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ABSTRACT

Towards decolonizing 'strategic management': An Ethnographic enquiry into Marwaris' practices, delivering ongoing stability and advantage

In this day and age when various tools, models and frameworks within management in general and strategy in particular, are being taught by business schools and practiced by corporates, how is it that few ethnic business communities continues to thrive on an ongoing basis, generation after generation, without acquiring and practicing them? Or are they acquiring and doing something else which is of a very different kind – of *daily practices* not beholden to business school system and its strategic tools but to the *community* itself, with its indigenous symbols and system of meanings? This dissertation explores one such business community, the *Marwaris*, an indigenous entrepreneurial community in India, that even after engaging commercially with the colonial powers, has stayed immune to the colonial discourse and practices. Here, the indigeneity comes from the fact that many Marwaris continue to be delinked from western ways of managing and governing organizations and have instead treaded paths constitutive of praxis of daily living that involve non-commercial spheres, otherwise to be kept at arm-length's distance within the Eurocentric frames of strategizing. Furthermore, the context of the dissertation is a fragmented industry – dispersed and highly competitive – a space that the field of strategic management has generally shunned as unattractive.

Since capitalist classes in India have attracted resentment and even loathing from the out-groups, that intensified during post-independence Nehruvian socialist era of closed-economy from 1940s to 1980s and its hangover continuing even today, there is a tendency of Marwaris to be secretive to out-groups about their business doings. This out-group to them also included anybody associated with the state machinery because of the community's inherent fear of the state, intensified with the ever-increasing oversight in the last few years through policies such as demonetization, GST and e-way system. Since I was associated with a state-funded institute, it could have become extremely difficult for me to access them for data unless establishing legitimacy with them based on mutual trust and transparency. Therefore, due to these as well as other reasons elaborated in the dissertation, I relied on ethnography that allowed the researcher to 'go native' for a prolonged period of time, to the extent that researcher gets naturalized, thereby eliminating figure-ground contrast, whatsoever. While Marwaris are spread across the length and breadth of the country, I accessed actors in their own cultures. I chose '*Pali*', an industrial town in Marwar region prominently known for textiles with more than five thousand business houses of small and medium scale.

The dissertation comprises two essays, with first one exploring the governance mechanisms deployed by firms within this business community, since they aren't afforded with control levers, both internal and external, that owners of large corporates employ over their managers to overcome issues of information asymmetry, opportunism, moral hazards and effort aversion that are characteristic of any field of commerce.

This raises questions around how Marwari organizations might be addressing agency problems and governance issues, given that the west styled corporate governance mechanisms, which even the Indian nation-state allude to, are not employed by them. In other words, how do indigenous business communities perpetuate with traditional governance mechanisms, without aligning to the matrix of global coloniality of power? I employed Mignolo's concept of decolonial re-existence to explain their governance mechanisms that leveraged upon praxis of daily living to evolve naturalized mechanisms of business governance that interlocks multiple spheres of community life. It was found that rooted in the historicized and embodied practices, these praxes create three kinds of interlocking – temporal, spatial and concomitant – between diverse and seemingly autonomous spheres, making their governance mechanisms effective.

Second essay looks into the dynamics of value appropriation by various stakeholders within textile industry in Pali-Marwar. Extant literature on drivers of value appropriation – either grounded in stakeholder view of strategy or resource-based view – implicitly assumes that it is driven only by commercial spheres and techno-economic aspects such as industry architecture and the respective bargaining powers of stakeholders. In doing so, it ignores socio-cultural spheres that strategic actors are embedded in and are shaped through it in terms of skills and embodied dispositions, much before their organizational innings begun. Therefore, I explore, *how social affiliation of strategic actors' influence value appropriation?* In doing so, this essay respond to the calls made within strategy-as-scholarship to explore larger questions of what are the skills required for strategizing work and how are they acquired.

It was found that in a fragmented industry, differences in value appropriation were grounded in historicized and embodied daily doings of stakeholders, whose source can be traced to the long-standing cultural toolkits of the social classes that they belong to. Marked differences between two sets of actors was observed, one belonging to the traditional entrepreneurial class (EC), and others belonging to the non-entrepreneurial classes (NEC) in terms of their value appropriation and bargaining capabilities, with the former dominating the other. To explain such rooted differences having a bearing on strategizing, I drew upon Bourdieu's practice theory that provides vocabulary and grammar to class-differences playing a role in embodied ways of 'doings' at micro-level. This essay engages with two sets of conversations in strategic management – one on value-appropriation and other on strategy-as-practice scholarship that has not been linked hitherto.