

Exploring Livelihood Through Tribal Entrepreneurship: A Case Study of the Asur Tribe in Gumla District of Jharkhand

Claber Minj¹, Madhu Vij²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Usha Martin University, Ranchi

²Professor, Department of Commerce Usha Martin University, Ranchi

Abstract: *This study explores tribal entrepreneurship among the Asur tribe in Jharkhand, emphasizing its potential to alleviate poverty and enhance livelihoods through local resources and traditional knowledge. The Asurs, one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), face significant socio-economic challenges, including low literacy rates and limited market engagement. Their historical reliance on iron smelting has diminished, necessitating a shift towards agriculture and alternative livelihoods. This research aims to assess the socio-economic profile of the Asurs in Gumla district, evaluate their current entrepreneurial practices, and identify barriers to development. Methodologically, it employs qualitative analysis through interviews and case studies with selected families in the Ghaghra block. Findings reveal a community grappling with poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate government support for skill development. Despite these challenges, Asur families exhibit potential in various entrepreneurial domains, including agriculture, livestock management, and handicrafts. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted government initiatives to foster entrepreneurship among the Asurs, such as providing education, training, and financial assistance. By leveraging the community's physical capabilities and traditional skills, it is possible to create sustainable economic opportunities that empower the Asurs and improve their living conditions. The paper underscores the critical role of entrepreneurship as a pathway for social upliftment and economic resilience in tribal communities, particularly those facing the risk of extinction.*

Keywords: Tribal Entrepreneurship, Asur Community, Livelihood Development, Indigenous Skills, Socio-Economic Empowerment

1. Introduction

The word 'entrepreneurship' is a combination of two Latin words: *entre* (to swim out) and *prendes* (to grasp, understand, or capture). French-Irish economist Jean-Baptiste Say merged these into *entreprendre*, which signifies undertaking something bold or important. According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary an entrepreneur is "a person who makes money by starting or running business, especially when this involves taking financial risks." Entrepreneur is often confused with 'entrepreneurship'. The term 'entrepreneur' refers to the individual, whereas 'entrepreneurship' describes the mission or process of creating new ways to combine resources. Entrepreneurship is the capability of an individual to undertake an enterprise with the potential for profit, and this aptitude can be nurtured through training and orientation. It is influenced by the social environment, including education, research, training facilities, and the vocational patterns of the population.

The concept of entrepreneurship has evolved over the year. According to (Dollinger, 2008) Entrepreneurship is the control and deployment of resources to create an innovative economic organization (or network of organizations) for the purpose of gain or growth under conditions of risk and uncertainty. (Hoque, 2022) identifies three main motivations: survival, pursuing a dream, and making a difference. Entrepreneurs must find resources, manage risks, and create wealth. (De Bruin & Mataira, 2018) distributed the Entrepreneurship into Heritage Entrepreneurship, Tribal Entrepreneurship, Indigenous Self-Employment, and Small Enterprises which opens the ways of development for all.

Tribal Entrepreneurship refers to the involvement of tribal communities in business activities using local resources and traditional knowledge. Although traditionally alien to tribals, it has emerged in response to challenges such as unemployment and declining land productivity. It has the potential to generate employment, increase income, reduce poverty, and foster sustainable growth. Tribal entrepreneurship becomes essential not only for profit but to give multidimensional benefit to the society. According to (Verbos et al., 2015) tribal enterprises are explicitly profit-driven because the profits support reservation economies through job creation, paying for tribal government, social services, education, tribal culture, and tribal community activities. Thus, the social logic of tribal enterprises should be paramount.

Social Demography of the Asurs: (An Overview)

Jharkhand is home to numerous tribes, each with rich cultural, social, and economic traditions. According to government records, Jharkhand hosts 32 Scheduled Tribes including PVTGs, who prefer to be called 'Adivasi,' meaning original settlers of the land.

The Asur tribe, one of the smallest and most ancient tribe, speaks the Asuri language and belongs to the Austroasiatic family. They are considered a PVTGs based on three criteria: pre-agriculture technology, low literacy levels, and a stagnant or declining population. The Asurs primarily reside in the Netarhat plateau, spanning Gumla, Lohardaga, Palamau, and Latehar districts. The Asurs engaged in iron ore extraction and smelting from the Netarhat plateau. According to (Roy, 2010) the Asurs resided in Khunti and its neighbourhood prior to the arrival of Munda Tribe. They were the raiyats. After the arrival of Mundas, the Asurs went

westward of Basia Pargana and Nagra. While some anthropologists associate the Asurs with the Munda tribe of Jharkhand, others argue that they are a distinct tribe with historical connections. According to (Hoffmann & Emelen, 1950) there exists no longer any trace of a belief in the former connexion between the Asurs and the Mundas.

