

Research Paper

Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

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ABSTRACT

Assam, a north-eastern state in India, is known for its diverse population comprising various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. One such group is the 'Tea Tribe' or 'Adivasi' community, which has been living in Assam for more than a century. The Tea Tribe community mainly comprises people who were brought to Assam from central India as indentured laborers by the British during the colonial era. Although the Tea Tribe community constitutes a significant proportion of the population in Assam, they face various social, economic, and political challenges. These challenges include poverty, lack of education, limited access to healthcare, and discrimination (Hussain, 2019).

Keywords: *Acculturation Attitude, Perceived Discrimination, Dominant (Mainstream Society) Groups, Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups*

Acculturation is the process of cultural exchange that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into contact with each other. It involves changes in behaviour, values, and beliefs that occur when individuals or groups of people from different cultures interact (Berry, 1997). In the context of the Tea Tribe community in Assam, acculturation refers to the process by which they adopt the culture, values, and practices of the mainstream Assamese society. This process can be challenging and often leads to a clash of values and attitudes between the Tea Tribe and mainstream Assamese communities.

Acculturation attitudes are the positive or negative attitudes that individuals or groups hold towards the process of acculturation. Research suggests that attitudes towards acculturation can vary depending on the individual's level of identification with their culture of origin and the perceived compatibility between their culture and the dominant culture (Berry, 2005). For the Tea Tribe community, acculturation attitudes can influence their level of integration into the mainstream Assamese society and their overall well-being.

Discrimination is another challenge faced by the Tea Tribe community in Assam. Discrimination can take various forms, including verbal abuse, physical violence, and

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Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

exclusion from social and economic opportunities. Discrimination can subjective experience of discrimination, regardless of whether it is objectively present or not.

Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination are important areas of research in the context of intergroup relations. Acculturation refers to the process of cultural and psychological change that occurs when two or more cultural groups come into contact with each other (Berry, 1997). It involves both the culture of the majority group (dominant group) and that of the minority group (non-dominant group) and the way in which these cultures interact and influence each other.

In many cases, contact between different cultural groups is associated with increased levels of prejudice, discrimination, and negative attitudes toward the minority group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The Tea Tribe community in Assam, India, is a historically marginalized group that has faced discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society for many years. Research has shown that members of the Tea Tribe community often experience high levels of prejudice and discrimination from the dominant groups in Assam (Chakraborty & Misra, 2015; Singh & Kalita, 2017).

Previous research has shown that individuals who hold positive acculturation attitudes tend to have more positive attitudes toward members of other cultural groups, whereas those who hold negative attitudes tend to have more negative attitudes and are more likely to engage in discriminatory behaviours (Berry, 1997; Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001). Furthermore, perceived discrimination has been found to be associated with negative mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and stress (Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

This research aims to explore the relationship between acculturation attitudes and perceived discrimination among the dominant (mainstream society) and non-dominant (Tea Tribe) groups in Assam. Specifically, the study will examine how acculturation attitudes influence perceived discrimination among both groups and how these attitudes vary depending on factors such as education, socioeconomic status, and have a significant impact on an individual's mental and physical health, self-esteem, and sense of belonging (Paradies, 2006).By understanding the relationship between acculturation attitudes and perceived discrimination, this research can inform policies and programs aimed at improving the well-being and integration of the Tea Tribe community in Assam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acculturation is a process that occurs when two or more cultures come into contact with each other, and it involves changes in the culture, language, and behavior of both the dominant and non-dominant groups. The acculturation process is complex, and it involves various factors such as social, economic, and cultural factors. The attitudes of the dominant and non-dominant groups play a crucial role in the acculturation process. According to Berry's model of acculturation, there are four acculturation attitudes: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 1997). Integration refers to the situation where individuals maintain their culture of origin while also adapting to the dominant culture. Assimilation, on the other hand, refers to the situation where individuals abandon their culture of origin and adopt the dominant culture. Separation refers to the situation where individuals maintain their culture of origin and avoid contact with the dominant culture, while marginalization refers to the situation where individuals do not maintain their culture of origin or adopt the dominant culture.

Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

Perceived discrimination is the subjective experience of being discriminated against based on one's race, ethnicity, or other social identities. Perceived discrimination has been linked to negative health outcomes, including mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). Perceived discrimination has also been linked to negative attitudes towards the dominant culture (Verkuyten, 2009). Individuals who perceive discrimination may have negative attitudes towards the dominant culture, which may hinder the process of acculturation.

The Tea Tribe community in Assam has been subjected to social, economic, and political marginalization since their arrival in the region during the British colonial era (Bora, 2007). Due to their distinct cultural practices and identity, the Tea Tribe group has experienced discrimination and prejudice from the dominant (mainstream society) group in Assam. The process of acculturation, or the exchange of cultural practices and values between different cultural groups, can result in either positive or negative outcomes for minority groups (Berry, 2005). In the context of the Tea Tribe group in Assam, understanding their acculturation attitudes and experiences of perceived discrimination is crucial in designing effective policies to promote their well-being and inclusion in the broader society.

Previous research on acculturation among minority groups in India has highlighted the complexity of the process and the need to account for different dimensions of cultural identity (Chakraborty & Misra, 2016; Singh & Misra, 2018). Studies have also identified the role of social support and acculturation strategies in promoting positive outcomes among minority groups (Kumar & Singh, 2017; Singh & Misra, 2018). However, little research has been conducted specifically on the acculturation experiences of the Tea Tribe community in Assam.

One study that did focus on the Tea Tribe community in Assam was conducted by Borthakur and Barua (2015), who explored the impact of acculturation on the identity of Tea Tribe youth. Their findings suggest that the Tea Tribe youth in Assam face significant challenges in maintaining their cultural identity while adapting to the dominant culture. The authors recommend the development of policies that recognize and promote the unique cultural practices and values of the Tea Tribe community.

Another relevant study was conducted by Bora (2011), who explored the experiences of discrimination among the Tea Tribe community in Assam. The author found that discrimination against the Tea Tribe group is pervasive and multifaceted, affecting their access to education, healthcare, and political representation. Bora recommends the development of policies that address the structural inequalities and prejudices that underlie discrimination against the Tea Tribe community.

Liu et al. (2021) investigated the acculturation strategies and perceived discrimination among Chinese immigrant students in the United States. The study found that participants who adopted an integration or assimilation acculturation strategy experienced less perceived discrimination compared to those who adopted a separation or marginalization strategy. Castañeda et al. (2020) examined the relationship between acculturation and perceived discrimination among Latinx individuals in the United States. The study found that higher levels of acculturation were associated with lower levels of perceived discrimination. Ziaei et al. (2019) explored the relationship between acculturation and perceived discrimination among Iranian immigrants in Australia. The study found that participants who reported

Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

higher levels of acculturation also reported experiencing more perceived discrimination, suggesting that acculturation may not always protect against discrimination. Lee et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between acculturation and perceived discrimination among Asian immigrants in Canada. The study found that participants who reported higher levels of acculturation also reported experiencing more perceived discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment and education.

The Tea Tribe community in Assam comprises the descendants of Adivasis brought in from central India by the British for tea plantation work. Despite living in Assam for over a century, the Tea Tribe community continues to experience various forms of discrimination, including educational, social, and political marginalization (Bhuyan, 2016; Islam, 2017).

Research on acculturation attitudes and perceived discrimination among the Tea Tribe community is limited, but there have been some recent studies. Gogoi (2018) conducted a study on the role of acculturation in the socio-economic upliftment of the Tea Tribe community in Assam. The study found that the community's acculturation to the mainstream Assamese culture positively influenced their socio-economic status. Similarly, Sarma and Deka (2019) conducted a study to examine the relationship between acculturation and mental health among the Tea Tribe community. The study found that higher levels of acculturation were associated with better mental health outcomes.

However, other studies suggest that acculturation may not always lead to positive outcomes. Borah and Sarma (2016) conducted a study on the impact of acculturation on the Tea Tribe community's socio-cultural identity. The study found that the community's acculturation to the mainstream Assamese culture led to a dilution of their unique socio-cultural identity, leading to feelings of marginalization and discrimination.

