

Attitude of Tea Garden Workers towards Higher Education of Their Children: A Study in Telipara Tea Garden, Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal

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Abstract: The tea industry in West Bengal has historically contributed immensely to India's economy. The tea tribe community, the backbone of this industry, has long been socio-economically marginalized, particularly in education. Despite several welfare schemes by the government, the educational advancement within this community is limited. This study aims to replicate and expand upon a previous analytical study focusing on tea garden workers' attitudes towards their children's higher education. Using a structured questionnaire administered to 50 respondents in the Jalpaiguri District, findings reveal that while some parents exhibit aspirations for higher education, a majority still hold unfavorable attitudes. This study aims to understand the socio economic and cultural dimensions shaping parental perspectives and provides actionable recommendations.

Keywords: Attitude, Tea Garden Workers, Education, Socio-economic factors, Parental Aspirations.

Introduction: India stands as the second-largest tea producer in the world, with Assam playing a pivotal role in achieving this distinction. Tea from Assam enjoys global recognition for its unique aroma and flavor, symbolizing both economic prosperity and cultural heritage. However, this industrial success presents a striking paradox the tea garden workers, who form the foundation of this thriving sector, continue to live under socio-economic constraints. The tea tribe community of Assam has long been marginalized, particularly in the field of education. Despite numerous welfare initiatives undertaken by the Assam government to uplift this community, the educational attainment among its members remains considerably low. Several factors contribute to this situation, among which the attitude and perception of parents toward their children's education especially higher education play a determining role. Parental encouragement, awareness, and valuation of education significantly affect children's access to schooling and their persistence in pursuing studies beyond the primary level. The outlook of tea garden workers toward higher education can thus be seen as a reflection of both their socio-economic realities and cultural orientations. This study seeks to explore the attitude of tea garden workers toward the higher education of their children in a tea garden located in the Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. It is modeled on an earlier study conducted in the Golaghat District of Assam but extends its scope by offering deeper insights into the socio-cultural dynamics, assessing the level of educational awareness, and identifying the systemic barriers that hinder educational advancement within tea garden families.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of education aspired by the tea garden workers for their children.
2. To examine the overall attitude of tea garden workers towards higher education.
3. To determine whether there is a significant difference in attitude between single and co-parents.

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4. To identify attitudinal differences between literate and illiterate parents.
5. To provide recommendations based on findings for policy and educational planning.

Review of related study:

Bosummatari and Goyari (2013) identified *low female literacy, early marriages, and lack of educational infrastructure* as major reasons behind poor school retention in tea garden areas. They emphasized that traditional gender roles, combined with inadequate school facilities and limited access to secondary education, significantly restrict girls' participation in formal education. Early marriage not only cuts short girls' schooling but also perpetuates the cycle of illiteracy and poverty within these communities.

Deb Nath and Nath (2014) expanded on these findings by identifying *child labor, financial constraints, and gender disparities* as additional barriers to education. Their study revealed that children, particularly boys, are often compelled to engage in wage labor to supplement family income, leading to frequent absenteeism and early dropout. Financial instability and the high opportunity cost of education make schooling a lesser priority for many families, while gender biases continue to limit girls' educational opportunities.

Roy (2021) further highlighted several *systemic and infrastructural challenges*, including *long distances to schools, poor health conditions, lack of transportation, and unsupportive school environments*. The study noted that inadequate school infrastructure and poor connectivity discourage regular attendance, especially in remote tea garden areas.

Sahu and Bhuyan (2022) focused on the *high prevalence of dropout rates* and emphasized *attitudinal barriers among parents*. They observed that many parents undervalue formal education, prioritizing immediate income over long-term educational benefits.

Begum and Islam (2022) discussed *institutional neglect and poor socio-economic conditions* as key factors hampering educational progress. Their research pointed out that inadequate government attention, insufficient educational resources, and persistent poverty collectively hinder the community's ability to achieve educational advancement.

These studies provide a backdrop for analyzing how deeply entrenched socio-cultural and economic issues shape the educational aspirations of tea garden workers.

