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Socio-Linguistic Implication of Language Usage by the Youths of Tripura

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ABSTRACT: North-east India, a clustered assembly of varied speech communities is a home to rich traditions, cultures, languages, identities and ethnicities. Today, the uniqueness about the place geographically and ethnographically is not limited to the neighboring states but is recognized and acknowledged across the globe. Yet, little has been done to bring out the versatility and the resource this part of India has, the way it should have been. The state of Tripura is located in an isolated hilly region of the country bordering Bangladesh and is predominantly rural in nature. It is a home to a diverse mix of tribal cultures and ethno-linguistic groups with a population of 3,673,917 (Census of India-2011). Education in Tripura is compulsory and free for children between the ages of 6 and 14. Even though education is free till high school level, the employment rate is alarming as compared to the other neighboring states of North-east. The statistical figures of rate of unemployment poised (Directorate of Employment Services & Manpower Planning, Government of Tripura, 2016) between youths with education and youths with no education is at par. Though Tripura became the fourth most literate state in India with 87.75 percent literacy rate (2011 census) having more than dozen good schools/colleges, good number of technical institutes and vocational training centers, there is a fall out of severe unemployment. English and Bengali primarily being the medium of instruction in education sectors, the youths are lagging behind. One of the few reasons observed across Indian schools and colleges is delink between the literary or the text language and the facilitator's output. This is an action research trying to find out the probable indicators of unemployment in youths in India despite having education in English. The paper tries to bring in to the forefront the socio-linguistic implication of language usage by the youths of this region. The questions raised are:

- i. Implication of medium of instruction in education sectors
- ii. Awareness attitude of youths and the concept of globalization
- iii. The role of teachers, trainers and elders of the society
- iv. English in Tripura: its social, psychological and economic effect

KEYWORDS: Use of English, Empowerment, Attitude

I. INTRODUCTION

North-east India comprising of seven states, is diverse and has a rich culture and heritage of its own. The region is wildly diverse so much so that it homes hundreds of different tribes representing varied languages, identities and ethnicities. In the last six decades, the region has seen tremendous developments in every sector in terms of education, employment, agriculture, industry and others. The geographic and ethnographic uniqueness of the region is acknowledged across nations and has drawn lot of attention from varied development sectors. Though the seven states (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura) have its own state official language, English is being widely used. Schools and higher educational institutes are mainly imparted in English and thus children learn English at an early age. Despite English being understood, the rate of unemployment is very low as compared to rest of India. This paper is an effort to find the trigger points of this unemployment among youths in one of the states named Tripura.

The state of Tripura is geographically surrounded by Bangladesh on three sides: north, south and west, Mizoram and Assam to the east. Tripura is predominantly rural in nature and is home to a diverse mix of tribal cultures and ethno-

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linguistic groups with a population of 3,673,917 (Census of India-2011). It is also the second most populous state in north east (Census 2011) region consisting of more than fifty percent of indigenous population.

1.1 Languages in Tripura

Bengali and Kokborok are the two major languages spoken in the state of Tripura which is also the state official languages. The other languages spoken are the Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam, Kuki, and Garo. English and Hindi are also being spoken on daily basis in cities and towns. English medium schools and higher educational institutes are spread across the state.

1.2 Infrastructure within the state of Tripura and its reach outside the state

The state of Tripura, today, is well connected by road, rail and air with the rest of India. The region is basically agrarian in nature with more than half of the population dependent on agriculture and allied activities such as handicraft and handloom. The state is covered by mountain ranges from north to south and thus has isolated the region from easy access from the borders. Rubber, jute and tea are major crops due to the tropical climate it receives. Modern state-of-art industries equipped with modern technology are almost negligible. Despite the state being the second populated in north-east region, has hit unemployment leading to social and economic crisis.

II. POTENTIAL TRIGGER POINTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE STATE OF TRIPURA

Here, I would like to talk on the trigger points in general. We all know that people or society without jobs can lead to conditions like a region going deeper into poverty.

