



Attitude of Guardians Towards *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)* Among Agro-Occupational Communities of West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of the Government of India (GoI) to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the country in a mission mode. Present study undertaken in three Southern districts of West Bengal to assess the attitude of the guardians towards SSA. 180 respondents were selected from 9 villages from these districts. An attitude scale was developed and administered through interview method. A comparative assessment was done between the guardians of 6-14 yr. old students of elementary education from agri-occupational and non-agri-occupational communities. The study revealed that most of the respondents have low to moderate level of favourable attitude. Although they have considerably favourable attitude regarding the provision of free educations, books and other learning materials and midday meal facilities; but their favouritism is less in case of teachers' attitude towards students and school environment. Some other aspects like assuring household food security, job security to the poor, considering English also as a medium of instruction to attract good students should be kept in mind for all-round success through SSA.

Keywords: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Attitude, Likert Scale, Midday Meal

Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate in Economics from India in his work, "Development as Freedom", places education as a core part of 'social opportunity' alongside health facilities at a societal level (Sen, 1999). Moreover, education supports delivery of other development targets, including the MDGs; and if universal primary education is not achieved, delivery of the other goals will also be in jeopardy (McGinnis, 2006; Ratnesh et al., 2008; Hanushek and Woessmann, 2010). Universal Elementary Education or Education for All means providing universal enrolment, universal retention, equity and universal achievement of children.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a flagship programme of the Government of India (GoI) to attain Universal

Elementary Education (UEE) in the country in a mission mode. SSA was started in partnership with the State Governments, its aims to provide useful and relevant education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years manifested through enrolment and retention of all children in school, bridging of gender and social category gaps in enrolment, retention and learning and enhancement in the learning attainment of children at the primary and upper primary level. Traditional farming communities in rural areas are heavily dependent on agro-based occupations as their primary livelihood and there are numerous factors which influence the school participation of children from this occupational sector. The case of child labour

and educational access showed the relationships between child labour and poverty (Rao, 2000). The child work hinders schooling. The finding of some researches revealed the relationships between schooling dropout and child labour. The research indicates poverty, gender, location, household education levels, household income levels, and season often interact with child labour to influence a child's access to education (Blunch and Verner, 2000; Admassie, 2003; Andvig *et al.* 2007; Ersado, 2005). In many cases, girls have more duties than boys (Kane, 2004). The number of siblings and increase in family size (Choudhury, 2006) or father's level of education (Sengupta and Guha, 2002) is significantly related to dropout behaviour. It is found that the guardians of the rural communities based on Agricultural occupation are very reluctant to send their children to schools. Pritchett (2004) pointed out that the guardians engaged in agricultural occupation are more likely to struggle to choose between schooling of their child and use of the un-paid child's labour on the farm. Rural areas are also poorly equipped with schools and the quality of education provided is typically low – both could further raise the costs and diminish the perceived return from schooling. Incentives to schooling may be lacking. Availability of job opportunities acquiring education is also a critical determinant of household decisions about investment in schooling (Clemens, 2004). In this backdrop, the present study was undertaken in selected South Bengal districts to enquire about the attitude towards SSA of the guardians from the agri-occupational background.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Selection of area and respondents

The study is empirical and based on primary data survey. It was conducted in three purposively selected South Bengal districts namely Birbhum, Burdwan and Murshidabad according to the convenience of the researchers. From each district 3 villages were selected purposively and 20 families from each village having children of age group 6-14 years were selected randomly. Thus, altogether 180 families from 9 villages were selected for the study and respondents both from agricultural and non-agricultural occupational backgrounds were included to get a comparative picture. A pre-tested

interview questionnaire was employed to collect the data.

