



# Resource Management and Sustenance Issues of Caste Based Occupations in Dharavi

Shilpi Lokre and Aishwarya Dikshit

Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce, Pune, Maharashtra, India

\*Correspondence for materials should be addressed to AD (email: aishwarya.dikshit05@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Dharavi the commercial hub of India sounds weird, a name synonymous with Slums. The largest slum of Asia is home to several flourishing industries- the prominent being leather, Dyeing, Pottery, Bakery and Scrap recycling. These are caste based occupations dotting the topography of Dharavi. On one end one may get the odour of leather on the other there is the sweet aroma of the baker's bread. One may feel nauseated with the smell of dye, but the whiff of potters' clay can be very refreshing. Life not only survives in Dharavi, but thrives in Dharavi. From 200-250 square feet home plus business place witnesses everything right from child birth to labour, celebration to occupation and death. Unbranded goods have their homes in Dharavi. World class leather jackets, shoes, wallets and accessories are christened by Big brands. Scrap management is a classic example of recycling. Clothes stitching and dyeing for renowned brands is done here. The bakers provide bread not only to Dharavi, but to Mumbai and across. The distinct potter community has kept us grounded with their classic earthen ware. The present paper attempts to study resource management in these caste base occupations and the sustenance issues faced by them on a daily basis. The study focuses on challenges faced and the opportunities capitalised by Dharavi residents in their attempt to survive.

**Keywords:** Resource Management; Recycling; Community based occupations; Sustenance

## Introduction

Dharavi – slums or commercial hub of Mumbai, is home to India's unbranded products. Whether its leather goods, clothes dyeing or clay pottery Dharavi houses them all. The 590 acres of Dharavi has a population of about 1,000,000 and is one of the most densely populated areas of the world. Dharavi, founded in 1884 is eroding because of the migration of rural Indians into Urban Mumbai. It is a diverse settlement of people from different ethnicities and religions. The economy of Dharavi is informal in nature as they are community based occupations. They are mostly un-registered units which employ the residents of the sprawling slums. The total annual turnover is estimated to be over US \$ 1 billion with Leather, Pottery, and textiles contributing a major share in the economy. Dharavi is characterised by improper sanitations in slums, harsh working conditions, extreme heat and pollution. The Dharavi Redevelopment Project launched by the Government of Maharashtra by appointment of developers for rehabilitation of slum residents and allowing incentive floor space index(FSI) has met mixed response from the residents.

## Literature Review

Dharavi was formed by carving out parts of Bandra, Mahim, and Sion. Previously a dumping ground, Dharavi had by the 20th century become home to over 20,000 small-scale industries and several communities, who migrated from within the growing city and outside. Among these, the Tamil migration to Dharavi has an interesting and unique trajectory.

The leather industry is the most prominent industry in Dharavi with over 20,000 small businessmen and producers. As the slaughter of cattle is banned in India, the leather comes mainly from goats and sheep. The skin is washed, cut and pressed with the desired pattern. Once it has been made into the final product, it is exported to high-street brands such as Zara and even high-end brands such as Giorgio Armani. A key theme that runs throughout Dharavi is 'nothing is wasted' so leather scraps are either used for energy production or reused by other industries such as pottery within the slum.

Another large industry is plastic recycling which employs about 10,000 people and recycles 60% of Mumbai's plastic waste. A few thousand workers will sort and separate the waste to identify recyclables with plastic being sorted further by colour and quality. The plastic waste is then crushed into microplastics and cleaned thoroughly. Microplastic cannot be melted in Dharavi due to health and safety regulations, so it is sold off to industries throughout India to be melted and reused as different plastics and finally resold to firms.

The 'Kumbharwada' community in Dharavi is renowned for their pottery making skills. The community is spread through narrow alleyways where the potters, the business owners who own the kilns and run the workshops, live and work onsite whilst labourers assist them with firing and finishing pots. The clay is transported from Southern Gujarat, linked to the fact that the community was originally founded by migrants from Gujarat, and then ground into a powder. The powder is then mixed with water to make the clay, from which the pots are made, polished, and fired in the kiln. Potters selling their products directly would make around \$0.10 of profit per medium sized pot whilst wholesalers buying from potters and selling to other consumers would make double the amount of profit. Overall, the literature reveals a paradoxical situation in Dharavi, where community-based occupations simultaneously support economic survival, resource recycling, and environmental degradation.

