

Tribal Development through Formal Education among Agarias of Chhattisgarh

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Abstract

Education is a powerful means of development in any community. Various formal and non-formal forms of education exist in different societies. Education has been institutionalized in the form of formal education in the schools and higher educational institutions in the remote and tribal areas gradually with the changing educational policies and programmes in the independent India with the advent of developing educational infrastructure and awareness in the remote areas. This resulted in the gradual increase in the percentage of literacy rate. But, perhaps few groups could not come up effectively in full pace along with their cohabitants and become part of this developing change in their villages and surroundings, due to their situational demerits. Agaria tribe is one of such groups residing in the adjacent part of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. A survey of Agaria tribe is done utilizing the scientific research methods in the few pockets of this area ranging from Dindori district in Madhya Pradesh to Kawardh and Bilaspur districts in Chhattisgarh. This paper includes the situational analysis of socio-economic and educational status of the Agaria people residing in the districts of Chhattisgarh.

Keywords: Formal Education; Literacy Rate; Girl Education; Infrastructure; School Dropout.

INTRODUCTION

Formal Education has been utilized as significant means of bringing deprived sections of the society into the mainstream. Education is a powerful

means of development in any community. Various formal and non-formal forms of education exist in different societies. Education remained a very vital aspect of society since time immemorial, when it was either in the formal educational form of Gurukul shiksha and temple education or in non-formal educational form of youth dormitories, such as, Ghotul of Muria Tribe, Dhumkeria of Oroan, etc.¹ Education has been institutionalized in the form of formal education in the schools and higher educational institutions in the remote and tribal areas gradually with the changing educational policies and programmes in the independent India with the advent of developing educational infrastructure and awareness in the remote areas. This resulted in the gradual increase in the percentage of literacy rate. But, perhaps few groups

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could not come up effectively in full pace with their co-habits and become part of this developing change in their villages and surroundings, due to their situational demerits. Agaria tribe is one of such groups residing in the adjacent part of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Tribal Oriented Educational Policies in India

National educational index is 0.563. Educational index of Chhattisgarh is 0.526. Education of ST children is crucial for total development, and above all, empowerment of the tribal communities. A significant policy initiative regarding tribal education in India is the National Policy on education (1986) and the Program of Action (1992) which recognized the heterogeneity of the Tribal groups in various scheduled areas while considering the importance of education in mother tongue and huge need of preparing teaching/learning materials in local tribal languages. In 7th five year plan during 1985-90, much emphasis was given to educational development of the STs and the 9th five year plan includes the empowerment of socially under privileged groups including STs for socio-economic change and overall development. Special emphasis was laid on education in 11th five year plan during 2007-2012. In the 11th plan period, Planning Commission had constituted number of Working Groups for the formulation of 11th five-year plan pertaining to the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD). One of such working groups was on educational development among SCs/STs/Minorities/girls and other under privileged groups. 11th Plan included one prime goal that up to 2007 every child should attain school. Following are few important aspects of this plan period:

1. There should be one primary school with two teachers in every one kilometre area having 25 children of school going age.
2. 500 new Ashram schools will be opened.
3. Building more number of upper middle schools and hostels in every block level area.
4. Promoting girl education through different schemes.
5. Increase in scholarship.
6. Vocational educational schemes.
7. Free mid-day meal in schools.
8. Distribution of free text books up to upper middle schools to girl students.
9. Renovation of schools buildings in every area.

Recently, New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is approved and implemented by MHRD and which also laid stress for education in native language and vocational education. Teaching up to class five will be done in compulsorily in mother tongue or regional language. Compulsory school education will be provided up to the age of 18 years. Medium of instruction will be of three language system including regional language.

Area of Study

A survey of Agaria tribe is done utilizing the scientific research methods in the few pockets of the Agaria area ranging from Dindori district in Madhya Pradesh to Kawardha and Bilaspur districts in Chhattisgarh. The initial study on Agaria tribe is done in the Dindori Tehsil of Madhya Pradesh state.