2.1. History

Tripura having a legacy of being a princely state ruling for several centuries before merging it with the Indian Union on October 15, 1949. Statehood was conferred in the year 1972. The place depicted a complex blend of history with mythology (Royal Chronicles of Tripura, popularly known as Rajmala, Source: Tripura.org.in) which had its own rich culture and tradition. The glorious past and the modern present...the whole region went through a massive transformation over the decades. It is important to look back and check where it has gone wrong, what led this region to severe unemployment and why it is currently lagging behind from the rest of India.

2.2. The fast paced social change

Are the people of this region ready to embrace the fast changing society? It is true that no human society is relatively static for too long as social change is a ubiquitous and inevitable phenomenon. The social structure, social order, social values, customs and traditions, socio- cultural norms, code of conduct, standards, attitudes and related factors change, the process of socialization also changes accordingly. It can affect an individual or the entire community members and becomes the target of social change OR they might be also an agent of such social changes.

2.3. Mobility

People were not so mobile till late 90's but there was a tremendous movement of people to other states within India for better opportunities like jobs and higher studies in the first part of 21st century. With the increase of mobility, variations seep in, modifications takes place, there are social pressures and thus social interactions and social organization change.

2.4. Adoption to new languages

I would bring here my observation from my field research in the year 2005 in Tripura, a time where the people of Tripura were engaged in reviving the lost native language 'Kokborok'. The society was falling apart, I was told by panicked parents. The new generation did not like the religion of parents and they took to Christianity. The students who went to Delhi formed a bible study group where every Sunday they met and discussed Bible. I was told by my informants that parents worship Hindu gods and children worship Jesus. Well, this is not my concern, and would remain ethically neutral. Every individual has the right to practice and believe what one likes.

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2.5. Shift in lifestyle: Modern over Indigenous

People move for new pastures, growth and later with the change or shift in lifestyle, there is a shift to adoption to new language/s. People adopt and adapt to new languages for access to the new community and work place, for better life and more power. This is happening everywhere across India and outside. Tripura, too, had witnessed this historically where the rulers had adopted Hinduism and adopted Bengali as court language initially and later the mass adopted (...cite.). So with language, culture, food and lifestyle are adopted and exercised in day to day life. And with time, people give away their own indigenous way of life to modern lifestyle as it seems to be more convenient and empowering.

2.6. Resilience to change

However, there are certain sections of people who are resilient to change. They cannot adopt to the new world or language. They simply resist. This resistance or not willing to learn new puts them behind. New jobs often require new skills or may be re-training. With globalization, new jobs skills are the need of the hour...such as-- industries being replaced by robots and machines e.g. motor manufacturing, electronic devices. Social sectors like online banking and online retailing or e-commerce, to name a few, needs special skills.

Besides the above mentioned trigger points, home, Schools, speech Communities, the geographical locations are few striking factors. In fact, one cannot have one single key to unlock all factors leading to unemployment in the region. It is a consequence to several factors.

III. WHAT MAKES A STATE OR REGION MORIBUND?

There are number of socio-political differences, psychological and religious reasons behind the declining of a state or region. Some of these indicators might not be conscious but affects the social security system in the long run. Here, I would like to pose a question -- who are responsible, outsiders or the natives?

Historically, transferring of knowledge was and is a natural phenomenon of humans in any given civilized society either orally or through print. The evolution of mankind from nomadic to stabilized structured society was due to the transferring of the knowledge of forbearers to the next generation. This knowledge gets absorbed by the next generation solely due to the interest and receptivity of individual and society. It is a combined effort. Though bigotry and to an extent political differences play a big role in a society lagging behind. But this is not the case today, we know many remarkable statesmen, sportsmen and others who have earned a name to themselves both domestic and globally despite all challenge the place or region holds. More so, in the modern world, science and technology have engulfed a large space of our life and home. Even though, there is a wide gap of ignorance of the existence of scientific world and disparity between the traditions and scientific observations. To improve the conditions of a given society, meticulous effort with the help of educational institutions, awareness program by the competent authorities must be disseminated to the youth at successive intervals. Lifelong learning needs to be at the centre of any efforts to make globalization work for everyone

