

## A study on attitude of literate Asur community people with the variation of gender and marital status regarding provision of education

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### Abstract

This paper is aimed to find out the relation of attitude towards education with the variation of gender and marital status among the literate Asur community, a particularly vulnerable aboriginal tribal community in West Bengal, India. A total of sixty numbers of samples from Cooch Bihar and Alipurduar districts, West Bengal were taken for this study. 1:1, face-to-face interview was conducted with an inventory containing 28 items covering seven dimensions of education, for data collection purpose. Descriptive as well as inferential statistics like ANOVA, 't'-test by applying Excel and SPSS-16.0 software were used for data analysis. A significant difference between the attitude of the literate married male and that of the literate married female samples of Asur community people was found at 0.05 level. But for their unmarried counterpart this difference was found to be non-significant at the same level. This finding might be helpful to the policy planners, program designers and to the implementing agencies from the govt. or non-govt. authorities in devising provisions of education to this particularly vulnerable most primitive tribe of India.

**Keywords:** Asur community; aboriginal tribe; gender; marital status; education

### 1. Introduction

We are living in a globalized world of tough competitiveness. In order to survive here good quality of human resource is a must. If any nation neglects the development of its human resource than no other resource, even it is the wealthiest or expensive one, can make it prosperous. In fact such nation could not even be able to maintain its existence in this world. No human child takes birth as human resource as such; it is the education system which upgrades him/her into a socially useful being, i.e., a human resource. The aim of education system is not only to convert a fully dependent human child into an independent, self-sufficient and even into a socially useful human resource; education system helps the new generation to inherit the knowledge acquired by their ancestors, enrich the same up to their limit and transmit it to the next generation. This process makes each generation and every clan, caste, community - aware and identified with the common knowledge, history, socio-political philosophy as well as the challenges and opportunities before the country. Thus, true education brings unity and strengthens integrity in the society /country. If some section of people - may be some ethnic identity, or caste, or clan, or community are not covered under the education system, they will not be aware about the knowledge, history, socio-political philosophy, etc. common facts and feelings of the country. These people beyond the umbrella of education system will feel isolation. This isolation under the ignorance of illiteracy may lead to the development of a feeling of separation from the national sentiments. This state will prove dangerous to the peace, tranquillity, unity and integrity of the country.

The reason behind our backwardness is lack of education. This creates all sorts of evils in our society. It is very difficult to create awareness among the uneducated and illiterate people. Since independence we have launched a number of welfare schemes meant for the general masses but majority of

them failed to bring desirable outcomes. The reason is - a large proportion of our population is illiterate. So, they are not aware about the benefits of these schemes. Hence, they did not take interest on these. As a result, the successive Census Reports of Govt. of India - 1991, 2001 & 2011 supports that the Tribal communities keeping pace with the trend of the world, are moving towards extinction.

China, the most populous country in the world, has converted her major part of population into human resources. So, the country is marching towards becoming the super power. At present, it occupies a prestigious high position of 90<sup>th</sup> (HDI, 0.727) in the HDI (Human Development Index) list of 216 countries <sup>[1]</sup>. Whereas, India being the second country in terms of population, could have taken the similar advantage as that of China by converting her large population into human resources, but failed and occupies only 130<sup>th</sup> (HDI, 0.609) position in the same list! So, if all the castes, communities, group of people, etc., are brought under the system of education, then only maximum human resources would be generated to march the country towards true prosperity.

A caste is a group of people having distinct cultural and ethnic identity <sup>[2]</sup>. According to the Govt. of India's report, there are 2800 castes in India <sup>[3]</sup>. The Scheduled Tribe groups who were identified as more isolated from the wider community and who maintain a distinctive cultural identity have been categorised as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' (PTGs) (previously known as Primitive Tribal Groups) by the Government. According to 2001 Census report there were 76 Primitive Tribal Groups in India with their total population 32, 62, 960 and in West Bengal it was 85,983 <sup>[4]</sup>. The criterion of being primitive is having pre-agricultural level of technology, low level of literacy and poor numerical strength. In West Bengal there are 40 Tribal Communities <sup>[5]</sup>. Out of these, Asur community is one, which

is considered to be the oldest community in India [6]. In West Bengal Asurs are mainly concentrated in Cooch Bihar, Jalpaiguri, Aliporeduar and Purulia districts with their small growth rate [7]. In Majherdabri Tea Estate, Alipurduar district about 150 Asur community people are there [8]. In Purulia (West Bengal.) a large number of Kherwal community people, who are the descendants of the Asur community are regularly observing “Asur Utsab” on the occasion of Durga Puja, for last few years, said Ajit Prasad Hembram, a member of the Asur (Kherwal) community in Purulia.