Development of attitude scale

For measurement of the attitude of the guardians, an attitude scale was developed following the methodology proposed by Likert (1933). The following steps were followed:

- (a) Lists of statements which reflect the attitude towards the SSA were collected covering all the elements of SSA. Care had been taken to make the list exhaustive and include positive and negative statements to make the scale appropriate.
- (b) After a preliminary processing of the statements based on the indicators proposed by Edwards (1957), the statements were sent to the experts for relevancy test. Relevancy test is one type of validity test (content validity) regarding the relevancy of the statements in relation to the attitude to be measured. Those statements having a relevancy score of 0.70 or more were selected.
- (c) Cronbach Alpha was calculated for final selection of statements and reliability test of the scale. A Cronbach Alpha value of 0.70 or more is acceptable for a reliable scale. Repeated reliability analysis was performed through SPSS statistical software to retain usual number of attitude statements. The selected statements were included in the final attitude scale (table 2) and Cronbach Alpha value was 0.708 including all the statements. Finally eight attitude statements were retained for analysis.

Each statement was assessed on a five-point ordinal scale continuum with "strongly agree", "agree", "undecided", "disagree" and "strongly disagree" with 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The scoring reversed in case of negative statements. The mean score was calculated for each attitude statement and a mean score below 3 indicates unfavourable attitude.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic profile of the respondents

It is imperative to know the socio-economic

Table 1: Socio-Economic Background of Respondent Families

Socio-Economic Characters	Unit of Analysis	Mean value		t-value
		Agro-Occupation (N=96)	Other Occupation (N=84)	
Age of guardian/father	Year	41.34	39.87	1.65
Educational status of the father	Score ^a	1.65	4.08	8.68**
Educational status of the mother	Score ^a	1.77	3.69	7.63**
Media contact level of guardian	Score ^b	3.81	6.31	7.74**
Yearly income of the family	INR	41,842.71	109,529.76	7.38**
Asset possession of the family	Score ^c	7.95	10.44	4.23**
Money spent for child education	INR	1,290.10	4,396.83	5.35**

^aScore is based on educational scale: 0 = Illiterate; 1 = Can read and write; 3 = Primary 4 = Elementary; 5 = Secondary; 6 = Higher Secondary; 7 = Graduate & Above
^bScore is the sum of extent of exposure to different media: 0 = Never; 1 = Sometimes; 2 = Always
^cScore is the sum of values of different assets

**Significant at $p=.001$ level

background of the respondent families to perceive the perspectives of any study. Table 1 depicted the socio-economic background of the respondent families. The average age of the household head is 41.34 and 39.87 years respectively for agro-occupational and non-agro-occupational families which is statistically at par with each other. So, in general, the age of the household head of families having 6-14 years aged children is around 40 years.

In all other socio-economic characters, non-agro-occupational families are significantly higher in status. In case of both, fathers and mothers from agricultural families attained education upto primary level (Education score is 1.65 and 1.77 respectively), whereas in non-agricultural families, the same is upto elementary level (Education score is 4.08 and 3.69 respectively). In media exposure and asset possession, agricultural families are significantly low (score value = 3.81 and 7.95 respectively) in status in comparison to non-agricultural families (score value = 6.31 and 10.44 respectively).

Values of t-test for both the cases (7.74 and 4.23 respectively) are significant at $p = .001$ level. Because the average yearly income of the non-agricultural families is significantly higher (₹ 109.529 thousand against 41.842 thousand; t-value = 7.38 which is significant at $p = .001$), the money spent for child education is also significantly higher (₹ 4.397 thousand against 1.290 thousand per annum; t-value = 5.35 which is significant at $p = .001$) in comparison to agricultural families.