IV. EDUCATION SCENARIO IN THE STATE OF TRIPURA

According to *All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE)* 2017-18 which is a comprehensive higher education data management system, the state of Tripura has 4 Universities, 51 Private and government colleges, out of which 1 Agriculture college, 6 nursing institutes, 4 Medical Science and technical institutes, 1 institute of Technology, 1 Law college and 6 Teacher's training institutes. As per 2017-18 AISHE report, a total of 69,856 students enrolled in undergraduate program, 2950 at post graduate level, 247 in PG Diploma and 9144 students in various Diploma courses. The report also states that as many as a total of 8259 Post Graduate students and 8984 Graduates got enrolled through Distance mode at various levels. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education (18-23 Years) in the year 2017-2018

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stood to 21%. The following statistics compiled from different government published sources shall give an idea of the education scenario in Tripura.

4.a. The productive youth: 18 -23 years of Age

Figure 1. Total number of youths in Tripura under the age groups of 18-23 years (AISHE report 2017-18)

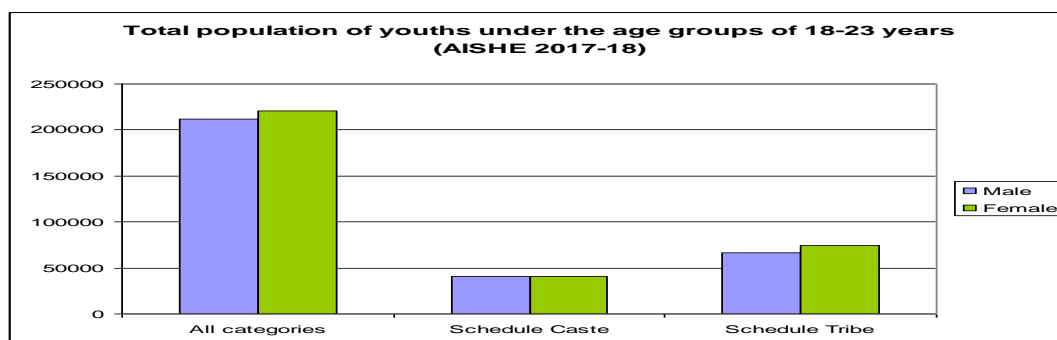
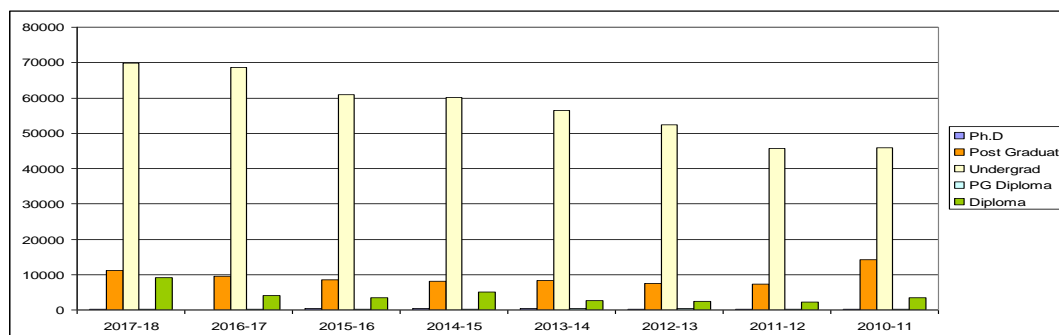


Figure 1 above shows a total of 36,73,917 number of youths falls under the age group of 18-23 years in the whole of Tripura, out of which a total number of 4,32,816 youth consists of late adolescences/young adulthood. They are the valuable and productive youths, an age for development of professional skills and exploration that covers many aspects of their life: home, family, work, school, resources, and role. This is an age of transition to work, college and independent living. A study on *Understanding Adolescence* by Teipel, K. (2021) states that the age that spans adolescence and young adulthood is a time whereby “capacity for abstract thought becomes established; can think abstractly and hypothetically; can discern the underlying principles and apply them to new situations; and can think about the future, considering many possibilities and logical outcomes of possible events. It also allows youth to better value the diversity of people (and their perspectives) and appreciate that there may be many right answers to a problem.”