As per the 2011 Census, there are 22,429 Asurs in Jharkhand, constituting 0.26% of the Scheduled Tribes, with over 50% concentrated in Gumla district. However, due to market constraints, policy changes, and other challenges, they have shifted to settled agriculture. They also collect forest products, hunt, fish, and work as labourers in nearby towns. The Asur tribe is divided into three groups: Bir Asur, Birjia, and Agaria. The Birjia is classified as a distinct tribe in Jharkhand and Bihar, and the Agaria is recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in Madhya Pradesh. Gumla district, carved out from the old Ranchi district in 1983, covers 5347.25 sq km and is one of the five districts in the South Chota Nagpur division. It comprises three sub-divisions and twelve Community Development Blocks.

Scope of Entrepreneurship Promotion Among the Asurs

Entrepreneurship is relatively new to the Asurs, who traditionally avoided activities involving financial risks. They live in remote areas, relying on hunting, fruit gathering, and settled agriculture, which do not involve significant financial risks. Their market interactions are limited to purchasing necessities of daily life in the local *harts* and selling minor products like forest goods and agricultural produce.

The scope for entrepreneurship among the Asurs depends on several factors, including location, familiarity with various activities, market availability, climate conditions, education, and support from government and NGOs. Potential areas for development include:

- 1) **Agricultural Activities:** Cultivation of organic grains, fruits, flowers, and mushrooms.
- 2) **Livestock Management:** Dairy farming, poultry farming, and beekeeping.
- 3) **Household Activities:** Carpentry, leaf stitching, weaving, and knitting.

Government Initiatives Towards Entrepreneurship

The 'Make in India' initiative launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016 aimed to transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub. The goal was to create numerous jobs in the private sector and reduce reliance on government jobs by promoting entrepreneurship. This initiative recognizes entrepreneurship as a crucial driver of socio-economic growth, transforming lifestyles and effectively utilizing human and natural resources. In light of the government's emphasis on entrepreneurship, this paper aims to study the situation of PVTGs in Jharkhand, focusing on the Asurs in Gumla district. It seeks to identify existing entrepreneurial skills and explore ways to empower the community through training and development programs.

2. Literature Review

Researches on Asur tribes have often been neglected by the social scientists and even anthropologists. A few authors have tried to understand the Asur tribe in general which includes their anthropological, social, religious, cultural, and economical aspect. Still there is a great dearth of studies focusing on Asur economy and their sustainability. (Lueva, 1963) made one of the most comprehensive studies on Asur life style with a special focus on cultural, social, religious, political and economic aspects of their lives but not focusing on the possibility of entrepreneurship in the Asur community. (Hoffmann & Emelen, 1950) compare Asurs with Mundas and found that the Asurs were in every respect far behind Munda, standing it appears closer to Birhors in their primitive civilization than the Mundas. Kumar Suresh Singh explicates that majority of the Asurs are involved in agricultural and other works and only a very insignificant number is involved in entrepreneurship activities that is only 2.23 per cent are now engaged in the household industry, i.e. their traditional occupation of iron smelting (Singh, 1994). Joseph Marianus Kujur says that the advent of the iron industries in the region has proved to be a curse for the cottage industry of the Asurs. Their tradition occupation has died out now (Kujur, 1999). With the gradual influence of modernization, urbanization, globalization, environmental degradation and changes, international, national and regional politics and interests, ethnocracy etc. The tribals are facing several difficult challenges for their survival (Biswas, 2024). Ashish Kumar Sinha emphasizes the need of improving and getting global recognition of their iron smelting technique. He also indicates that their shift from iron smelting to other occupations have weaken their economy which often ends up in taking loan from local money lenders (Sinha, 2015). (Trivedi, 1954) sees a possibility that Asurs were the part of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilization in the prehistory period. Ranchi district gazetteers states that even before the Mundas arrived in the land Asur had already developed in the land. (*Ranchi District Gazetteers*, 1917). (Raven & Murmu, 2024) studied the transition of Asurs from iron smelting to settled agriculture. They also analyzed the factors facilitating transition like government policies, agriculture policies and socio-cultural dynamic within country and challenges and opportunities encountered by them in embracing agriculture. (Das, 2023) has analysed the socio-economic condition and education situation of Asur tribe in the light of National Education Policy, 2020 how the Asur community can be included in the mainstream education to facilitate social and economic development. (Das & Biswas, 2024) see the Asur's health, education, and economy are neglected leading to their present-day societal decline. Sushma Asur, one of the members from the Asur community writes on Asur social, cultural and religious issues in poetic form but she has not been able to address the economic issues of the community.

