

# A Study on the Attitude of Female Members of Asur Community People with Varying Literacy and Marital Status Regarding Provision of Education

**Md. Afsar Ali**

Principal, Saheed Nurul Islam Mahavidyalaya, Swarupnagar, West Bengal, India  
E-mail: [ali.mdafsar09@gmail.com](mailto:ali.mdafsar09@gmail.com)

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**Abstract** - The present study is aimed to find out the relation between literacy status and attitude towards education as well as between marital status and attitude towards education among the female Asur, an aboriginal tribal community in West Bengal, India. A total of sixty numbers of samples from Cooch Bihar and Alipurduar districts, WB were selected for this study. Face-to-face interview (1:1) was conducted with a self-made inventory having 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 female and that of the illiterate married female samples of Asur community people was found at 0.01 level. Similarly, a significant difference was observed between the literate and illiterate Asur community unmarried females at 0.01 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 our country.

**Keywords:** Asur Community, Aboriginal Tribe, Literacy, Marital Status, Education

## I. INTRODUCTION

Resources are indispensable for any system to function and to bring desirable success. Human resource is the most important of all the resources in knowledge. In fact, the function and utility of other resources are decided by the quality of the human resources. 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 tough competitive world. No human child takes birth as a human resource, it is the education and training 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 ancestor, 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 of 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 amongst 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, tranquility, unity, and integrity of the country.

The root cause of all individual, social, and national backwardness is illiteracy and lack of education. This creates all sorts of evils in society. It is very difficult to create awareness among the uneducated and illiterate people. Since independence we have launched several 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 Report, of Govt. of India urged that the Tribal communities in West Bengal, keeping pace with the trend of the world, are moving towards extinction.

Human resource is the best resource. China, the most populous country in the world, has converted her big population part into human resources. So, the country is marching towards becoming the superpower. At present, it occupies a prestigious high position of 85<sup>th</sup> (HDI, 0.761) in the HDI (Human Development Index) list of 219 countries (Anonymous, U.D.). 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 131<sup>st</sup> (HDI, 0.645) position! (Javaid, 2020). So, if all the castes, communities, group of people, etc., are brought under the system of education, then only maximum human resources would be possible to generate and lead the country towards true prosperity.

Our Indian society is characterized by its diversity in terms of caste, creed, culture, and economic conditions. A caste is

a group of people having distinct cultural and ethnic identity (Rajshekar, 2007, p.9). According to the Govt. of India's report (Singh, 1993), there are more than 2800 castes in India. The Scheduled Tribe groups who were identified as more isolated from the wider community and who maintain a distinctive cultural identity have been categorized as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' (PTGs) (previously known as Primitive Tribal Groups). According to 2001 Census report there were 76 PTGs in India with a population of 32,62,960 and in West Bengal it was 85,983 (Anonymous, 2001). 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 (Anonymous, 2014a). Out of these, Asur community is one, which is the oldest community in India (Kerketta, 2010). In West Bengal Asurs are mainly concentrated in Cooch Bihar, Jalpaiguri, Aliporeduar and Purulia districts with their small growth rate (Chaudhuri & Chaudhuri, 2005). In Majherdabri Tea Estate, Alipurduar district about 150 Asur community people are living (Tiwari, 2009). In Purulia (West Bengal) many Kherwal community people, who are the descendants of the Asur community are regularly observing "Asur Utsab" on Durga Puja, for last few years, said Ajit Prasad Hembram, a member of the Kherwal (Asur) community in Purulia.

Sukanukuti village, post office – Hazrahat, district - Cooch Bihar, West Bengal is known as "Asur Village". Because every member of this village belongs to Asur community and bears the common title - 'Asur' (Dutta, 2013). The village is located about 7 km away from Mathabhanga town of the district. 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 (Anonymous, 2013). 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 legendary ancestor in their glorious past. Thus, many of them possess incompatible attitude against the modern civilization outside (Asur, personal communication).

In this situation there is an urgent need to study, plan and provide education to this most disadvantaged Asur community. For this purpose, we must explore the provisions of education to this community by studying the attitude of the community towards education.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Following methods and materials were used for conducting this study

*A. Sample:* A total of 60 numbers of female samples were taken for this study. From the Sonakuthi village, Hazrahat

Post Office, Cooch Bihar District - 20 numbers of samples, from Indukuthi village P.O. - Hazrahat, P.S. - Ghoksadanga, Dist.-Cooch Bihar - 20 numbers of samples and from the Asur Line, Majherdabri Tea Estate, Alipurduar District, W.B. - 20 numbers of samples - through purposive sampling method. The samples belonged to literate and illiterate, married and unmarried status. As this community has very small population, so it was not possible to get more number of samples for this study. The sample flow-chart is shown below.

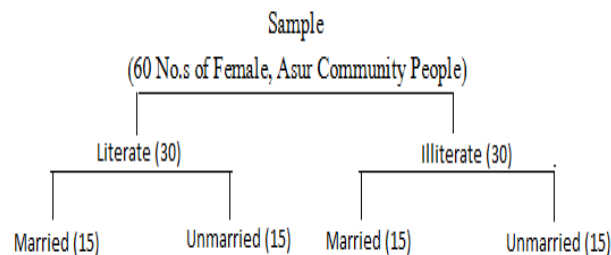


Fig. 1 Sample flow-chart for the study

*B. Tools:* A self-made inventory containing 28 items covering seven dimensions of education – 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-16.0 software were used for data analysis.

