

**Gender Disparity in Literacy among Ager Community
in Ankola Taluka of North Kanara District of Karnataka**

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1. Introduction

In fact, in India there are over three thousand castes, most of them having sub-castes, each one of these is associated with one or more traditional occupations and is related to the others by means of its elaborate division of labour. These caste groups may be broadly grouped into three categories namely: Upper Caste, Middle Caste and Low Caste groups. The caste groups which are historically recognized as socially, culturally improved are known as Upper Castes; the caste groups which are historically known as socially, culturally and economically depressed are considered to be Low Castes. The caste groups which come in between these two and they neither enjoy socially, culturally high status nor belong to depressed group are known to be Middle Castes.

In the low caste group, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) occupy the lowest rank in the caste hierarchy. The terms Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes were first introduced by Government of India (British act.1935), to mean such castes, races or tribes which correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as the “Depressed Classes” to safeguard the interest of the people who suffered from all sorts of discrimination by providing them special concessions and thereby enable them to join the mainstream of population. These caste groups were also called untouchables/ exterioriors/ outcastes before the British rule. The scheduled caste was known for its long association with socialized impure, unclean, degrading, socially looked down and least preferred occupations. The castes which follow occupation like scavenging, carcass recovery and flaying and hide tanning, leather

work, drum beating and grave digging are called untouchables (Blunt, 1969). They also used to work as bonded agricultural laborers, sweepers, folk musicians, basket makers, and meat sellers and some of them were used to perform various manual jobs for their higher caste patrons. Each caste performs a number of useful functions both for the individual and the society (Hutton, 1946). But these depressed castes have been treated as untouchables; as a result they suffered from many civic and religious disabilities.

The Scheduled Castes were subjected to various kinds of social disabilities and discriminations. The Scheduled Castes absolutely had no access to education in India. Earlier efforts towards educating of the untouchables made during the British rule and Christian Missionaries were also associated with the cause of education in India. After independence the Government of India in its five-year programme gave due importance to education of Scheduled Caste. One such community is Ager community spread over North Kanara District of Karnataka state. In this paper we study in detail the literacy status of Agers in Ankola taluk of North Kanara (Dt), Karnataka (State).

2. Review of Literature

Sociologists have attached a paramount importance to education in modern society. Education and occupation have become irrepressible as the society endlessly requires more and more specialized services. The role of education in raising the consciousness is widely acknowledged in the contemporary world. The Western world recognized the relevance of education in integrating individuals with society and it was progressively made accessible to all sections of society. The leaders of independent India were largely educated in the western tradition who gave due weightage to education of the scheduled castes as a means to improve their status. Immediately after the end of colonialism the literacy levels were low and the government of India undertook positive steps to make education accessible to all. It was not

an easy task (Puri H.K., 2004). Simultaneously the constitution of India provided reservation of a certain portion of seats for the members of the scheduled castes in educational institutions.

It is generally perceived that the schooling system offers scheduled castes an opportunity, on equal terms with others, to gain knowledge and enable them to rise in socio-economic status. It allows them to learn and develop along with children belonging to other castes, to see and imbibe values of higher communities, the experience and exposure to which was possible not available to their parents and grandparents (Mamata Rajwat, 2005). In short, education can be defined as a great human experiment in community interaction, a process of constant learning.

Acquiring education is generally perceived as a means to get white collar jobs, which in the case of scheduled castes is an important element, in their efforts to move away from their traditional occupations. Usually, we find scheduled castes in class IV category of government jobs; they are underrepresented in all other categories. It shows that despite reservation for the scheduled castes in educational institutions and government jobs, they have failed to make use of it. Also, it may be noted that all castes coming under scheduled castes category are not benefited by the reservation in the same way. Some castes made use of it more, while some others have not enjoyed the facility at all.