There are a number of Asur community’s villages /habitations in in West Bengal. In Cooch Bihar district: village - Daibhangi – Kurakota and Indukuthi, P.O. – Hazrahat. Around 50 and 70 Asur peoples respectively live here. In Alipurduar district: village Uttar Asur Line and Kalkut Basti, Block - Kalchini, P.O.–Damanpur, P.S.–Shamuktola. Around 100 and 50 Asur community people respectively live here. And at village Santali Tea Garden, Hansimara Old, P.S. – Madarihat. Around 100 Asur community people live here. In Jalpaiguri district: village Kiran Tea Estate, P.S. – Malbazar. Few hundred Asur community people live here. Every member of this village belongs to Asur community and bears the common title - ‘Asur’ [9]. This community is astonishingly backward in education. In the 1981 Census their literacy rate was merely 10.66%. They don’t have access to proper basic amenities of life including education [10]. Hence, they are on the verge of extinction as their traditional occupation (metallurgy) faced strong aggression by the modern advanced technology. These people are living in isolation from the Indian nationalist stream and harbour agony particularly regarding the Durga Puja, a religious festival of Bengali Hindus observed here. They claim that the demon (Asur) which the Durga symbolically kills is none but their legendry ancestor in their glorious past; who had been killed by the Aryans in deceptive, unjust “war” [11]. Thus, many of them possess incompatible attitude against the modern civilization outside [12].

In this situation there is an urgent need to think, plan and provide education to this most disadvantaged Asur community. In order to do this one must explore the provisions of education to this community by studying the attitude of the community towards education.

## 2. Methods & Materials

Following methods and materials were used for conducting this study:-

### Sample

A total of 60 numbers of literate samples were taken for this study. 20 from Daibhangi - Kurakota village, Hazrahat Post Office, Cooch Bihar District; 20 from Asur Line, Majherdabri Tea Estate, Alipurduar District; and 20 from Santali Tea Garden, Hasimpura Old, P.S.-Madarhat, Dist. Alipurduar, West Bengal, India. Purposive sampling method was used. Samples from both the gender male and female, and married and unmarried status were taken. As this community has very small population and also due to sample’s non-cooperation, it

was not possible to get more number of samples for this study. The sample flow-chart is shown below:

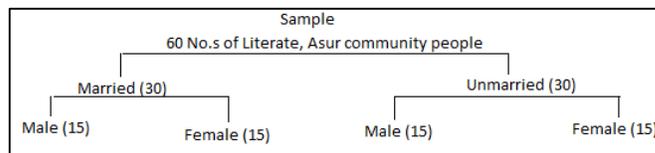


Fig 1: Sample flow-chart for the study

### Tools

A self-made inventory containing 28 items covering seven dimensions of education as; school-distance from residence, gender, curriculum, cost of education, cultural barrier, religious belief and profession - was used as tool for data collection. Its content validity was of good value, reliability,  $r = 0.91$ , checked through test-retest method. Descriptive as well as inferential statistics like ANOVA, ‘t’-test by applying Excel and SPSS-16.o software were used for data analysis.

### Method

1:1 face-to-face interview method between the investigator and the subject on the items of the above inventory was adopted.

Before starting the interview the subject was advised to read/listen carefully each item and give his/her opinion/response as quickly as possible. In case of literate subjects, the questionnaire was handed over to them, to read each item before giving their response. But in case of illiterate subjects, the data-collector sat beside him/her and read out each item in the questionnaire one by one slowly, clearly and loudly, and sought his/her response. On the basis of the response given by the subject, the data collector put a tick (✓) mark on the appropriate response box out of the given set of three alternatives. Each alternative response bears a numerical score value against it; total numerical score against each subject was counted. Each subject on an average took 30 minutes in giving response to the full inventory.

### The Area of Study

Sample survey work for this study was conducted at Daibhangi - Kurakota village, Hazrahat Post Office, Cooch Bihar District; at Asur Line, Majherdabri Tea Estate, Alipurduar District; and at Santali Tea Garden, Hasimpura Old, P.S.-Madarhat, Dist. Alipurduar, West Bengal, India.

### Period of Study

Data collection for this study was completed during the period of November, 2015 - January, 2016.