The current study is done mainly on the Agarias of Chhattisgarh state in the districts of Kawardha and Bilaspur. The study in the Kawardha district has been done in Devsara, Khamhi, Damgarh, Polmi, Bhedagarh, Dalmuha, Kodwa, Agarpani, etc. Villages of the Pandaria Tehsil and Gaboda, Pakhapani, Ghogra, Kaowanar, etc. villages of Borla Tehsil. The study has also been done in the Lormi Tehsil of the Bilaspur district.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The various Anthropological scientific research methodologies and field techniques are applied for the collection of data in the current study, such as, observation, interview, schedule, focused group discussion, case study method, photography, etc. Qualitative and quantitative both types of methods were used.

Agarias live in the villages with other communities such as gond, Baigas and other caste groups. Agaria settlements are very dispersed due to their occupation of iron smithy and as per the demand of their services in the villages. Usually, only one or few households are found in a single village. Only few villages have Agaria hamlets. Considering this situation every household is studied in the area.

Primary information was collected from parents and children of Agaria community and primary school teachers with the help of structured questionnaire and schedule followed by personal interview and observation. The gathered information from primary and secondary level

sources are being analysed and tabulated with the help of simple method of statistical tools and techniques for writing the final report.

Review of Literature

R.V. Russell and Hira Lal², pp. 3-8 in the volume-II of their edited book entitled *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, include a brief detail on the Agaria tribe living in the central India. It also provides a glimpse of the situation of the Agarias of that time. Verrier Elwin³ in his monograph on the Agaria tribe describes the life and culture of Agaria tribe living in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. It provides the detailed account of Agaria Society and Iron-metal smelting and craftwork. Verrier Elwin⁴ in his book entitled "*Tribal Art of Middle India*" provides details of various types of tangible and intangible art forms practiced by tribal communities of central India. Bhattacharya⁵ in his book *Iron Smelters and Indigenous Iron and Steel Industry in India* provide wide details about traditional iron metal craft and indigenous artisans. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay⁶ in her book *Indian Craft Tradition* gives glimpses of handicraft tradition in India.

K.S. Singh (ed.)⁷ in his edited volume (3) includes a brief account of the Agaria tribe of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, indulge in the occupation of Iron smelting and craftwork. Prakash Chandra Mehta⁸ in his article on the Agaria in his book. *The Ethnographic Atlas of Indian Tribes* includes brief account of the Agaria tribe, culture and society. It also includes brief detail of the Iron metal craft of the Agaria tribe. Niranjan Mahawar⁹ in his book *Arts and Crafts of Chhattisgarh* provides details about various art and handicraft forms practiced in Chhattisgarh, which also includes iron metal craft. T.K. Vaishnav¹⁰ in his book entitled "*Chhattisgarhka Janjatiya Paridrishya*" includes a brief detail about the traditional practise and current situation of the Agaria tribe living in the state of Chhattisgarh.

Agaria Demography

The Agarias are an indigenous iron smelters and craftsmen tribal community. They live in the adjoining areas of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The major population of the Agaria tribe lives in the Mandala, Dindori, Balaghat and Sidhi districts of Madhya Pradesh and Bilaspur, Kawardha and Raigarh districts of Chhattisgarh. According to Census 2001, their total population in Chhattisgarh was 54,574 including 27,192 males and 27,382 females (sex ratio – 1007). As per the census¹¹, their total population in Chhattisgarh is

67,196 including 33,384 males and 33,812 females (sex ratio – 1013). Most of their population lives in rural areas (64112 – Census 2011). Their main occupation is Iron smelting and craftwork. They have indigenous technique of iron smelting and craft work developed long back by their forefathers. They produce iron from locally available iron ore and make artifacts and agricultural implements, etc and sell in the local market.¹² They built their houses in the out skirts of the villages. The Agaria have much dispersed population due to their traditional occupational constraints. Usually, only one Agaria family is found in one village. Only few villages have Agaria hamlets with few families.