4.b. Higher Education of youths in the age group of 18-23 Years in Tripura in the last 8 years

Figure 2. Growth of higher education in the age groups of 18-23 years (compiled from AISHE 2017-18)



A glance in Figure 2, suggest enrollment in higher education by the youths in the age group of 18-23 years in the state of Tripura in the last eight years. Like any other states within India, undergrad education programs are popular and easily accessible by the students due to the rise in the number of such educational institutions. As mentioned above that

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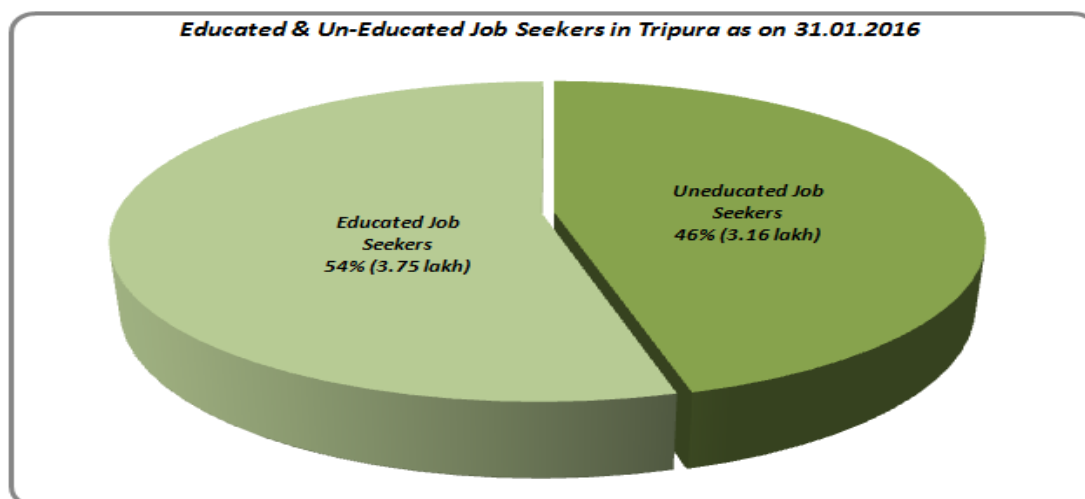
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there are almost 51 Private and government colleges in Tripura, it is quite obvious that students opt for undergrad programs after high school. While various diploma courses are also on rise in the last eight years, research programs are lagging behind despite the state boasting of four universities. Diploma courses are second most popular in the state because they are short term courses and thus one can get into small scale business and become entrepreneurs.

4.c. The ratio of educated and un-educated job seekers in Tripura

A report from Directorate of Employment Services & Manpower Planning, Government of Tripura in the year 2016 states that the educated and un-educated job seekers are at par in the state of Tripura. It is alarming a fact that 54% constitutes educated job seekers and almost of the same percentage, that is, 46% are uneducated job seekers within the state. The situation is a matter of concern as it is almost 50-50 ratio of education Vs no education job seekers.

Figure 3: Educated and un-educated job seekers in Tripura



Source: Directorate of Employment Services & Manpower Planning, Government of Tripura, 2016

4.d. Unemployed Statistics: Educational Qualification-wise in Tripura

For any economically rich state or nation, participation of both male and female is important. Here (Figure 4) if we look at the unemployed statistics of both genders, women lag behind. Irrespective of education or no education, females in Tripura fairs low in comparison to Males. Though the educated youths are more in number than uneducated youths, which is good for any state, unemployment is a big concern, even though with high figures of educated population. This is where the Government and other bodies must intervene to generate jobs within the state in various sectors.

