through a comprehensive analysis, this study unveils the diverse sectors driving entrepreneurial endeavors in Darjeeling. From the traditional tea industry to emerging sectors like tourism, hospitality, and artisanal crafts, the region offers a spectrum of opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs. Moreover, the unique blend of local culture and global influences presents fertile ground for innovation and creativity. This study was done based on secondary data collected from multiple sources of evidence, in addition to books, journals, websites, and newspapers.

"Entrepreneurship is neither a science nor an art. It is a practice." – Peter Drucker

Keywords: Entrepreneurial ecosystem, Entrepreneurship, Female Entrepreneurship, Darjeeling, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to A.H. Cole, "Entrepreneurship is the purposeful activity of an individual or a group of associated individuals, undertaken to initiate, maintain or organize a profit-oriented business unit for the production or distribution of economic goods and services".

In entrepreneurship, the individual is the most important element. It is he/she who takes the decision to start an enterprise, and strives to make it a success. Three main factors influence his/her behavior- knowledge, skill and motivation. Entrepreneurship is not limited to any class, community or religion. There is no age bar, for any person who possesses certain behavioral traits and attitudes can work to become an entrepreneur.

Darjeeling district, nestled in the Indian state of West Bengal, is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, vibrant culture, and significant contributions to the tourism and economy of the region. Situated in the Lesser Himalayas, Darjeeling is adorned with lush tea gardens, panoramic views of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks, and a temperate climate that attracts visitors from across the globe.

Economically, Darjeeling is synonymous with its renowned tea industry, producing some of the finest varieties of tea in the world. Tea cultivation forms the backbone of the region's economy, providing livelihoods to thousands of people and contributing significantly to India's export revenue. Additionally, tourism plays a pivotal role in the district's economy, generating employment opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship in sectors such as hospitality, handicrafts, and adventure tourism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sen, D. (2018) the study centers on the entrepreneurial activities and resilience exhibited by female organic tea producers in Darjeeling, India, situated in the realm of alternative agriculture and Fair Trade principles. It underscores the multifaceted responsibilities shouldered by women in their capacities as 'organic cultivators' and 'businesswomen,' which disrupts traditional perspectives on sustainable initiatives and evaluations of Fair Trade.

R Harini & R. Savithri (2021) the manuscript examines the advancement of entrepreneurship and startup ventures by the Indian administration, underscoring the significance of policy frameworks in stimulating innovation and economic development. Diverse strategies have been put into effect to bolster startups in India, including expediting patent requests, easing exit processes, offering financial backing, and allowing self-attestation via a mobile application to simplify regulatory protocols. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of self-reliance policies, the integration of entrepreneurship in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the potential for a significant surge in entrepreneurship and startups in India with the right policies and actions in place.

Mago, S., & Merwe, S. (2023) the paper suggests that policy-makers should develop supportive frameworks to strengthen entrepreneurship in their regions and promote entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) for sustainable economic development.

Karthik Chittibomma (2023) the manuscript amalgamates current literature, industry analyses, and expert perspectives

to offer a thorough comprehension of the opportunities and obstacles in the floriculture sector for fostering entrepreneurship in the North East region of India.

Kuratko, D. (2022) the paper emphasizes a paradox in which entrepreneurs encounter difficulties in legitimizing novel business endeavors within entrepreneurial ecosystems, depending on the degree of technological or market novelty.

III. OBJECTIVES

- The paper aims to explore the entrepreneurial landscape in Darjeeling comprehensively.
- One of the main objectives is to identify the diverse sectors that drive entrepreneurial activities in Darjeeling.
- The paper seeks to understand how historical influences impact the entrepreneurial environment in Darjeeling.
- Another objective is to highlight the significance of the tourism sector in Darjeeling.

IV. OVERVIEW OF DARJEELING ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

The entrepreneurial landscape in Darjeeling encompasses various key sectors, each contributing uniquely to the region's economy and cultural richness. existing entrepreneurial landscape in Darjeeling :

- **Tea Industry:** Darjeeling is renowned for its tea production, offering distinct varieties like black, green, white, and oolong tea. The tea sector not only caters to local consumption but also exports its unique blends globally, attracting tea tourists interested in witnessing the manufacturing process.
- **Tourism:** Darjeeling is a major tourism destination, known for its picturesque landscapes, tea gardens, and historical sites like the UNESCO World Heritage Toy Train. The tourism sector generates significant revenue, with a growing trend towards tea tourism, where visitors can experience the serene atmosphere of tea gardens and learn about the tea-making process.
- **Handicrafts:** The region boasts skilled craftsmanship in woodcraft, bamboo crafts, metal works, and other artisanal products. Handicrafts like jewelry, Tibetan amulets, paintings, and woolen garments are examples of the rich cultural heritage that contributes to the local economy.
- **Agriculture:** Agriculture plays a vital role in Darjeeling's economy, with crops like rice, maize, ginger, potato, cardamom, and various fruits and vegetables being cultivated. The agricultural sector offers opportunities for businesses focusing on agricultural products and farming practices