Rationale of the Study

Jharkhand enjoys rich cultural, social, economic, religious, and political heritage of variety of groups living in it. In Jharkhand there are 32 tribes with their unique identity. Eight of them are known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The Asur tribe is one of the eight PVTGs. In Vedic hymns they have often given it a very negative

picture by referring it as Dasayan, Dasyu, Daas, Rakshasas etc. Initially, the Asurs worked as iron smelter and moved to settled agriculture. Even now, economically, and politically the Asurs remain very insignificant. Therefore, a need has been felt to understand the extent of entrepreneurship skills among the Asurs of Gumla District of Jharkhand and also find the ways and means of empowering them through various training and entrepreneurship development program which will enable them to be economically and socially sustainable.

3. Research Objectives and Challenges

- 1) **Socio-economic and Cultural Profiling:** The study aims to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Asur community's current socio-economic status and cultural practices in Gumla District. This involves analyzing factors such as income levels, education, health, and traditional customs that may influence entrepreneurial potential.
- 2) **Evaluation of Current Entrepreneurship Practices:** Researchers identify and evaluate existing entrepreneurial activities within the Asur community, examining their scale, success rates, and impact on livelihoods. This includes studying both traditional crafts and any modern business ventures undertaken by community members.
- 3) **Challenge Analysis:** The study delves into the various challenges and difficulties faced by the Asurs in developing entrepreneurship. This includes examining barriers such as lack of education, limited access to capital, market constraints, and any cultural factors that may hinder entrepreneurial growth.
- 4) **Skill Assessment and Action Planning:** Finally, the research aims to assess existing skills within the community and develop an action plan for enhancing productivity and production. This involves identifying potential areas for skill development, training needs, and strategies to leverage traditional knowledge for entrepreneurial success.

4. Methodology

A descriptive and exploratory research design was used, based on personal visits, observations, interviews, and conversations with the Asur community. The sample comprised nine families from two villages: Velwadih Purnadih and Barangpath in Ghaghra Block of Gumla district in Jharkhand. Purposive sampling was used due to the challenges in locating and interviewing community members. Data was collected through personal visits, observations, and in-depth interviews and case studies with nine Asur families. Despite the small sample size, the information gathered is intended to address the issues identified in the study. The paper is basically based on qualitative data and data procured from secondary sources like Census 2011 etc.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Based on the provided tables, we can analyse the demographic data for the Asur tribe in Jharkhand, specifically in Gumla district and Ghaghra block, focusing on total population, sex composition, and the urban-rural divide. In the state of Jharkhand, the total population of Asur tribe 22,459, male population is 11,473 (51%), female population: 10,986 (49%) and sex ratio is approximately 96 females for every 100 males. In Gumla district the data resembles the same scenario. In Ghaghra block and villages the data reveals that sex ratio is in slightly favour of female. The education level among is very poor. The major interpretation of the tables are as follows –

- **Rural vs Urban Dynamics:** The majority of the Asur population lives in rural areas, which reflects common trends in tribal populations in India. Urban areas, while having a relatively small population, show a healthier sex ratio.
- **Comparative Insights:** While the Asur tribe exhibits lower sex ratios at state and district level, the general population within the Ghaghra block displays a healthier balance. This may suggest varying socio-economic factors impacting gender ratios across different communities.
- **Implications for Policy:** These demographics could guide targeted development programs, focusing on gender equity, healthcare, and infrastructure improvements and gender-specific livelihood opportunities in general, especially in rural areas where the Asur population predominantly resides.

Total Population of STs at Jharkhand state, Gumla district and Ghaghra block and its sex composition

Sr. No.	Unit	Total	Male	Female
1	Jharkhand (only Asur)	22,459	11,473	10,986
2	Gumla (only Asur)	11,396	5,863	5,533
3	Ghaghra(all STs)	88805	44148	44657
4	Bhelwadih Purnadih	171	82	89
5	Barrang	434	210	224
	Total		Rural	Urban
	Ghaghra (all STs)	88805	83940	4865

Source:

<https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/population-finder>

Total Population of Asur tribes by their sex and type of residence

		Population	Male	Female
Asur, Agaria	Total	22,459	11,473	10,986
Asur, Agaria	Rural	21,351	10,898	10,453
Asur, Agaria	Urban	1,108	575	533