Literacy and education are two basic indicators of the level of development achieved by any group of people in general and in particular the scheduled caste. The literacy results in more awareness besides contributing to the overall improvement of health, hygiene and other social conditions (Mamata Rajwat, 2003). Even after the 50 years of independence the literacy level of scheduled castes is not improved as compared to general population. The data available shows that though a significant improvement has taken place, yet cent percent

literacy remains a distant dream. The literacy level is still low. Promotion of women's education has been the concern of India. Since independence the central and state governments, voluntary organizations and other institutions have done a lot for the progress of women's education and literacy by stepping up and strengthening their formal and non-formal education programmes. Yet the achievement in women's education and literacy are far from the goals set for universalisation of elementary primary education, more particularly among women. Studies on women education observed that as the level of education is increased; the age at marriage is also increased, which led to lower fertility. So, education was found to be an important factor for delaying the marriage of Dalit women. It was further observed that the education had increased the awareness level of women. The attitude towards child bearing and rearing had undergone a tremendous change.

Eradication of illiteracy has been a major concern of India in the recent past with education for all at the global level. Alongside strengthening the formal education sector, there have been many special drives in respect of literacy promotion like farmer's functional literacy programme, National Adult Educational Programme (NAEP) covering many programmes, Rural Functional Literacy Programme (RFLP), State Adult Education Programme (SAEP), mass programme and Functional Literacy (MPFL), Non-formal Education Programme for the 6-14 age group, back to school programme etc and total literacy campaigns (TLC's) of the National Literacy Mission all putting emphasis on women on the priority group among others. Even then the gender gap in literacy is not yet reduced to the required level.

3. Objectives of the study:

To find the literacy rates of Ager community in different age groups, in different villages.

To study the gender disparity of literacy and its affect on the community.

4. Methodology:

The Ager community is concentrated only in the District of North Kanara of Karnataka State and as per 2011 census their total population was around 6388. Among these 5160 were living in Ankola Taluk and remaining 623, 536 and 69 individuals were in Kumta, Karwar and Yellapur Taluks respectively. Even though Ager population has spread in the four Taluks of North Kanara, Ankola taluk has been chosen for sample survey of Ager community due to their large population in this Taluk (80 % of the total population).

1078 Ager families have well settled in several colonies of 34 villages in Ankola Taluk. For our survey 10 villages have been chosen using simple random sampling (Lottery method). From the selected 10 villages 100 families are chosen for sample survey using Lottery method by selecting 10 families from each village. A detailed questionnaire has been prepared related to literacy. A continuous survey has been made with three trained investigators in three months duration visiting and spending enough time with each household head and members of the family. Survey was conducted from October 2014 to December 2014. The collected data has been carefully edited and possible content and coverage errors have been eliminated before the analysis was done. Special care has been taken to collect information with respect Literacy.

Agers being scheduled castes are falling short in attaining education. Here we study status of literacy of hundred families selected from ten villages. The following tables 4.1 and 4.2 have been prepared on the basis of the present survey and a comparative study with Scheduled Castes in Karnataka state is made here. Table 4.1 provides information about Agers literacy in the sample villages selected age wise and sex wise and table 4.2 gives us the information about literacy of Agers in the sample villages. The literacy rate of Ager

community as whole is 82.12 %, where as the male and female literacy rates are respectively 92.58% and 70.65%. Which is high when compared to other scheduled castes.

Table 4.1. Distribution of Literacy rate of Agers age wise and sex wise.

Age group	Total Population			Illiterates			Literates			Percentage of literacy		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
6-9	11	1	12	-	-	-	11	1	12	100	100	100
10-14	19	27	46	1	2	3	18	25	43	94.73	92.59	93.47
15-19	15	11	26	-	1	1	15	10	25	100	90.9	96.15
20-24	26	18	44	2	1	3	24	17	41	92.31	94.44	93.18
25-29	25	17	42	-	2	2	25	15	40	100	82.23	95.23
30-34	23	18	41	-	3	3	23	15	38	100	83.33	92.68
35-39	24	17	41	-	2	2	24	15	39	100	88.29	95.12
40-44	13	14	27	1	4	5	12	10	22	92.31	71.42	81.48
45-49	9	18	27	1	5	6	8	13	21	88.89	72.22	77.78
50-54	11	17	28	1	11	12	10	6	16	90.9	35.29	57.14
55-59	8	7	15	2	6	8	6	1	7	75	14.29	46.67
60 & above	18	19	37	7	17	24	11	2	13	61.11	10.52	35.14
Total	202	184	386	15	54	69	187	130	317	92.58	70.65	82.12