- **Technology:** The need for IT professionals to address software and hardware issues is evident in both government and private sectors. Establishing IT services to cater to the technological needs of businesses and individuals presents a promising entrepreneurial avenue in Darjeeling.

V. ROLE OF POLICY AND SUPPORT

The Indian government has also taken various initiatives to help entrepreneurship and startups. The government has developed a number of programmes during the past ten years to encourage

entrepreneurship among small businesses, women entrepreneurs, students, etc. All of these are mostly focused on promoting small and rural industries. The following discussion focuses on a few of the programmes and support measures designed to help small and rural industries.

MAKE IN INDIA

"Make in India" is a national program launched by the Government of India in 2014, aimed at encouraging companies to manufacture their products in India. The initiative focuses on various sectors such as manufacturing, electronics, textiles, and infrastructure, with the goal of boosting domestic production, creating jobs, and attracting foreign investment. It's essentially a push to transform India into a global manufacturing hub and enhance its economic growth.

STARTUP INDIA

"Startup India" is another flagship initiative of the Government of India, launched in 2016. It aims to foster entrepreneurship and promote innovation by creating an ecosystem that supports startups. The initiative offers various incentives and support measures for startups, including funding support, tax benefits, simplification of regulations, and access to networks and resources.

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION (AIM)

The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is an initiative by the Government of India that was launched in 2016 with the aim of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship across the country. It is part of the broader Startup India initiative.

AIM has several key objectives:

1. Promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among students and young innovators.
2. Establish Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) in schools across India to provide students with access to tools and resources for innovation and tinkering.
3. Support Atal Incubation Centers (AICs) to nurture startups and provide them with the necessary infrastructure, mentoring, and support services.

- Facilitate the creation of Atal New India Challenges to encourage startups and innovators to address pressing national problems through innovative solutions.

Overall, AIM aims to create a vibrant ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship in India by empowering individuals, especially youth, to unleash their creative potential and solve real-world problems.

AATMA NIRBHAR BHARAT ABHIYAN

The Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, or Self-Reliant India Campaign, is an economic initiative launched by the Government of India in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to make India self-reliant across various sectors by reducing dependency on imports, promoting domestic industries, fostering innovation, and strengthening infrastructure. The campaign encompasses measures to support businesses, stimulate economic growth, and enhance India's competitiveness on the global stage.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD):

NABARD was set up in 1982. The main objective was to promote comprehensive rural development. At that time, it has continued to adopt a multifaceted strategy for promoting rural businesses. Not only does it help agriculture, but it also uses financial and non-credit methods to support small businesses, cottage and village industries, and rural craftsmen. Additionally, it provides counseling and consulting services as well as different training and development initiatives for rural business owners.

The Rural Small Business Development Centre (RSBDC):

The Rural Small Business Development Centre (RSBDC) is a support institution dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship and small business development in rural areas. It provides resources, guidance, and training to aspiring and existing rural entrepreneurs to help them start, grow, and manage their businesses successfully. The RSBDC offers services such as business planning assistance, access to financing options, marketing support, and workshops on various aspects of entrepreneurship. By empowering rural entrepreneurs and promoting economic development in rural communities, the RSBDC plays a vital role in strengthening the rural economy and improving livelihoods.

These initiatives provide valuable resources, financial support, and assistance to aspiring entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses. By reducing regulatory burdens, offering financial schemes, promoting innovation, and facilitating public-private partnerships, these programs create a conducive environment for entrepreneurial success. Additionally, initiatives like the National Entrepreneurship Development Program (NEDP), Startup India Scheme, and others in countries like India focus on empowering

entrepreneurs, promoting innovation, and providing opportunities for growth and development. Overall, government initiatives on entrepreneurship play a crucial role in nurturing a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem and driving economic progress.

VI. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENTREPRENEURS IN DARJEELING

Darjeeling offers several promising entrepreneurial opportunities in various fields. Darjeeling presents numerous opportunities for entrepreneurs in both the tea production and tech innovation sectors, attracting a surge of entrepreneurial activities in these areas.