Source: Census 2011

Educational background of the Asur Families

Sr. No.	Village of respondents	Name of Family head	Total family members	Persons between the age of 18 to 40	Primary and middle school passed	Educations levels 10 th Passed or above
1	Bhelwadiah Purnadih	Lal Deo Asur	11	7	1	0
2	Bhelwadiah Purnadih	Mangru Asur	6	4	1	1
3	Bhelwadiah Purnadih	Lalu Asur	2	2	0	0
4	Bhelwadiah Purnadih	Chait Toppo	20	10	5	5
5	Barangpath	Bishnu Asur	7	3	1	1
6	Barangpath	Somra Asur	5	2	1	1
7	Barangpath	Ratiraj Asur	4	2	0	0
8	Barangpath	Firu Asur	7	4	1	1
9	Barangpath	Sandeep Asur	6	3	0	0

Case Studies -

Village: Bhelwadiah Purnadih

Panchayat: Bimarla,

Block: Ghaghra,

District – Gumla

Lal deo Asur is a having family of 11 members of which 7 members are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. The family holds 2 acres of agricultural land. The family is involved in agriculture. The family income is uncertain. Family is very poor and facing malnutrition. There is lack of basic facilities of life like clean water and medicine. Children go to school but they are not provided with mid-day meal. One member of the family is differently abled. The strength of the family is physical capacity. The family has not received any kind of financial help and training from the government. The family sees opportunity in agro-based entrepreneurs, animal husbandry and carpentry.

Mangru Asur is having a family of 6 members of which 4 members are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. The family is having 5 acres of agricultural land. His wife is sick for years and bed ridden. The family is very poor and facing the problem of malnutrition. The family is involved in rain -fed agriculture. Their family income is uncertain. There is lack of basic facilities. The strength of the family is physical capacity. The family has not received any kind of financial support and training from the government support. The market is very far from the village. The strength of the family lies in physical fitness. The family sees opportunity in carpentry.

Lalu Asur is having the family of 2 members of which both are adults. They have no children. They are having 2 acres of agricultural land which is cultivated by them. The family has not received any kind of financial help or training for the from the government to empower them. They see opportunity fishery to improve the family income. However, they do not desire for any kinds of training due to their age.

Chait Toppo is having the family of 20 member of whom 10 are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. He has 10 acres of land used for agriculture. At present he is living in the Ghaghra the nearest town. The family is well educated. Along with him four members of his family are working as government service men. The family says no step is taken for the training and development of the people. On rare occasions the family visit the village. The family see lot of opportunity in agro-based entrepreneurship, animal husbandry and wooden work-related entrepreneurship

Village: Barangpath

Panchayat: Bimarla

Block: Ghaghra,

District: Gumla

Barangpath is a beautiful village located on the hill top of Netarhat rage. The village is surrounded by thick forests.

Bishnu Asur is having a family of 7 members of whom 3 are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. The family is having 5 acre of land and 1 acre of forest. The family is involved in agriculture and daily laborer in Hindalco plant in the village. The family says no work has been done for their skill development by the government. the family believes that leaf plate stitching, tailoring, animal husbandry could be the means of increasing income.

Somra Asur is having the family of 5 member of whom 2 are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. The family is having 5 acre of land and 1 acre of forest. He is working as a daily labor in Hindalco. His family is involved in agriculture. He has developed himself as an entrepreneur. He has his own shop. Apart from all these works he works as a carpenter and mason. He takes loan through credit card for tomato cultivation in the summer season. He says he learnt all these things through his own effort. His family see opportunity is leaf stitching, tailoring, carpentry, vegetable business and animal husbandry. Practical problem faced by him is lack of market and lack of transportation. The market is very far from his village. Carrying products to the village becomes an expensive affair.