Agaria Tribe

Agaria is a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal society. It practices tribe endogamy and clan exogamy. The main occupation of Agaria tribe is iron-smelting and iron craft.¹³ They are found in the states of Madhya Pradesh (Dindori, Mandala, Anoopur, Balaghat) and Chhattisgarh (Kawardha, Bilaspur, Korja, Sarjguja, Jashpur, Raigarh) and Verrier Elwin claims that they also reside in the district of Mirjapur, Uttar Pradesh. There are three sub-groups of Agaria tribe, viz., Patharia, Khutia, and Choke.

The word Agaria originated from the word 'Aag', means fire, common in local dialects and Hindi language and originated from the Sanskrit word 'Agni'. As their work of iron-smelting and iron smithy is not possible without fire the word Agaria means the people working with fire. *Agni* Devis the Hindu deity of fire. Similarly, 'Agyasur', tribal demon who was born from flames, is the prime tribal deity of Agaria. The Agaria are indeed the servants of the fire which they so constantly tend, and the name will not seem inappropriate to anyone who has watched by night their ghostly figures clothed in showers of sparks as they move to and fro in the weird light of the flames flickering above the furnace.³

RESULT

Current Situation and Situational Analysis

As per the census of India 2001, out of the total Agaria Population in the state of Chhattisgarh, i.e., 54,574 only 16,901 are literate comprise 30.968% of the total Agaria population. Among the literates 11,238 (66.49%) are male and 5,663 (33.51%) are female. The major part of the Agaria population

lives in the rural areas. According to census of India 2011, out of the total Agaria Population in the state of Chhattisgarh, i.e. 67,196 only 25,683 are literate comprises 38.22% of the total Agaria population. Among the literates 15,512 (60.4%) are male and 10,171 (39.6%) are female. In the last decade the overall literacy rate as well as female literacy rate is

increased among Agarias in Chhattisgarh.

Generally, very low level of education is found among the Agarias in my studied area. Moreover, they show very less interest towards education. Not a single Agaria person has studied after class 10th in my area of study. The literacy rate is found very nominal among the older generation.

Table 1: Sex - Wise Literacy Rate

Literacy	Person					
	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Literate	55	52.38	37	37	92	44.88
Non-Literate	50	47.62	63	63	113	55.12
Total	105	100.00	100	100.00	205	100.00

The literacy rate is less in female in comparison to the male members of the Agaria community in my area of study. Most of the old people are found illiterate.

Table 2: Age-wise Literacy Rate

Age Group (in years)	Person												Literacy rate wise difference between male and female
	Literate						Non - Literate						
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
6-14	25	45.45	20	54.05	45	48.91	1	2	6	9.52	7	6.2	8.6
15-21	9	16.36	10	27.03	19	20.65	2	4	4	6.35	6	5.31	10.67
22-28	13	23.64	6	16.22	19	20.65	5	10	12	19.05	17	15.04	-7.42
29-35	5	9.09	0	0	5	5.44	16	32	13	20.64	29	25.66	-9.09
36-42	3	5.46	1	2.7	4	4.35	5	10	6	9.52	11	9.74	-2.76
43-49	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	7	11.11	10	8.85	0
More then 50	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	36	15	23.81	33	29.2	0
Total	55	100	37	100	92	100	50	10	63	100	113	100	

Maximum literacy rate is visible in the 6-14 years age group, i.e., 48.91%. It indicates towards the growing interest in education of the new generation. The findings also reflects that there is little difference between male and female education. Preferably, boys are more literate then girls.

Table 3: Level of education and educational facilities

Level of education	Person					
	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Balwadi (Nursery)	3	5.17	3	7.5	6	6.12
Primary school	33	56.90	31	77.5	64	65.31
Middle school (8th)	17	29.31	5	12.5	22	22.45
Matriculation (10th)	5	8.62	1	2.5	6	6.12
Higher secondary (12th)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Graduation college	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	58	100.00	40	100.00	98	100.00

In the current area of study no body pursued education after Matriculation (10th). Nobody is found getting higher education. At the adolescence age, kids play major role in subsistence economy.

