

Customs and Hope: My ASER Survey Experience in Chhattisgarh

This was the first time I embarked on an ASER Survey, filled with a mix of excitement and curiosity. I had no idea what lay ahead, but I was eager to learn and see the world through this unique experience. I was fortunate to have some of my team members accompanying me, some with whom I had traveled before, and others who were new to this journey. The state assigned to us was Chhattisgarh, a place I had visited before and truly grown to love for its sheer beauty.

Our training sessions were informative and thorough, ensuring that we were well-prepared for the task at hand. As the training came to a close, the real work began. Two volunteers joined me as we embarked on house visits to conduct the survey. Each house we entered held a unique story.



During one visit, we entered a house where two of my team members engaged in conversation with a young girl while conducting the survey. This particular household had some guests visiting for an ongoing occasion. As we observed, a middle-aged lady entered the house. To my surprise, a man in the room extended his leg in front of her, and she respectfully bent down to touch his feet. What struck me, was not the custom itself but the way it was performed, seemingly driven by a sense of superiority rather than genuine respect. This incident left me pondering and I couldn't help but question the dynamics at play.

After we completed our survey, I approached two of my team members and inquired about this unusual custom. They explained that it was indeed a customary practice in that region. However, it wasn't the tradition that surprised me but the way it was executed with an air of dominance.

This incident weighed on my mind as we continued our survey, but soon, I encountered another story that provided a glimmer of hope. In the same village, we visited another house, and this time, we were greeted by another family with a young girl. Although the girl was uncertain about her future, she spoke confidently in front of her family, a rare sight for many young individuals who often shy away from speaking in front of their families. During our conversation with her father, mother, and grandmother, I sensed a collective desire for her to continue her education. Surprisingly, they were entirely supportive of her not taking on an excessive amount of household work.

These two contrasting incidents left me with a profound sense of change and transformation. I had journeyed from disappointment, observing a custom that concealed a deeper issue of dominance, to new found hope and optimism, witnessing a family willing to embrace the aspirations of their daughter.

Chhattisgarh had once again surprised me, reminding me that even in the face of long-standing customs and traditions, change was possible. The hope of progress could emerge from the most unexpected places. And as I continued with the ASER Survey, I carried these experiences with me, eager to discover more stories of resilience, transformation, and hope in the heart of this beautiful state.

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