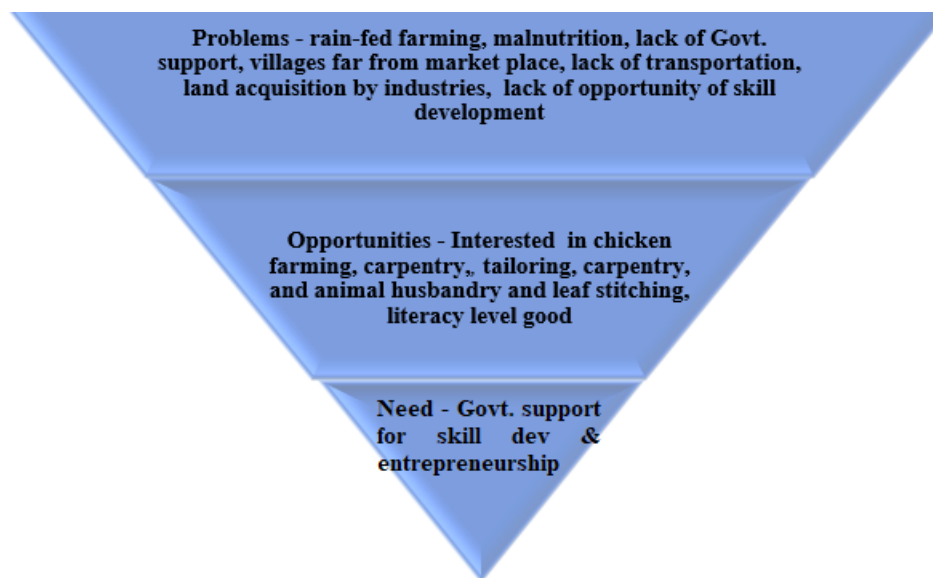
Ratiraj Asur is having the family of four member of 4 of whom 2 are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. The family is having 1. 5 acres of land. His mother is differently able. He is working as a daily laborer in Hindalco. He also doing his studies and desire to become join Jharkhand Police. A big portion of land was taken away by Hindalco and left over land is

not sufficient to meet the needs of the family. Family is also facing malnutrition. The family sees opportunity in leaf stitching, tailoring and animal husbandry for the development of Asur community.

Firu Asur is having a family of 7 members of whom 4 are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. the family has 1 acre of agricultural land and 1 acre of forest. Family is dependent on agriculture and labor work. He is working as daily laborer in Hindalco. A huge portion of land was taken away by Hindalco. His family sees an opportunity in leaf plate stitching, tailoring and animal husbandry in the village for the development of the Asur community.

Sandeep Asur is having a family of 6 members of 3 are of the age between 18 years to 40 years. The family holds 1 acre of agricultural land. He works as a daily laborer in Hindalco. One of his brothers has become blind and cannot see. His family sees opportunity in chicken farming, carpentry, and leaf stitching.

Schematic diagram representing problem & opportunities of Asur Tribes of Ghaghra Block



6. Key Findings: Challenges and Opportunities

Persistent poverty, malnutrition, and lack of basic amenities continue to plague the Asur community, hindering their overall development and well-being. They are deprived from all kinds of development in the society. Limited access to quality education and skill development programs has created a significant knowledge gap, impacting the community's ability to engage in modern economic activities. Tribal entrepreneurship holds the key to unlocking

sustainable livelihoods for the Asur community, offering a path to economic empowerment while preserving their rich cultural heritage. Though the community is at the verge of extinction no sufficient work has been done to empower it. There is need of external support from the government to educate and help them so that they could stand on their own feet. Training them for entrepreneurship could be one of the wonderful options to uplift it. Today, the Asurs are ready and willing to take up new step towards empower themselves. The overall observation are as follows –

S. No.	Theme	Status
1	Economic Status	Economically severely disadvantaged, facing malnutrition and health issues.
2	Infrastructure	There is lack of transportation and market facilities.
3	Support Systems	Insufficient government and NGO support for skill development.
4	Entrepreneurial Interest	Most families view entrepreneurship as a viable option.
5	Youth Potential	Physically and mentally fit, ready for entrepreneurial training.
6	Resource Utilization	Opportunity to leverage available local resources.
7	Community Readiness	Willingness to embrace new steps towards empowerment.

7. Recommendations for Fostering Tribal Entrepreneurship

Success requires a concerted effort from government bodies, NGOs, and the Asur community itself, working together to overcome challenges and capitalize on unique strengths and resources. By investing in education, training, and support systems for Asur entrepreneurs, we can pave the way for a brighter future, ensuring the survival and prosperity of this vulnerable tribal group for generations to come. Encouragement of entrepreneurship among the Asurs along with the agricultural activities is the need of time which would be working as the means of empowerment. The following actions need to be taken by Government as well as NGOs,

- 1) **Education Initiative:** Implement free, quality education programs specifically tailored for Asur children, focusing on both traditional knowledge and modern skills to develop their entrepreneurial potential from an early age.
- 2) **Entrepreneurship Training:** Establish comprehensive, free training facilities that encourage entrepreneurship among Asur youth, teaching them how to effectively utilize local resources and traditional skills for business ventures.
- 3) **Financial and Technical Support:** Develop government-backed financial assistance programs and provide technical expertise to support Asur entrepreneurs in launching and sustaining their businesses.
- 4) **Market Access:** Create alternative mechanisms and platforms to connect Asur entrepreneurs with broader markets, ensuring fair prices and sustainable demand for their products and services.

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