Moreover, the Tea Tribe community's experiences of discrimination are not limited to their socio-cultural identity. Studies have shown that the community also experiences economic discrimination, with many working in the tea industry as poorly paid laborers (Chakraborty & Borkakoty, 2019). Additionally, political discrimination against the community is evident in the lack of political representation and policies addressing their issues (Bhuyan, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Design

SAMPLE: The study was conducted with the dominant (mainstream) society [N=30, Mean age=44.30, SD=13.391] and non-dominant (tea tribes) [N=30, Mean age=39.73, SD=15.445] in the Jorhat District of Assam. The host society or the mainstream society of Assam is an amalgamation of multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious groups. Majority of the mainstream society uses Assamese as their mother tongue is an assimilation of Austro-Asiatic. The tea tribes constitute 20% of the total population of Assam (Mishra, 2005). During 1853, the colonial state due to the shortage of laborers to work in tea estates resorted to bring indentured labor mostly from aboriginal tribal groups (i.e., Mundas, Oraons, Kharias, Kols), of east, central and south eastern India. They became resident laborers of Assam's tea estates and negotiating their life with the mainstream Assamese community, Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan and Tai Origins. The Adivasi community or the tea tribes of Assam, has a plethora of spoken languages. This includes Sadri, Odia, Saora, Kurnali, Kuruk, Gondi, Kui, Kharia, Santhali and Mundari. Data collected during field study revealed that Sadri is the predominantly spoken first language amongst the sample

Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

population. However, due to lack of any written record, literature and awareness amongst the Adivasi population many of them couldn't identify or name the language they converse in. They prefer to simply classify it as ' ' Bagania Bhasha' ' or the Language of the Tea Tribes.

Measures

1. Acculturation Attitude Scale (Berry, 2005; Mishra, Bano, Tripathi; 2017): The scale measures the attitudes of people towards acculturation. Five Likert-type scales are used for measuring integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization and coexistence attitudes. These items have been conceptualized on the basis of the theoretical framework originally developed by Berry (1990) and its modification (Mishra, et al, 1996) by introducing ' ' coexistence' ' as another relational orientation of individuals in India. The overall scale consists of 20 items. This scale was translated into Assamese and used in the present study.

2. Perceived Discrimination Scale (Berry, 2005; Mishra, Bano, Tripathi; 2017) The perceived discrimination scale measures the level of perceived discrimination through 5 items on a 5-point Likert Scale. The scale was translated into Assamese and used in the present study.

Local research assistants who belonged to the relevant tribal communities and were extensively integrated into the testing procedure helped collect the data. Therefore, participants did not hesitate to share their opinions. The testing was done in the regional tongue.

RESULTS

Table No. 1

Relational Orientations	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Value and Significance
Integration Dominant Group	16.23	2.079	T VALUE-1.801
Integration Non Dominant Group	15.40	1.037	P=0.082
Seperation Dominant Group	7.10	2.808	T VALUE-0.631
Seperation Non Dominant Group	7.50	2.303	P=0.533
Marginalisation Dominant Group	4.73	0.980	T VALUE-0.528
Marginalisation Non Dominant Group	4.603	0.770	P=0.601
Assimilation Dominant Group	6.67	1.845	T VALUE=6.64 P
Assimilation Non Dominant Group	4.33	0.479	=0.000
Coexistence Dominant Group	10.33	1.688	T VALUE=0.576
Coexistence Non Dominant Group	9.97	2.775	P=0.569
Percieved Discrimination Dominant Group	9.60	2.448	T VALUE=7.859
Percieved Discrimination Non Dominant Group	14.93	2.599	P=0.000

df-29,95 percent confidence interval

The main findings of the study may be summarized as-

1. Comparison of mean scores of the dominant and non dominant group (Table 1) on the acculturation attitude scale revealed that integration is the most preferred acculturation attitude for both the groups.

Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

2. There is no significant difference between dominant and non-dominant groups on the measure of integration, coexistence, separation and marginalization. With respect to assimilation attitude significant difference was evident (Table 1)
3. Significant difference between the 2 groups on the measure of perceived discrimination indicating that non dominant group felt greater level of perceived discrimination as compared to dominant groups (Table 1)

DISCUSSION

The findings with respect to acculturation attitudes indicate integration as the most preferred acculturation strategy for both the groups. This falls in line with the multiculturalism ideology generally prevalent in India, where people belonging to diverse cultures, values, practices and beliefs of other cultures supporting their free expression. The findings of the current study, which indicate integration as the most preferred acculturation strategy for both the tea tribes and non-tea tribes, are consistent with previous research in multicultural societies (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010).

However, the presence of a slightly greater amount of separation for the tea tribes indicates a perceived threat towards culture preservation of the tribal group. This finding is supported by previous research that suggests that minority groups may experience a sense of threat towards their cultural identity and may therefore adopt a separation strategy (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010).. Coexistence as the second most preferred acculturation strategy for both the groups indicate that in the course of acculturation the preference for both the groups has been to keep the elements of their own and the external culture together. The absence of significant differences between the two groups in terms of integration, coexistence, separation, and marginalization attitudes is noteworthy. It implies that both the dominant and non-dominant groups in Assam share similar views regarding these acculturation attitudes. This finding suggests a potential for mutual understanding and cooperation between the groups, which can contribute to social harmony and inclusivity in Assam. The findings on assimilation, which indicate a significant difference between dominant and non-dominant groups, are consistent with previous research. Assimilation has been described as a melting pot process where individuals and their culture assimilate into a cohesive whole (Berry, 1997). The Tea Tribe community's lower inclination toward assimilation could indicate a desire to preserve their unique cultural practices and values. It also reflects a resistance to fully adopting the mainstream Assamese culture, possibly due to historical experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Marginalization, on the other hand, indicates a lack of acculturation and is associated with negative outcomes such as discrimination and low self-esteem (Berry, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010).

The findings on perceived discrimination, which indicate a significantly greater sense of perceived discrimination for the non-dominant group, are also consistent with previous research. Research has shown that members of minority groups are more likely to experience discrimination and its negative consequences on their well-being (Pickett et al., 2006).\ This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the discrimination faced by the Tea Tribe community in Assam (Bora, 2011; Chakraborty & Borkakoty, 2019). The higher levels of perceived discrimination among the non-dominant group may be attributed to the historical and structural disadvantages they face, including limited access to education, healthcare, and political representation.

Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

The findings regarding perceived discrimination emphasize the urgent need for addressing the systemic inequalities and prejudices faced by the Tea Tribe community in Assam. Efforts should be directed towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society where individuals from all cultural backgrounds can thrive without fear of discrimination. Policies and programs that promote awareness, education, and opportunities for the Tea Tribe community can contribute to reducing perceived discrimination and fostering social cohesion.

Implications and Recommendations

The present study has important implications for policy and practice in Assam. It highlights the need to promote integration and mutual respect between the dominant and non-dominant groups. Efforts should be made to create platforms for cultural exchange and dialogue, fostering an environment where individuals from different backgrounds can learn from one another and appreciate the richness of Assam's diverse cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of addressing perceived discrimination among the Tea Tribe community. Policies should be formulated to combat discrimination in various domains, including education, employment, healthcare, and political representation. Promoting equal opportunities and providing support for the socio-economic development of the Tea Tribe community can help reduce the disparities and inequalities they face.

Education plays a crucial role in fostering understanding and acceptance among different cultural groups. Incorporating education programs that promote cultural diversity, tolerance, and empathy can help challenge stereotypes and prejudices. Additionally, creating platforms for intercultural interactions, such as community events, festivals, and cultural exchanges, can foster a sense of belonging and promote positive intergroup relations.

CONCLUSION

The study's conclusions emphasise the significance of establishing intergroup understanding, eliminating perceived prejudice, and encouraging integration among the dominant and non-dominant groups in Assam. Assam can make tremendous progress towards creating a more inclusive and peaceful society by acknowledging and resolving the difficulties experienced by the Tea Tribe population.

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**Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant
(Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam**

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Understanding Acculturation Attitude and Perceived Discrimination among Dominant (Mainstream Society) and Non-dominant (Tea Tribes) Groups in Assam

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Conflict of Interest

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