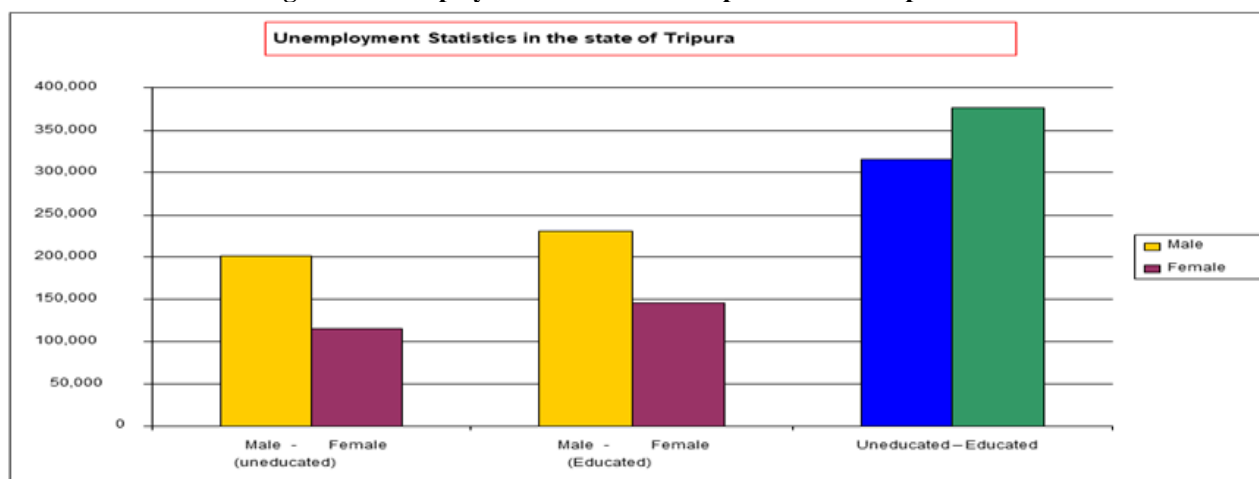
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Figure 4: Unemployment statistics in Tripura. Year of report: 2016



Source: Directorate of Employment Services & Manpower Planning, Government of Tripura, 2016 (Compiled Data)

I would like to draw upon an interesting quite a similar encounter with an informant from Kakeroad, Jharkhand-India. The informant is a Santhali speaker by birth but has moved out for education and job. His extended family still resides there and he also own land in Jharkhand. The Santhali speech community belongs to the North Mundari group of languages, part of the Austro-asiatic language family, who were basically hunters and later on took to agriculture. The informant reports that there is minimal awareness among the community members of advantages and disadvantages of Govt. and non-Govt. jobs and schemes. Importance of education is seen as non-productive in this twenty-first century and is less motivate by TV news or newspaper; a traditional approach/attitude still lingers on. The survival attitude is towards food only. Though young generations are breaking the old adages, however, most of the community members are highly affected by traditional tenets (superstitions) totem and taboos. The percentage who overcame this is very less. Santhali community being a patriarchal society, MAN is always right. Women are bound to be slave of man. Baski (2016), reports that Santhali community is egalitarian in nature, having a cultural dependence, freedom to women and has a carefree lifestyle. However, today, women are high in number for menial jobs, i.e., they work for daily wage such as road construction, building construction, peon/housekeeping, weed pullers (in farm lands), or work in brick kiln (creating raw materials) in Jharkhand.

4.e. Skilled Vs Unskilled Job-Seekers in Tripura

Now if we take closer look in table 5, almost 97% are unskilled job-seekers as opposed to only 3% skilled job-seekers in Tripura as per 2016 report. What makes the table interesting is that educated unskilled job-seekers are 94% and just a miniscule of the total i.e., 6% is in the category of educated skilled job seekers. The picture depicts, which are the ways to look forward.