- Entrepreneurs can explore avenues such as tea plantation, processing units, brand creation, online retail, tourism, export markets, value-added products, sustainable practices, and research and innovation in the tea industry
- The region's rich cultural heritage, particularly in tea production and traditional handicrafts, serves as a foundation for entrepreneurial ventures.
- Furthermore, placing emphasis on conventional handicrafts, artisanal goods, and endorsing local artisans via diverse efforts and partnerships.
- The emergence of startups and projects led by women, alongside efforts to support female entrepreneurs, has been particularly significant in the area, highlighting a varied and welcoming environment for business ventures.

Overall, Darjeeling's natural resources, cultural heritage, and growing entrepreneurial spirit present numerous opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs to start successful businesses in diverse sectors and contribute to the region's economic development.

VII. CHALLENGES FACED BY ENTREPRENEURS

- Historical Influences:** Historical influences play a crucial role in shaping the entrepreneurial environment within the region, as they are intricately connected to contemporary issues such as political instability and ecological emergencies. Entrepreneurs face challenges stemming from this historical backdrop, including navigating intricate socio-political dynamics and adjusting to evolving landscapes.
- Negative Societal Perceptions:** Negative societal attitudes towards women's involvement in the business realm may serve as an impediment, impacting the confidence and growth opportunities of women in the entrepreneurial sphere. Such perceptions have the potential to constrain the

entrepreneurial prospects of women residing in Darjeeling district.

- **Structural Hindrances:** Entrepreneurs in Darjeeling Hills encounter obstacles stemming from historical structural barriers to land rights and plantation regulations, which constrain their prospects for success. The constraints enforced by plantation authorities impede alternative sources of employment, compelling individuals to rely on a subsistence livelihood.
- **Market Marginalization:** The scarcity of social capital presents a noteworthy obstacle for micro-entrepreneurs operating in the hilly terrain of Darjeeling, prompting them to depend on intermediaries who subject them to marginalization. This dependency leads to increased costs for negotiation and enforcement, subsequently further marginalizing these entrepreneurs within the market.
- **Political and Social Turmoil:** The extended period of political unrest and lack of commitment from governmental bodies are significant factors contributing to the difficulties encountered by micro-entrepreneurs in Darjeeling. Political actions such as awarding contracts for construction projects tend to garner more focus than initiatives aimed at fostering entrepreneurship, thus affecting the development of businesses in the area.
- **Economic Setbacks:** External influences such as labor strikes and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to significantly affect small-scale entrepreneurs in Darjeeling, resulting in financial setbacks and impeding the long-term viability of their businesses. The resultant economic challenges may cause disruptions in the day-to-day functioning of enterprises and jeopardize their financial security, thus presenting formidable obstacles for entrepreneurs operating within the locality.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data collected from various sources such as books, journals, websites, and newspapers. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Darjeeling, providing insights into the opportunities and challenges present in the region.

The investigation strives to unveil a variety of prospects accessible to potential entrepreneurs in the area through an examination of different industries, illuminating both the opportunities and challenges present in Darjeeling. By delving into these industries, the study aimed to reveal the range of opportunities open to budding entrepreneurs in the area. The research explored the historical forces shaping the

entrepreneurial landscape in Darjeeling, underscoring the significance of comprehending how these factors influence entrepreneurship in the region. Moreover, the paper recommended that policymakers should establish supportive frameworks to enhance entrepreneurship in the area and foster entrepreneurial ecosystems for sustainable economic growth.

IX. CONCLUSION

The examination revealed a varied entrepreneurial panorama in Darjeeling, encompassing conventional sectors like tea manufacturing and emerging industries such as tourism, hospitality, and artisanal crafts. External elements such as labor conflicts and the repercussions of the COVID-19 outbreak were recognized as potential hurdles for small-scale business proprietors in Darjeeling, underscoring the necessity for resilience and adaptability. Entrepreneurs in Darjeeling encounter challenges originating from historical heritages, societal perceptions towards women in entrepreneurship, and structural obstacles linked to land possession and plantation regulations. Activities backing female entrepreneurs and endeavors steered by women assume a pivotal role in cultivating an inclusive business milieu in Darjeeling, accentuating the region's dedication to diversity and inclusivity.

On the whole, the abundant natural resources, rich cultural heritage, and entrepreneurial zeal in Darjeeling offer a multitude of prospects for budding entrepreneurs to prosper and contribute to the economic advancement of the region. The abundant natural resources, rich cultural heritage, and entrepreneurial spirit in Darjeeling offer numerous opportunities for budding entrepreneurs to thrive and contribute to the economic development of the region.

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