*C. Method:* The data collection method was 1:1 face-to-face interview between the investigator and the subject on the items of the above inventory.

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 ( $\checkmark$ ) mark on the appropriate response box out of the given set of four 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 Sonakuthi village (20 numbers of samples), Hazrahat Post Office, Cooch Bihar District, Indukuthi village (20 samples), P.O. - Hazrahat, P.S. - Ghoksadanga, Dist. - Cooch Bihar, and at Asur Line (20 numbers of samples), Majherdabri Tea Estate, Alipurduar District, West Bengal.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Female members generally play major roles regarding decisions with respect to their children, including their education. So, the investigator studied the attitude of the female members of the Asur community towards education.

In order to explore the provisions of education among the community, its attitude needs to be studied. The table I below depicts the comparative results of attitude studied on the two groups of married, female samples - literate and illiterate.

TABLE I THE TABLE ABOVE DEPICTS THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE ATTITUDES OF LITERATE VS. ILLITERATE, MARRIED FEMALE MEMBERS OF THE ASUR COMMUNITY PEOPLE TOWARDS EDUCATION

Marital Status & Gender	Comparison Between Groups	Sample No.	Mean	S. D.	Variance	Df	F-value	t-value
Married - Female	Literate	15	57.93	2.37	5.62	28	60.85	7.80*
	Illiterate	15	64.13	1.96	3.84			

\*Significant at 0.01 level

Contrary to their male counterpart, the illiterate females possess better attitude (mean value,  $64.13 \pm 1.96$ ) towards education than the literate ones (mean value,  $57.93 \pm 2.37$ ). And the difference between the attitudes of the literate married female and that of the illiterate married female samples of Asur community people was found to be significant at 0.01 level (Table I). That means, the illiterate married females possess more favorable attitude regarding getting education for the community than their literate counterpart. So, in order to explore the provisions of

education among the Asur community, the married illiterate female members of the community will prove much helpful than their literate counterpart. This result is in conformity with the available findings in this line (Ghanney, 2018).

A significant difference (at 0.05 level) was also found between the attitudes of the literate and the illiterate unmarried females Asur community people towards education. The table II below shows this result.

TABLE II THE TABLE ABOVE DEPICTS THE COMPARISON BETWEEN LITERATE VS. ILLITERATE, UNMARRIED FEMALE MEMBERS OF THE ASUR COMMUNITY PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS EDUCATION

Marital Status & Gender	Comparison Between Groups	Sample No.	Mean	S. D.	Variance	Df	F-value	t-value
Unmarried - Female	Literate	15	57.80	2.18	4.75	28	7.12	2.68*
	Illiterate	15	54.87	3.64	13.25			

\*Significant at 0.05 level

The table above shows the reverse trend. Here, the literate unmarried female members of the Asur community possess better attitude towards education ( $57.80 \pm 2.18$ ) than their illiterate counterpart ( $54.87 \pm 3.64$ ). This is probably due to the influence of the modernity outside with which the unmarried and literate young generation is in frequent contacts. Like any other community, this influence of modernity among the Asur community's literate youngsters reshapes their thought process in favour of getting educated.

illusion of "all right" "happy" present life. Thus, they feel less urged for better future life 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 (Anonymous, 1985). These, contribute to develop relatively lower attitude towards education among the unmarried youngsters of aboriginal tribal Asur community.

Another thing which this study reveals is that in comparing the above two tables, it is clear that the unmarried youngster females possess relatively lower mean attitude value towards education (for literates,  $57.80 \pm 2.18$  and for illiterates,  $54.87 \pm 3.64$ ) than their married counterpart. This can be attributed to the very culture of the aboriginal tribal communities, to which the Asur community belongs. The female members, particularly the present young generation is habituated to "enjoy life" by adopting different self-intoxicated / inebriated means.

The results further suggest that for literate females, marital status does not contribute effectively towards shaping their attitudes regarding education. The literate Asur community females – both married and unmarried (tables I & II respectively) possess almost same mean attitude values ( $57.93 \pm 2.37$  &  $57.80 \pm 2.18$ ). But marital status plays a positive role in this regards only for the illiterate females (mean attitude values for illiterate married females and their unmarried counterparts =  $64.13 \pm 1.96$  &  $54.87 \pm 3.64$  respectively, vide tables 1 & 2 respectively). Probably marital status of an illiterate female puts her in more responsible position in society, which elicits more responsible and sustainable thought process, thus favourable attitude towards education (Ali, 2017).

A Columbia University research finding shows that there is three-fold increase in number of teenage drinking alcohol in India (Anonymous, 2014b). This develops in them an

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Asur community is a particularly vulnerable primitive tribal community, living in pre-agricultural mode of technology with low numerical strength. 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 from extinction. It is our inherent duty as a diversified old Indian civilization, to bring them in the mainstream of progress by providing inclusive education is the only effective and sustaining means to do this. The above findings show that married illiterate females possess much favorable attitude towards education compared to their unmarried youngster generation. So, in order to explore a successful provision of education for this community, the Govt. should plan, make programs and adopt implementation modes focusing the married female members of the community in general and the illiterate married female members in particular.

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