

## **An Assessment of Poverty and Living Standard of the Baigas of Samnapur Block of Dindori District, Madhya Pradesh**

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**ABSTRACT** The present paper elucidates some aspects of poverty and living standard of Baigas of Samnapur block of Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh. Baiga is one of the most primitive tribal groups of central India. Out of total Baiga villages of Samnapur block, Simardha and Tikariya village were randomly selected for the purpose of study, and out of these two villages a total of 100 households comprising of 494 individuals were randomly selected and interviewed. The information was gathered through interview using a pretested, structured schedule. The findings reveal that a majority of the population is poor and illiterate. As most of them live in the interior forest areas, away from the main stream, their living standard also reflects the same. Many of them are not even able to consume the fruits of recent development, occurring elsewhere in the world. Agriculture is one of the major sources of income among them, but they are required to be trained about new techniques and methods of it, which can bring a substantial increase in their yield. Thus, there is an urgent need to launch some income generating programmes to improve their economic status, by different government and non government organizations.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Poverty is one of the most serious and formidable economic problems, which the world is facing today. It is the root cause of many other problems also. Malnutrition, high mortality rates etc. are the results of poverty. Poverty in human terms means inadequacy of; basic necessities, viz., food, clothing and housing etc. (Caprihan, 1982).

Malnutrition and poor health condition is one of the most serious consequences of poor economic conditions, which is prevalent all over the world today. The most agonizing part is that children under age group of 5-15 years are hit the hardest. Poverty is defined in a number of ways by different people. The food and agriculture organization of the United Nation defines poverty as if a household spend 70 percent of its income on food, it can be classed below poverty line. There are two approaches for discussing the poverty line, i.e., mono and multi dimension approach. The former is mainly concerned with level of income and the later is concerned with multivariate nature of social indicators, like standard of living etc. For the purpose of present study the second approach is used.

The most obvious meaning of poverty is low income, poor health, low literacy and unemployment. The term poverty refers to state or condition of having little or no money, low

living standard and goods and means of transport.

It is well known that most of the tribal are victims of acute poverty and are living in worst living conditions. Lack of money, along with unawareness, is often responsible for illiteracy and poor health conditions, and as a result the tribal remain at their present position on the graph of development. A number of studies have been made on poverty and living standard of different tribal populations, viz., Elwin (1939, 1963), Saxon (1957), Caprihan (1982), Mahapatra (1994), Yadav (2000, 2001), Sharma et al. (2002, 2004), Dwivedi (2003) and many others. Here, attempt has been made to assess the level of poverty and living standard of the Baigas of Samnapur block of Dindori district.

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The present study is conducted among the Baigas of Samnapur block of Dindori district, Madhya Pradesh, India. The newly formed Dindori district is surrounded by Kachar and Satpura mountain ranges of Narmada River, which is very rich in terms of natural beauty and wild resources, but very poor from the economical point of view. It is basically a tribal area. It is surrounded by Jabalpur in its northeast, Shahdol in northwest, Bilaspur in southwest, Rajnandgaon and Balaghat in south and Mandla

in west. It also touches the boundary of Chattisgarh state.

The Simardha and Tikariya villages come under block Samnapur of Dindori tehsil, Dindori district. It lies between, 22°17' to 23°22' North and 80°35' to 80°58' east. The block covers an area of 806 km<sup>2</sup>. Out of the two villages, which are covered during study, Simardha is a forest village, situated at a distance of 8 km from block headquarter on a small hill top, whereas Tikariya is a road side village.

Baiga is one of the most primitive tribal groups of central India. Baiga can easily be described as a tribe, which has been least affected by the modern civilization. The earliest account of the Baiga that has come down to us is as recent as 1867, when captain Thomson, in his Seoni settlement report, briefly described them as "the wildest of the tribes, inhabiting the most inaccessible hills and the remotest forests; living on what they can secure with their bows and arrows, in the use of which they are very skilful, and on the forest produce, and the small crops which they raise on the hill sides."