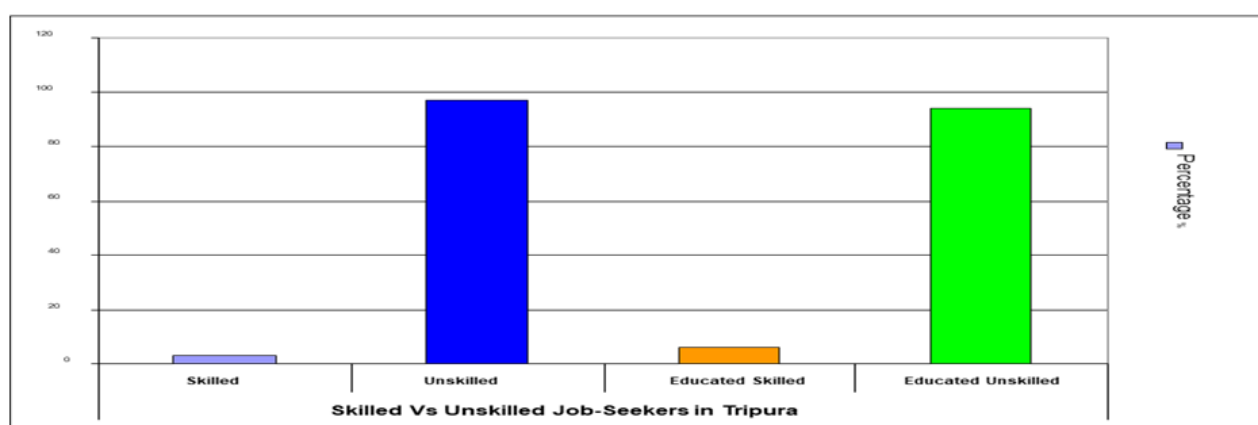
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Figure 5: Skilled Vs Unskilled Job-Seekers in Tripura. Year of report 2016



Source: Data compiled from--Directorate of Employment Services & Manpower Planning, Government of Tripura, 2016

V. THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS ON THE SOCIETY AND THE YOUTHS

The state official languages of Tripura are Bengali and Kokborok. Besides being the two major languages, usage of English and Hindi is extensively used by the speakers in the state of Tripura in the recent years. This might be the pan-Indian effect as is seen across India. The recent trends in Tripura have seen young students who are socio-economically strong moving out of the state for good education and jobs. Most of them do not return back to their home once they get job. Youths today are more aware of the development in and around their region, but lack of infrastructure and development within the state allows the youths to move out. This leaves a strong socio-psychological effect on the youth and the society by and large. Some of the propositions mentioned below are suggestive to contain the brain-drain before it is too late.

5.1. The effect of globalization and the social mindset of the Indian community

The effect of globalization has changed the social mindset of the Indian community. This is quite evident these days among the masses, however there is a wide gap. What I mean here is the use of language: English and Hindi. The two languages are used extensively in higher educational institutes across India. English acts a medium for class-room instruction, scientific presentation and writing. It is also considered to be 'the professional language' in organizations, companies, corporate, media, publishing, advertisement and other such bodies which are of concern to reach out globally in their endeavor.

English is not only restricted to the elite or educated millennial but can also be heard from every section of society in order to be in line with the higher-ups in the society. Thus, it has become the much sought-after language not only in metro cities rather it has influenced the semi-urban to the bucolic areas of India by and large.

Craze of getting the children admitted in English medium schools has left with sleepless nights for the parents from low income group to higher income group. It is very common to notice that with the adoption of English, there is a complete shift in cultural practices, food habits, dress and other lifestyle one can think of.

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5.2. Society, family, school and individual awareness

Society, family, school, individual awareness and conscious effort can bring a change. Indian culture and its languages are considered in the highest regard globally. And it is to be noted that vocal expressions talk a lot about one's culture and upbringing. On the one hand, some are of the opinion that English medium education can brand them as smart, suave and modern; on the other hand, the same people find it difficult to cope up with the culture English hold as per se.

5.3. The use of language

Languages are immensely complicated structures. One soon realizes how complicated any language is when trying to learn it as a second language. The number of languages that children at early age learn apart from MT, whether through natural exposure or educational intervention, has deep consequences in their cognitive development (Barac et al 2011). Use of language is not homogenized, but who speaks what and how in different domains is what matters. Students, in general, are less aware of the fact that language can be courteous, debonair, and sophisticated. They have their own lingua and they find it trendy using it among their peer groups in the campus. The use is not limited inside the campus; in fact, they use it all the time with their peer groups. English is considered, by them, as formal and official only. I have observed in my teaching tenure in Professional colleges in Delhi-NCR, students use English with non-Hindi faculty members (if they know that he/she (read faculty members) do not know Hindi) to any query. Hindi is extensively used both formally and informally in northern region of India. Thus the interface with such teachers (non-Hindi speakers) is very short and to the point usually.