### 3. Result and Discussion

Literacy influences one’s attitude [13]. So, the attitude of the literate members of the Asur community towards education was studied. In order to explore the provisions of education among the community, its attitude needs to be studied. The table 1 below depicts the comparative results of attitude studied on the two groups of male and female – literate married samples.

**Table 1:** Comparison between Male vs. Female, Literate Married Asur community people’s Attitude towards Education

| Literacy & Marital Status | Comparison Between Groups | Sample No. | Mean  | S. D. | Variance | Df | F-value | t-value |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------|-------|-------|----------|----|---------|---------|
| Literate - Married        | Male                      | 15         | 60.27 | 2.99  | 8.94     | 28 | 5.61    | 2.37*   |
|                           | Female                    | 15         | 57.93 | 2.37  | 5.62     |    |         |         |

\*Significant at 0.05 level

The male samples possess higher attitude (mean value, 60.27 ± 2.99) towards education than the female ones (mean value, 57.93 ± 2.37). And the difference between the attitudes of the literate married male and that of the literate married female samples of Asur community people was found to be significant at 0.05 level (Table 1). That means, the literate married males possess more favourable attitude regarding educational provision for the community than their female counterpart. This result is in conformity with the available

findings in this line <sup>[14]</sup>.

So, in order to explore the provisions of education among the Asur community, married literate male members of the community will prove much helpful than the literate married females. On the other hand, a non-significant difference at 0.05 level was found between the attitudes of the unmarried, literate male and females of Asur community people towards education. The table 2 below shows this result.

**Table 2:** Comparison between Male vs. Female, Literate Unmarried Asur community people’s Attitude towards Education

| Literacy & Marital Status | Comparison Between Groups | Sample No. | Mean  | S. D. | Variance | Df | F-value | t-value |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------|-------|-------|----------|----|---------|---------|
| Literate - Unmarried      | Male                      | 15         | 56.40 | 2.35  | 5.52     | 28 | 2.86    | 1.69*   |
|                           | Female                    | 15         | 57.80 | 2.18  | 4.75     |    |         |         |

\*Not significant at 0.05 level

The above tables further show that the literate female members of the community, irrespective to their marital status, possess almost similar attitude towards education (mean values 57.93 ± 2.37 and 57.80 ± 2.18). This is probably due to the influence of the common feminine character which overrides the marital status difference.

Another thing which is revealed in comparing the above two tables is that the married males possess relatively higher mean attitude value towards education than their unmarried counterpart (60.27 ± 2.99 and 56.40 ± 2.35 respectively). This can be attributed to the very culture of the aboriginal tribal communities, to which the Asur community belongs. The unmarried male members, without family responsibility, are more habituated to “enjoy life” by adopting different self-intoxicated /inebriated means. A Columbia University research finding shows that there is three-fold increase in number of male teenage alcohol drinkers in India <sup>[15]</sup>. This develops in them an illusion of “all right” “happy” present life. Thus, they feel less urged for better future by acquiring education. The situation is aggravated by the non-respect shown by the non-tribal teachers recruited in the tribal area schools, towards the tribal cultures <sup>[16]</sup>. These, contribute to develop relatively lower attitude towards education among the unmarried youngsters of the aboriginal tribal Asur community. Probably marital status of literate males put them in more responsible position in society, which elicits more responsible and sustainable thought process towards education.

Interestingly, the above explanation applies to both the genders of the community, if they are literate but unmarried, which is revealed by the non-significant attitudinal difference between the male and females (literate, unmarried) Asur community people (table 2).

**4. Conclusion**

Being a particularly vulnerable primitive tribal community, the Asur community is on the verge of extinction. So, they face much hardship in sustaining the community and protecting their culture. In this situation we, the advanced

world must come forward to help them and to save the community as an important constituent of enriched, diversified Indian nation. Providing education is the only effective and sustaining means to do this. This study finds that married literate males possess much favourable attitude towards education compared to the unmarried literate ones. Literate females in general irrespective of their marital status possess almost similar but lower attitude compared to their male counterpart So, in order to explore a successful provision of education for this community - plan, program and mode of implementation should be made focussing the literate married male members of the community.

**5. Acknowledgement**

The researcher is grateful to acknowledge the financial assistance by the University Grants Commission, Govt. India to Dr. Md. Afsar Ali, the principal investigator of this Minor Research Project. He is also thankful to the co-operation and services of A.J.C. Bose College (Kolkata-20), its office regarding the official, peripheral works related to this project. Thanks are also due to my family and friends who directly or indirectly helped me in completing this project.

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