The Baigas appear to be a branch of the great Bhuiya tribe, which still numbers half a million in Bengal and Bihar and is to be found chiefly in Jashpur and Serguja in the present neighbourhood of the Baiga. The Bhuiya, who are also called as the Bhumia, are, as their name implies 'lords of the soil'. This title is also claimed by the Baiga who call themselves Bhumiaraja or Bhumijan, and Bhumia is the name given to the most important sub-section of their tribe.

A total of 100 households comprising of 494 individuals were randomly selected during the study. For this purpose, the two villages named Simardha and Tikariya were randomly selected from the total number of villages and then different households were selected out of these two villages on a random sampling basis. Thus the present investigation has been conducted by random sampling using pre tested, structured interview schedule. Simultaneously, group discussion and informal interview methods have been used. Observation has been conducted through semi-participant method.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Most of the Baigas live in Kuccha house with Khuppar roof (58 percent) and moreover many of these houses are made up of one room only

(59 percent). All the Baigas make use of wood as their fuel instead of other sources like coal, kerosene; gas etc., for it is easily available due to long forest area. Baigas use traditional diyas/lamps (83 percent) for the purpose of lighting. Almost all of them (96 percent) travel by foot, except a very few ones of road side village, who own their bicycles and make its use for covering distant areas (4 percent). Maximum numbers of Baigas get information of outside world from the market (74 percent). This implies that the economic condition of Baigas is not very much sound, as they cannot afford to have major means of communication such as Television, Radio etc. (Table 1), which is the major cause of much of their unawareness and ignorant attitude towards education, thereby increasing the prevalence of illiteracy.

Maximum numbers of Baigas possess land

**Table 1: Information regarding housing and other basic necessities of Baigas**

<i>S. Characteristics</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>No.</i>	
1. <i>Type of house</i>	
(a) Kuccha with hay roof	1
(b) Kuccha with Khuppar roof	58
(c) Pukka with Khuppar roof	37
(d) Pukka with half hay and half Khuppar roof	1
(e) Mixed	3
2. <i>Number of rooms</i>	
(a) One	59
(b) Two	30
(c) Three	7
(d) Four	4
3. <i>Type of Fuel used</i>	
(a) Wood	100
(b) Kerosene	-
(c) Coal	-
(d) Gas	-
(e) Solar Energy	-
(f) Other	-
4. <i>Source of Lighting</i>	
(a) Lamp/Deepak	83
(b) Electricity	17
5. <i>Mode of Transport preferred</i>	
(a) Bicycle	4
(b) Bullock cart	-
(c) Scooter	-
(d) Rikshaw	-
(e) On foot	96
(f) Other	-
6. <i>Source of communication</i>	
(a) Radio	6
(b) Television	-
(c) Market	74
(d) Other Village	13
(e) Other (One-another)	7

of about 4-6 acre (44 percent). It can be observed that 54 percent people of the observed sample possess cows, out of which maximum individuals have only one cow (29 percent) followed by those having two (17 percent), three (6 percent), four (1 percent) and more than four cows (1 percent). However in case of buffaloes only 5 percent people domesticate them, out of which maximum number of people possess only one buffalo (4 percent), followed by those having four (1 percent) buffalos (Table 2)

Goats are possessed by 37 percent people out of whom maximum numbers of people possess only one goat (28 percent), followed by those having two (7 percent) and three (2 percent) goats. It may be observed that 77 percent of households have oxen, which are clearly meant for the sake of agriculture. A maximum number of people own 2 oxen (46 percent), followed by those having one (16 percent), four (09 percent) and three (6

percent) oxen. Pig rearing is also a practice found among the Baigas of Samnapur block and 39 percent people were found to rear one pig in their house. People were also found to rear the kids of pigs in different numbers (see the table).