As a language teacher, I always find my students reporting how to improve vocabulary in English rather than asking how to achieve fluency or the correct diction the language holds. Limited use of English has also left them in oblivion as how to use English in the most casual conversation. In extreme case where they have to speak in English, students have the psychological tendency to translate it from their native tongue wherein the essence of the thought is lost. Language cannot be learnt in isolation and it has to be a continuous effort by the speaker to achieve command and fluency.

VI. THE ROLE OF TEACHERS, TRAINERS AND ELDERS OF THE SOCIETY

Education liberates from race, creed, and gender and thus helps in the economic growth of a place or region. Learning is not the product of teaching. Learning is the product of the activity of learners. A condition where the use of regional languages is inevitable in this part of the region, there is also a mad race to learn to speak good English. English continues to have major social, psychological and economic effects.

Here what I want to draw the attention is the use of regional language in terms of its style and registers. The students and youths are so much into the colloquial casual spoken form that it becomes difficult for them to understand that these expressions are not acceptable in civilized society. Some may argue that social or societal norms are conditioned set of rules for expected behaviour and that these set of rules are considered to be more of do's and don'ts or of even social taboos. It is not the question who sets those norms? Swear words or taboo words are found in every language. One can also notice that women do not lag behind in the usage of such words like men, these days. College prospectus campaign about English medium as a matter of convention but the use of English is limited. Inside the classroom, corridors, canteen and play ground, students use more of regional language than English. On the one hand, they want to excel and become global professionals, but they fail massively due to their vocal expressions. By doing this, the youth miss a point that....what is distinctive in one language may not be distinctive in another or may be used in a different way.

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VII. ENGLISH IN TRIPURA: ITS SOCIAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC EFFECT

As mentioned earlier, people in Tripura were not so mobile till late 90's but there was a tremendous movement of people to other states within India for better opportunities like jobs and higher studies in the first part of 21st century. With the increase in mobility, variations seep in, modifications takes place, there are social pressures and thus social interactions and social organization change.

People move for new pastures, growth and later with the change or shift in lifestyle, there is a shift to adoption to new language/s. People adopt and adapt to new languages for access to the new community and work place, for better life and more power. This is happening everywhere across India and outside. Tripura, too, had witnessed this historically where the rulers had adopted Hinduism and adopted Bengali as court language initially and later the mass adopted. So with language, culture, food and lifestyle are adopted and exercised in day to day life. And with time, people give away their own indigenous way of life to modern lifestyle as it seems to be more convenient and empowering. However, there are certain sections of people who are resilient to change. They cannot adapt to the new world or language. They simply resist. This resistance or not willing to learn new puts them behind. New jobs often require new skills or may be re-training. With globalization, new jobs skills are the need of the hour...such as-- industries being replaced by robots and machines. Even social sectors like online banking and online retailing or e-commerce to name a few needs special skills.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Every individual has the right to practice and believe what one likes. Home, Schools, speech Communities, the geographical locations are few striking factors which the society and individual needs to be empowered. In fact, one cannot have one single key to unlock all factors leading to unemployment in the region. It is a consequence to several factors.

Given the fact, that being unable to communicate, is akin to living with a serious impairment. It is very difficult and near impossible, to adapt and get along with people if there is no way to communicate with one another. The benefits of learning a language are not just learning grammar and vocabulary. It empowers one to express one's own thought and ideas or action in the most significant way with clarity, precision and accuracy. Good language skills empower a professional in multiple ways. It creates more positive attitudes and less prejudice toward people who are different. Not only effective acquisition of language improves analytical skills but make an employee more valuable in the workplace. It increases creativity thereby helps in problem solving and dealing with abstract concepts. It provides a competitive edge and one can participate more effectively and responsibly in a multi-cultural world. Languages open the door to art, music, dance, fashion, cuisine, film, philosophy, science...and thus help one to lead out of confinement and narrowness and darkness

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