#### Objectives

- To study prominent community based occupations in Dharavi
- To study resource management in these occupations
- To examine the sustenance issues faced by people in these occupations
- To study the impact of these industries on the Environment

#### Methodology - Sector-Wise Case Studies

The case studies have been created based on first hand information collected from Dharavi. BMCC, Pune organises study tours to Dharavi every year.

#### Scrap Recycling

Dharavi has provided enormous support to the 6R Framework of sustainability. Bhangarwalas of Dharavi bring with them Oil Cans, aluminium sheets, rubber tyres, bikes, chains from all over Mumbai. Scrap as big and bulky as Railway Tracks and Cargo Containers are also received here. Scrap dealers in Dharavi also have tie ups with Industrialists and the Government. The Government floats tenders for Scrap. There are popular scrap merchants in Dharavi like Shivdatta Traders, Rishi Old Paper and Metal Mart, Manjunath scrap mart, Scrapiz, Scrap bin etc. There is quality wise segregation of scrap. Sorting of plastic and metal scrap, dismantling of old furniture, metal scrap and recycling is done here. High Efficiency Gravity Feed Shears, scrap shears, balers & Briquetting are used to shred scrap. The scrap received is powdered or made into metal pellets. There are blade manufacturing units in Dharavi from recycled metal. Cars that are in good condition are sold to Garage. Vintage collectors find their haven in Dharavi.

#### Dyeing and Textile

One steps into this zone and is greeted with a strong, pungent odour. Reams and bundles of cloth come from Surat for Dyeing. Tubs full of colour present a picturesque sight, as if Holi, the festival of colours is round the corner. Readymade white shirts are also sent by leading Garment manufacturers to be dyed in desired colours and patterns. One can also witness production lines for manufacturing of Denims, shirts and trousers. There is a beehive of people assembling together Wedding Gowns and Coats. The noise of tailoring machines can be deafening with tailors stitching Salwar Kurtas, Kids wear and Trousers. It's a huge unbranded market for clothes, once branded the prices increase manifold.

#### Environmental & Sustenance Issues

Many of the Dharavi residents moved to textile and dyeing because of the ban on slaughtering and tanning using harmful chemicals. The textile and dyeing industry has its own challenges. Dyeing chemicals like sulphuric acid and chromium cause serious skin infections. Most of the units are unregistered businesses without government licenses which means without government support and vulnerable to closure. Poor infrastructure, congested alleys make logistics and manufacturing difficult. Community Engaged : Dyeing and Textile Industry majorly run by Muslims.

#### Leather

Dharavi is known for its leather industry, which is primarily dominated by the Muslim community. One of the most income generating industries, it contributes to around 60% of Dharavi's GDP. The leather is pure and used to make various products like bags, belts, purses, wallets, jackets, shoes and more. It is said that the unbranded leather is sold to big companies like Gucci, where the price increases manifold because of the branding. Leather is also sold in the local market, to brands like Dharavi, and the price of the products is incredibly cheap for the pure quality they provide. The products are sold for as low as 150 rupees and may go up to 7500 rupees. However, it is not easy to make leather. It is a long and tedious process, involving many departments and skilled workers.

The work begins with animal skin coming in from the slaughter houses. Sheep, goat and buffalo skin is primarily used to make leather. Killing cows is prohibited, since it is a holy animal for the Hindu community. The slaughter houses are not present inside Dharavi, but in various areas in Mumbai, including Deonar. The skin is then washed and dried in huge buckets with a capacity of about 1 tonne. Further, rock salt is added to remove the moisture and prevent any bacteria from growing, after which it is sent to tanneries. Tanning generates a great deal of smell. It is said that the smell stays on the road for as long as 30 minutes after the van carrying leather passes by. This is the very reason the tanning process shifted from Mumbai to Chennai and Bhivandi. The tanned leather is brought back to Dharavi, where it is trimmed, cut, coloured and designed. Embossing of various brands may also be done, if required.

Nothing from the leather making goes to waste. Even the waste from the trimming process is stuck together using glue to make fake leather. This is then sold to roadside and beachside shops who sell such fake leather and cheap leather products. The leather industry is a marvel indeed, and an example of fine craftsmanship.

### Environmental & Sustenance Issues

Tanning units discharge toxic, chromium laden waste in water bodies and open drains. The toxic chemicals lead to contamination of water. Shavings of leather are not disposed off in a proper manner leading to soil contamination. Gases like hydrogen sulphide and ammonia released in the environment cause air pollution making it difficult to breathe in addition to the pungent and nauseating odour. All these the work conditions of workers are very unsafe and unhygienic. Many tanneries are facing closure and relocation in places like Deonar. Despite the issues, the leather industry remains a vital part of Dharavi and is a means of survival for people. Community Engaged: Leather units run by Dalits and Muslims.