Attitude towards Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA)

A positive attitude towards any activity proves its utility and effectiveness. Attitude towards SSA also reflects the effectiveness of SSA in the rural agrarian society of West Bengal. The present section assessed attitude of the guardians towards SSA.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to attitude towards SSA

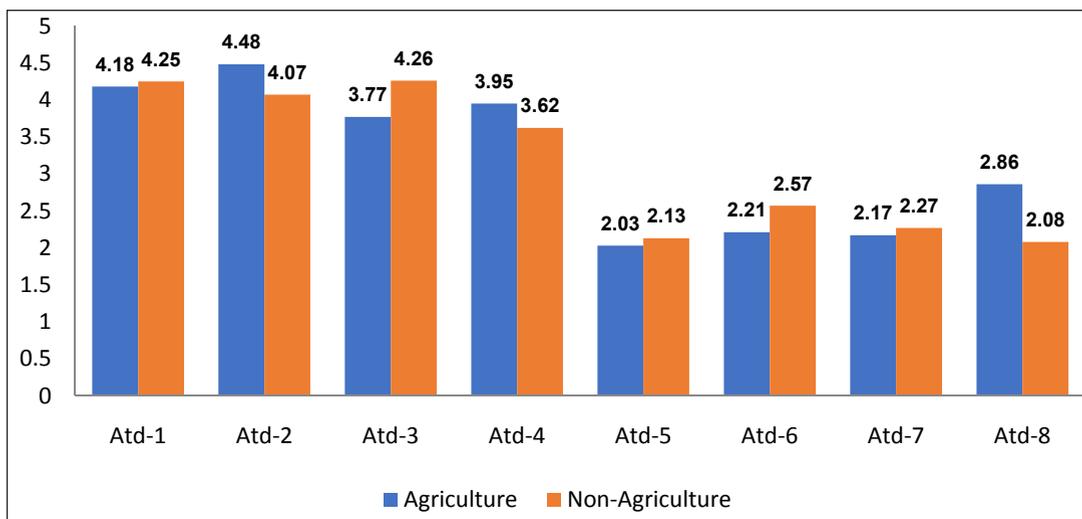
Attitude Class	Agro-Occupation (N=96)	Other Occupation (N=84)
Less Favourable	35 (36.46)	23 (27.38)
Moderately Favourable	61 (63.54)	59 (70.24)
Highly Favourable	0 (0.00)	2 (2.38)
Chi-Square = 3.58 ($p = 0.16$)		

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage"

Table 2 distributes the respondent guardians according to their attitude towards SSA and reveals that they have low to moderate level of favourable attitude. Although 2.38% of respondents from non-agricultural communities had highly favourable attitude towards SSA but no respondent from agricultural communities had shown highly favourable attitude. However, Chi-square value indicates no significant difference between these two communities ($p = 0.16$). It may be due to the fact that although SSA have provided many good facilities for the students, but there is lacking in proper implementation of SSA in rural schools.

Table 3: Statement-wise assessment of attitude

Code	Attitude Statements	Mean	Attitude towards SSA
Atd-1	Midday meal is a very good step for spreading elementary education (+)	4.21	+
Atd-2	Providing free books, dress and other learning materials is a good step for attracting children to school (+)	4.29	+
Atd-3	Providing free elementary education to all is one of the best decisions of the government (+)	4.00	+
Atd-4	Teachers attitude changed after spread of SSA (+)	3.79	+
Atd-5	Without assuring household food security, midday meal only can't attract children to school (-)	2.08	+
Atd-6	Without job security to the poor, free elementary education is a wrong step of the government (-)	2.38	+
Atd-7	School environment have not been improved after implementation of SSA (-)	2.22	+
Atd-8	Govt. schools should adopt English as medium of instruction to attract good students (-)	2.96	+



Mean Value = 3.21 (Agriculture); 3.16 (Non-agriculture). Wilcoxon (Z) = 3.52 (p = .001)

Fig. 1: Comparative picture between agriculture and non-agricultural occupation

Teachers’ shabby attitude towards students develop a moderately favourable attitude towards SSA. A statement wise discussion in the following section may answer these attitudes.

Providing free books, dress and other learning materials is a good step for attracting children to school: Free books, dress and other learning materials are now available in schools provided as the facilities of SSA, which were once the privilege of a lucky few. It is seen that regarding this action the guardians had a highly favourable attitude with a mean score of 4.29 ranking first.