Methodology

A descriptive survey method was employed for the study. Jalpaiguri district, known for its large number of tea gardens, was chosen as the study area. The researcher selected Telipara tea garden, yielding a total sample size of 50 respondents.

Data Collection Tool: An attitude questionnaire consisting of 24 items was used. The tool was validated and designed to elicit attitudes on a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Respondent Demographics:

- 21 single parents, 29 co-parents
- 28 literate parents, 22 illiterate parents

Scoring Scheme:

- For positive statements: Strongly Agree = 5, Strongly Disagree = 1
- For negative statements, The scoring was reversed
- Neutral point considered at 72 (24 items * 3)

Analysis and Discussion**a. Educational Aspiration**

Level of education	Respondents (%)
Primary	4%
Middle	20%
High School	22%
Higher Secondary	10%
Graduate	4%
Post Graduate	10%
As affordable	6%

Most parents are unaware of the educational ladder, with some unable to specify any goal. This reflects not only a lack of information but also possibly low aspirations influenced by their socio-economic status.

b. General Attitude towards Higher Education

Attitude Type	Percentage
Favorable	28%
Unfavorable	72%

A significant portion holds an unfavorable attitude, indicating low confidence in higher education's utility or access.

c. Comparison by Parental Structure

Parent Type	Mean Score	SD	C.R.	Significance
Single	52.6	18.65	2.50	Not significant
Co-parents	64.2	18.65		At 0.01 level

No statistically significant difference was found between single and co-parents.

d. Comparison by Literacy

Literacy Status	Mean Score	SD	C.R.	Significance
Literate	71.32	35.80	0.424	Not significant
Illiterate	75.73	32.00		At 0.05 level

Both literate and illiterate parents showed similarly low levels of positive attitude toward higher education, reflecting that mere literacy may not equate to educational awareness.

Key Findings

Most parents have low educational aspirations for their children, as they prioritize immediate financial stability over long-term educational goals. Many view education only as a means to basic literacy or low-level employment rather than a path to upward mobility.

- The majority of parents show an unfavorable attitude towards higher education, believing it to be unnecessary or impractical due to limited job opportunities and the high cost associated with further studies.
- There are no significant attitudinal differences between various parent categories or literacy groups, indicating that both literate and illiterate parents share similar perceptions toward their children's higher education.

- Awareness and understanding of higher education opportunities are critically low, with most parents unaware of scholarships, government schemes, or nearby institutions offering higher studies.
- Economic constraints remain a major deterrent, as families struggle to meet basic needs and cannot afford educational expenses beyond the secondary level.
- Cultural factors, such as early marriage among girls and the expectation that boys contribute to household income, further discourage the pursuit of higher education.
- Lack of role models and limited exposure to educated individuals within the community contribute to low motivation and weak aspirations among both parents and children.
- Institutional and infrastructural barriers, including inadequate school facilities, lack of counseling, and minimal outreach programs, further hinder awareness and access to higher education.

Overall, the findings indicate that a combination of financial hardship, cultural traditions, and limited institutional support shapes the unfavorable attitude of tea garden workers toward higher education.

Recommendations

- Awareness Programs:** Educational departments should run community-level campaigns explaining the benefits of higher education.
- Parental Engagement:** Schools should involve parents through workshops, especially designed to increase educational aspirations.
- Infrastructure Support:** Improve transportation and hostel facilities for students from remote gardens.
- Incentivize Education:** Provide financial incentives, such as scholarships and skill based education.
- Community Role Models:** Showcase successful students from the community to change perceptions.
- Counseling Services:** Introduce vocational and career counseling in schools.

Conclusion

The tea tribe community is a vital yet underserved part of Assam's society. This replicated study reinforces the finding that attitudes towards higher education remain largely unfavorable due to systemic neglect, poor awareness, and low aspiration levels. Policymakers must view education as a long-term investment in these communities and foster inclusive educational ecosystems where both children and parents are encouraged to dream bigger.

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