Figure 4.1. Distribution of Literacy rate of Agers age wise and sex wise

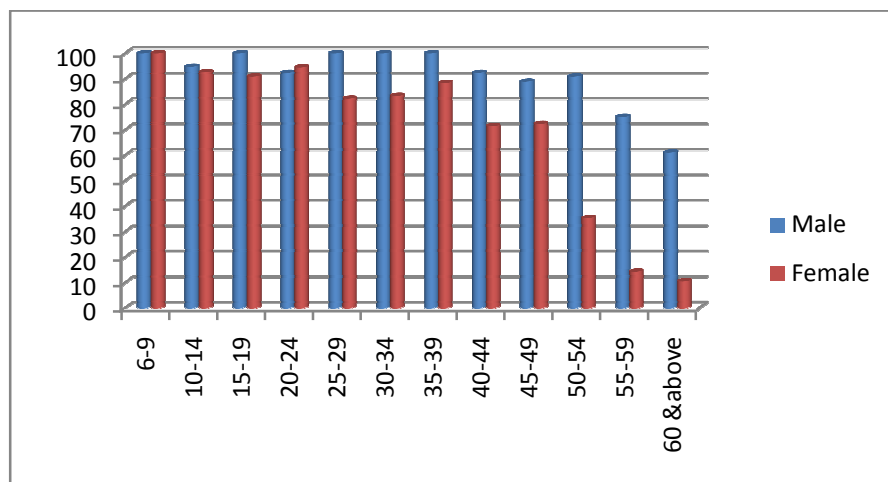
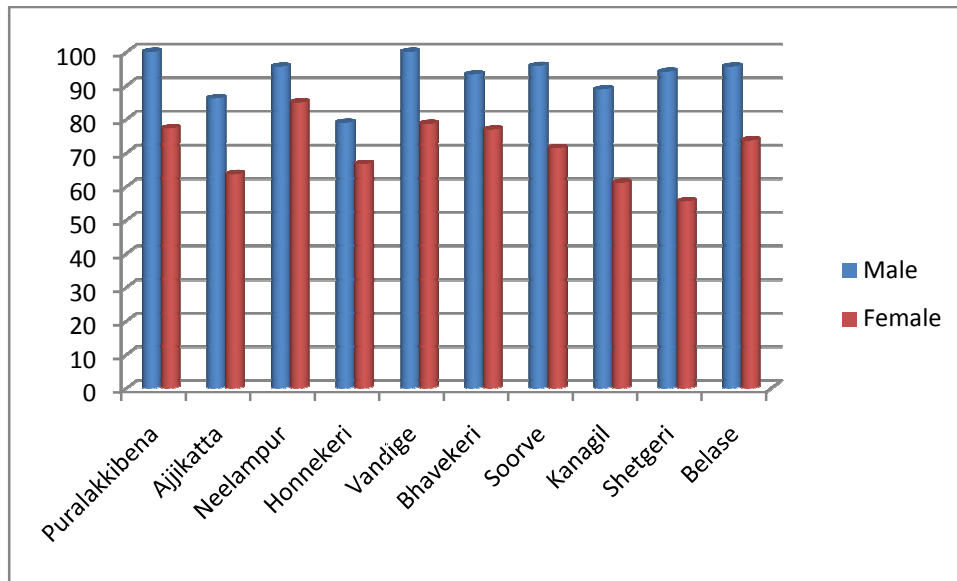


Table 4. 2. Distribution of Literacy rate of Agers in different villages sex wise