Midday meal is a very good step for spreading elementary education: There was no security of food

felt by parents of the children of the age group of 6-14 years in the traditional rural communities of West Bengal. As such, they were unwilling to send their wards to school. But their attitude changed as the SSA provided mid-day meal to the children so as to create interest in them to attend school regularly. Mid-day meal scheme is therefore, a good step for spreading elementary education in the state of West Bengal and the guardians of traditional rural community had highly favourable attitude towards this facility of SSA.

Providing free elementary education to all is one of the best decisions of the government: Free Elementary Education being provided to all the children of the traditional rural communities of

West Bengal is one of the best decisions of the Government as perceived by the respondents with attitude ranking third with a mean value of 4.00.

Teachers' attitude changed after spread of SSA: Teachers' good attitude towards students in Government aided/sponsored schools is one of the most important factors for the successful implementation of the SSA. Generally, in the traditional rural communities, the students of first generation feel some sort of fear of going to school. This school fear can be removed from their minds if the teachers' behaviour is kind and sincere and thus the SSA programme will be sure of success at the grass root level. In fact, the students who belong to rural areas are naturally introvert and educationally backward. The teachers can help the students overcome their backwardness through sincere and careful teaching and enhance the comprehensive programme to reach its goal. Score more than 3 indicates a positive attitude towards SSA.

Without adopting English as a medium of instruction to attraction for SSA will be less: Although currently there is a growing demand among the guardians for English medium schools and so they have opinion that the Government schools should also adopt English as a medium of instruction for the good students; but present study did not conform totally with this view. The statement scored a mean value of 2.96 and which rank fifth. The score is near-about 3, so maybe told that the guardians of traditional communities had a mixed attitude towards this.

Without job security to the poor, free elementary education is a wrong step of the government: In view of poor parents of the children of traditional rural communities, there is no job security in competition of the free elementary education of their wards. Rather they want to see their children to be involved in any job whatsoever security of earnings. However, the mean score of 2.38 (it is a negative statement and so score less than 3 indicates a positive attitude) indicates that although job security is very essential and also elementary education does not secure it, but providing elementary education is not a wrong step of the government.

School environment have not improved after implementation of SSA: Although there is a belief that the environment of the private schools is far better than that of Government schools (implementing

SSA), but the mean score of the attitude statement (value = 2.22, which indicates a positive attitude because it is a negative statement) disproves it in the traditional rural communities.

Without assuring household food security, midday meal only can't attract children to school: Most of the parents of the children of 6-14 years of age in the study areas of West Bengal. According to the socio-economic factors, they are reluctant in their attitude towards SSA. There may be a notion that without assuring their household food security, mid-day meal only cannot attract their children to school. But the mean value of 2.08 of this negative statement indicates a positive attitude towards mid-day meal scheme of SSA.

Fig. 1 represents a comparative picture of attitude towards SSA between agricultural and non-agricultural communities and Wilcoxon (Z) value (3.52; $p = 0.001$) indicates a significant difference between agricultural and non-agricultural communities regarding attitude towards SSA when individual attitude domains are considered. Although both have positive attitude towards SSA, but there is difference in extent of favourableness.

CONCLUSION

A positive attitude towards any activity proves its utility and effectiveness. Attitude towards SSA also reflects the effectiveness of SSA in the rural agrarian society of West Bengal. The guardians have low to moderate level of favourable attitude. Although 2.38 % of respondents from non-agricultural communities had highly favourable attitude towards SSA but no respondent from agricultural communities had shown highly favourable attitude. Although they have considerably favourable attitude regarding the provision of free educations, books & other learning materials and midday meal facilities; but their favouritism is less in case of teachers' attitude towards students and school environment. Some other aspects like assuring household food security, job security to the poor, considering English also as a medium of instruction to attract good students should be kept in mind for all-round success through SSA.

Development of the physical and administrative efficiency of government schools and giving concerted effort to change the behaviour of the teachers by reward and punishment component in

SSA may make SSA and government educational system reach highest effectiveness.

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