Cock or hen were found to be reared by 63 percent of people out of which a maximum number of people reared one cock/hen (34 percent) followed by those having two (21 percent), three (4 percent), four (3 percent) and more than four (1 percent) cock/hen. Chicks were also found to be seen in few households (4 percent). Some of the households (24 percent) were found to have calf i.e. Bachada, Pada etc. in their house, out of which maximum number of people reared one calf (12 percent), followed by those rearing two (08 percent) and three (04 percent) calves.

Table 3 depicts average monthly income of the family through agriculture, labour jobs, forest produce gathering along with total average monthly income. Most of the Baiga households (63 percent) have a monthly income of 0-100 Rs. from agriculture, whereas highest amount of family income through labour is between Rs. 51-100 (54 percent). It can be observed from the table that different Baiga households have different income from the gathering of minor forest produces, but a maximum number of them earn an amount of Rs. 601-800 (18 percent) through minor forest produce gathering. The total average monthly income of most of the Baiga households is between Rs. 1001-1200 (21 percent). Thus it could be concluded from the table that most of the Baigas come under the category of below poverty line, which itself simply explain the reason for wide spread malnutrition and poor health conditions prevalent among the region. As most of them are hardly able to secure the most basic requirement of their life, that is food, they are least concerned about the nutritional aspect of the same, whatever they are able to procure and anyhow, which goes to worsen the case. Moreover, the persistent state of malnutrition and poor health condition leads to push up the mortality rate of all the types, for most of the death cases observed are found to have their roots in the poor nutritional status and health conditions of the victim.

The total monthly expenditure on different aspects of Baigas of Samnapur block has been elucidated in table 4. It can be observed from the table that most of the Baigas spend a sum of Rs. 401 - above, per month, on food (27 percent)

**Table 2: Economic assets of Baigas**

S. No.	Characteristics	Percent
1.	Total Land Possessed	
(a)	Less than 1/2 acre	7
(b)	0.5 acre-3 acre	28
(c)	4-6 acre	44
(d)	7-9 acre	-
(e)	10-12 acre	10
(f)	Included in that of father	6
(g)	No Separate Land	5
2.	Type and number of animals possessed by Baigas	
(a)	Cow (29 having one, 17 having two, 06 having three, 1 having four and 1 having more than four cows)	54
(b)	Buffalo (4 having one, 1 having four, and no one having two, three or more Buffaloes)	5
(c)	Goat (28 having one, 7 having two, 02 having three and no one having four or more than four goats)	37
(d)	Ox(16 having one, 46 having two, 06 having three, 9 having four and no one having more than four oxen)	77
(e)	Pig(All of them have only one pig)	39
(f)	Kids of Pig (Chauna)(1 having one, 1 having two, 02 having four, 4 having more than four and no one having three kids of pig)	8
(g)	Cock/ hen (34 having one, 21 having two, 04 having three, 3 having four and 1 having more than four cock/hen)	63
(h)	Chick (Chooja)(1 having two, 3 having more than four and no one having one, three or four chick/choojas)	4
(i)	Calf (Bachiya/Bachada)(12 having one, 8 having two, 4 having three, and no one having four or more than four calves)	24

**Table 3 : Average monthly income of the family**

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Income (in Rs)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>1. Through Agriculture</i>		
(a)	No income	10
(b)	0-100	63
(c)	101-200	21
(d)	201-300	5
(e)	301-400	-
(f)	401- above	1
<i>2. Through Labour (Govt. Jobs etc.)</i>		
(a)	No income	9
(b)	0-50	28
(c)	51-100	54
(d)	101-150	8
(e)	151-200	-
(f)	201-250	1
<i>3. Through Minor forest produce gathering</i>		
(a)	0-200	2
(b)	201-400	4
(c)	401-600	11
(d)	601-800	18
(e)	801-1000	16
(f)	1001-1200	16
(g)	1201-1400	17
(h)	1401-1600	9
(i)	1601- Above	7
<i>4. Total average Monthly Income</i>		
(a)	Less than 200	1
(b)	201-400	-
(c)	401-600	2
(d)	601-800	13
(e)	801-1000	9
(f)	1001-1200	21
(g)	1201-1400	19
(h)	1401-1600	18
(i)	1601- 1800	9
(j)	1801-2000	6
(k)	2001-2200	1
(l)	2201-2400	-
(m)	2401 - above	1