Villages	Total Population			Literates			Illiterates			Percentage of literacy		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Puralakkibena	17	22	39	17	17	34	-	5	5	100	77.27	87.18
Ajjikatta	29	22	51	25	14	39	4	8	12	86.21	63.64	76.47
Neelampur	23	20	43	22	17	39	1	3	4	95.65	85	90.69
Honnekeri	19	24	43	15	16	31	4	8	12	78.95	66.67	72.09
Vandige	17	14	31	17	11	28	-	3	3	100	78.57	90.32
Bhavekeri	15	13	28	14	10	24	1	3	4	93.33	76.92	85.71
Soorve	24	14	38	23	10	33	1	4	5	95.83	71.43	86.84
Kanagil	18	18	36	16	11	27	2	7	9	88.88	61.11	75
Shetgeri	17	18	35	16	10	26	1	8	9	94.11	55.56	74.29
Belase	23	19	42	22	14	36	1	5	6	95.65	73.68	85.71
Total	202	184	386	187	130	317	15	54	69	92.58	70.65	82.12

Figure 4.2. Distribution of Literacy rate of Agers village wise and sex wise.



The Gender disparity among the Agers in different villages as well as in different age groups is very clearly indicated in the figures 4.1 and 4.2. The table 4.2 indicates that in the all the villages female literacy rates are less than the male literacy rates. Neelampur and Vandige occupy the first rank in literacy rate, whereas Honnekeri occupies the last rank in total literacy rate. The difference between the literacy rates of male and female (gender disparity) varies from 10.65% to 38.55%. Gender disparity of Ager community as a whole is 21.93 percent, whereas the same among Scheduled castes and general population in Karnataka are 22.03 and 19.23 percent respectively. That is the disparity is almost same in case of Agers and the people in the state. To decrease gender disparity rate it is necessary to increase the female literacy rates. Also from the table 4.1 the gender disparity in terms literacy varies from zero percent to 60.71 percent and it is very less in the age groups 10-14-15-19, 20-24 and thereafter it increased. The high level of variation in the elder age groups is a common feature.

5. Education of the parents and number of child birth.

Education of the parents has an effect on number of children born to them. Usually educated people prefer small family and accept family planning after they have two or three children. The education of the male or female among the couples who ever has higher education is considered as education level of the couples. The number of children born to 96 couples in the field survey of Agers is given in the table 5.1.

Table: 5.1. Number of children born per couple according to education level

Education Level	No. of Couples	No. of Children	Children per Couple
Illiterate	19	61	3.22
Primary	32	88	2.77
High School	31	105	3.39
P.U.C	12	36	3.00
Degree or Higher	2	4	2.00
Total	96	294	3.06

Number of children per couple is 3.06. This shows that Agers prefer small family. Also we observe that higher the education level of the couples lower is the number of children born to them.

Now let us test whether the education of the couples has an effect on number of children born to them by using chi- square test. Table 5.2 displays the observed and expected number of children per couple.

Table 5.2 Observed and Expected number of children

Education Level	Number of couples	Number of children per couple	
		Observed	Expected
Illiterate	19	61	58
Primary	32	88	98
High school	31	105	95
P.U.C	12	36	37
Degree or higher	2	4	6
Total	96	294	294
Chi-square value – 2.92			
Degrees of freedom – 4			

To test the significance, we define the null Hypothesis, H₀: Number of children born equally frequently in all education level of the couples.

Chi square calculated value for the above data is 2.92 and critical value of chi-square at 5% level of significance and for 4 degrees of freedom is 2.36. Since, the calculated Value is greater than the table value, it is highly significant and we reject the null hypotheses. Thus we conclude that the number of children born per couple is not equally frequent in all education level. That is education of the parents has an effect in having number of children. That is higher the education level less will be the number of children born.

6. Conclusion:

The literacy rate of the community is 82.12% and is comparatively better when compared to the other scheduled castes. Gender disparity is 21.93% and varies from 10.65% to 38.55% in different villages. The literacy has an effect on number of children born to the couples.

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