### Pottery

Located far away from the crowded and cramped shops, the pottery industry grows in a spacious, cool area. Dominated by the Gujarati community, the potters are known as "Kumbhars". The specific clay required to make the pots is brought from Gujarat. All kinds of pots are made — from small chai cups to large vases. In the earlier days, pots would be made using wheels and hands. Now, with technological advances, all the work can be done using electric machines. After having made the pots, they are kept in a heated furnace for drying, which typically takes 7 to 8 hours. As many as 300 pots can be heated at once in the furnace. The designs are known for their distinct style, a blend of traditional culture and modern style. The pottery shops are found right outside, where the intricate patterns and vibrant colours light up the road.

Environmental & Sustenance Issues: The kilns and furnaces emit toxic fumes causing bronchial issues like asthma. Burns and eye problems have also been reported in residents of this area. Depleting resources of clay to make pot is yet another problem. Clay was sourced from Gujarat, which is now taken from Bhivandi due to increased transportation cost. Seasonal nature of business, as the heavy monsoon showers of Bombay make it difficult to make and dry pottery. The earthen ware is competing with cheaper Chinese products and are losing in the competition. The next generation of potters are reluctant to get into this occupation as they see no future. The government redevelopment plan does not work in their favour as big, towering buildings cannot have kilns and furnaces, depriving them of their livelihood. Community Engaged: 1400 - 1500 Gujarati families are engaged in this occupation. They are primarily migrants from Saurashtra.

### Analysis

Industry	Communities Engaged	Resource Management	Issues Faced
Scrap Recycling	Dalits and Muslims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scrap is obtained from Railway Tracks and Cargo Containers, Bhangarwalas, garages</li> <li>Government floats tenders for Scrap</li> <li>Tie ups with Industrialists and the Government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health issues like Bronchitis</li> </ul>
Dyeing And Textile	Muslims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reams and bundles of cloth comes from Surat</li> <li>Readymade white shirts are also sent by garment manufacturers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skin issues</li> <li>Poor infrastructure</li> <li>Unregistered businesses</li> </ul>

Leather Making	Dalits and Muslims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal skin from the slaughter houses</li> <li>• Washing, drying, adding salt in Mumbai</li> <li>• Tanning in Chennai</li> <li>• Designing, embossing in Mumbai</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air, soil and water pollution</li> <li>• Health issues due to unhygienic workplace</li> </ul>
Pottery	Gujaratis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The specific clay required to make the pots is brought from Gujarat.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health issues like Bronchitis and burns</li> <li>• Resource depletion</li> <li>• Difficulty in drying pots due to seasonal variation</li> <li>• No future generations</li> <li>• Lack of government support</li> </ul>

### Findings

- The broad based occupations directly linked to the livelihood of people are Pottery, Leather goods manufacturing, Scrap recycling and clothes dyeing. Besides these, are other important industries like- Bakeries, spice retailing and flowers & garland markets.
- Leather, scrap recycling and clothes dyeing industries pose dangerous health hazards to labourers working in these industries. People who own these units have air conditioned offices in Dharavi or have shifted to better places in Mumbai.
- Muslims and Dalits are engaged in leather and textiles. South Indians are engaged in selling flowers and spices. The Kumbhars engaged in pottery are Gujarati's migrated from Saurashtra.
- The effluent released from these prominent industries like animal waste, excreta, pungent and poisonous odour is doing considerable damage to the environment.
- The hot furnaces, kilns and their smoke are causing pollution in the environment.
- The recycling of tins and bins, railways track, bumpers of cars support the environment in a big way.
- Finally, the occupational health hazards in each industry outweigh the benefits to the economy or support to the livelihoods of residents. The Sustenance of Residents is certainly under a big threat.

### Suggestions

- Reconstruction and reorganisation companies should not trample on the livelihoods of Dharavi residents in their attempt for redevelopment.
- Proper effluent disposal systems, health and sanitation systems is the immediate need of Dharavi.
- Roads and workplace infrastructure need immediate attention.
- Such a vast expanse of land, with a high density of population truly deserves a better life.

### Future Scope

There is scope of re organisation and reconstruction of these industries. The Adani group is all set to do this, taking into account the livelihoods of Dharavi residents. Dharavi residents are inspiring college students, by their struggles, their hardships and their zest for life. More colleges should conduct such tours to understand how life not only survives but thrives in Dharavi.

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