Table 4: Educational School Dropouts

Literacy	Person					
	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Perusing Education	25	23.81	22	22.00	47	22.93
Education stopped	30	28.57	15	15.00	45	21.95
Uneducated	50	47.62	63	63.00	113	55.12
Total	105	100.00	100	100.00	205	100.00

On average children leave schooling after primary school (5th) due to various situational reasons and indulge in economic activities. More than half of the studied Agaria population is found illiterate.

DISCUSSIONS

Causes of Low Level of Education

Social Status: Agarias live in the villages with other communities. Usually, They supply and repair agricultural tools of the villagers. As they eat pig they were considered of low social status in the village. They were allowed to build their huts at the corner of the village and considered equal to the standard of scheduled casts. Hence, they feel quit uneasy and hesitated while going to school and studying with other upper caste students.

Economic Condition: Due to low economic condition, usually children leave schooling after primary level and get indulged into economic activities to support their family's economy.

Family business and household activities: Usually, it is observed while study that all the family members are involved in some sort of work in their family business, i.e., iron-smithy. Hence, children leave schooling and sometimes not even go to school. Sometimes, it is also observed that girl children are found taking care of their younger brother and sisters instead of attending schools.¹⁴

Formal Education: Agarias are living in a very deprived situation in my area of study. Hence, they could not easily able to grasp the formal pattern of modern education. Moreover, bookish language seems to them very unfamiliar as they are habituated of their own dialect.

Less Infrastructure: Though the government is trying to open up more and more schools in the remote areas. But, still due to the dispersed settlement in the hilly and forest areas of the Agaria tribe sometimes it is found that schools are bit far from their hamlets. Lack of proper schools in the vicinity is also resulting in the low level of education.

Absenteeism of Teachers: It is also observed during the study that teachers don't want to go to the

remote areas. Hence, sometimes they found absent from their job. It is greatly effecting the education and motivation of the children.

Suggestions / Recommendations

Informal Education: Sometimes formal educational pattern seems unsuitable in few instances. Hence, tribal children could not easily grasp the study material. Informal education pattern may be mixed up with the formal one to make the education more effective and easily understandable.¹⁵

Vocational Education: Vocational education and training should be promoted to strengthen the economic status and chances of economic development.¹⁵

Awareness: Agaria people are not much aware about the importance of education in life. Gradually, educational awareness is developing in the present generation. This may further developed by mass publicity and counselling.

Motivation and Economic Support: Agaria people should be motivated by stipend, economic support, infrastructure support and chances in jobs. Educated person may also teach.

Inclusion in PVTG: Today Agarias are living in very poor and deprived condition. As their population is much dispersed no special attention is given on them by government. No special plans and policies are designed keeping them in mind. Now, due to their poor economic condition they are leaving their traditional art of Iron-smelting and Iron-craft. Most of them are working as labourers. Moreover, in the state of Chhattisgarh they are facing identity crises (Fake people and Lohar community are taking benefit on their name). Looking towards their condition, they may be included among the PVTG.

CONCLUSION

Agaria are traditional iron-smelters and craftsmen

and usually only one or two Agaria households are found in a village. Due to their dispersed population in several villages in a bigger area, their identity as a community is not prominently established in their villages. They are also not getting benefit of specific government schemes as tribal artisans in the studied area. Gradually the level of formal education and awareness is increasing in the younger generation and they are getting inclined towards school education. But, still they are away from higher education. Maximum formal educational level found in studied area is Matriculation level. High rate of school drop out is found among Agaria in the studied area as they engage in economic activities at an early age. At the adolescence age, kids play major role in subsistence economy of their family. Apart from working in the traditional iron-craft work they also work as labourers. This situation is resulting in low level of their overall development and living standards. Gradual inclination towards education will help them in getting better facilities, benefits, alternative occupations and awareness.

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