whereas in case of entertainment activities, i.e., celebrations, liquor drinking etc. most of them spend between Rs 151-200 (29 percent). Nearly half of the Baigas (51 percent) spend a sum of Rs 51-100 on cloths. In case of health, 38 percent people spend up to Rs. 50 per month and almost equal numbers of individuals (37 percent) are there who do not make any expenditure for it. Most of the Baigas (46 percent) spend no money for the sake of education; however some of them spend upto Rs. 50 (32 percent) or Rs. 51-100 (22 percent) for educational attainment. This again is a matter of grave concern as the explicit ignorance towards attaining the basic education further cumulates with the already prevalent unawareness regarding such basic requisite to finally result into a state of all pervasive illiteracy in the region. Thus an urgent need is there to

**Table 4: Information regarding total monthly expenditure**

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Expenditure (in Rs.)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>1. On Food</i>		
(a)	51-100	1
(b)	101-150	1
(c)	151-200	9
(d)	201-250	13
(e)	251-300	23
(f)	301-350	10
(g)	351-400	16
(h)	401- above	27
<i>2. On Entertainment</i>		
(a)	1-50	1
(b)	51-100	8
(c)	101-150	16
(d)	151-200	29
(e)	201-250	14
(f)	251-300	21
(g)	301-350	3
(h)	351-400	6
(i)	401- above	2
<i>3. On Cloths</i>		
(a)	1-50	45
(b)	51-100	51
(c)	101-150	4
<i>4. On Health</i>		
(a)	No expenditure	37
(b)	1-50	38
(c)	51-100	25
<i>5. On Education</i>		
(a)	No expenditure	46
(b)	1-50	32
(c)	51-100	22
<i>6. On Journey</i>		
(a)	No expenditure	91
(b)	1-50	9
<i>7. On Other expenditures</i>		
(a)	No expenditure	4
(b)	1-50	27
(c)	51-100	40
(d)	101-150	17
(e)	151-200	9
(f)	201-250	2
(g)	251-300	1

make them aware about the benefits of education, which may in turn help them to improve their economic status.

In case of traveling, almost all of the people travel by foot and so no expenditure is incurred on journeys (91 percent), except a few people who spend upto Rs. - 50 as their traveling expenses (9 percent). Besides, expenditure is made by Baigas on other things also like consuming meat of fish, pig or tobacco purchasing etc. Maximum number of Baiga households spends Rs 51-100 for these expenses (40 percent).

In all it can be concluded that Baigas, like

many other tribal populations, are victims of poor economic conditions. Their total monthly income, expenditure, type of fuel used, source of lighting, mode of transport preferred, and type of communication media owned etc. reflects their poverty level and low living standard, which is certainly responsible for their poor health and nutritional status, illiteracy and high mortality rate in the population. Their main source of income is minor forest produce collection. Besides, agriculture is also practiced by many of them, who have their own forest land pieces, big or small, but as they are following the old methods and techniques of agriculture (Ploughing etc.) the substantial yield is not upto the degree of satisfaction. Thus there is an urgent need to make them aware about modern methods and techniques of cultivation, so that they can increase their yield, thereby increasing the profit margin.

It is well known that if lack of awareness is there, poverty and illiteracy makes a cumulative and reciprocal effect over each other, as both of them generally enhance the incidence of each other. In such a case presence of any one of these facilitate the other to flourish, which in turn facilitates its own growth. However the situation can be remedied by increasing the awareness among the residents through education, and therefore need is there to launch some income generating, educational and health awareness programmes to improve their overall economic, educational and health status and bring the awareness regarding proper utilization of their skills and resources, by government and non-

government organizations. The programmes should be launched according to their aspirations, needs and resources.

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