

Bhili Dialect v/s Wagadi Dialect: The Issue of the Ethnic Identity of the Tribal Dominated Region of Southern Rajasthan

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Banswara, Dungarpur and Pratapgarh districts and a few tehsils of Chittorgarh, Udaipur and Sirohi district are enlisted as Tribal Sub Plan Area. TSP region is a particular term assigned to a certain area which is dominated by the tribal community; it may have its identity simply as a tribal dominated area/region. As per the constitution of India, as the population of the tribal community in these area is more than 80 % percent of the total population of the area.

The Scheduled Area in the state of Rajasthan was originally specified under the scheduled Areas (Part-B-sates) order, 1950 (C.O.26) dated 7-12-1950 and has been specified vide the Scheduled Areas (State of Rajasthan) order, 1981 (C.O.114) dated 12-2-1981 after rescinding the order cited earlier in 80 far as it is related to the state of Rajasthan.

This region is dominated by the tribal community, which is a subaltern and primitive community. Therefore, the government has specified this region as a Tribal Sub Plan region to introduce certain special plans and schemes for the emancipation and upliftment of the tribal community. Both the central and the state governments have introduced special plans, programmes and schemes for the welfare of this region. For the same purpose, both the central and the state governments have established the Department for Tribal Area Development in the state.

Two ethnic regions cover this TSP area, these are Mewar region and Wagad region. Udaipur, Sirohi and a few tehsils of Pratapgarh districts are part of Mewar region. Though Banswara district is located near

Pratapgarh district, and Dungarpur district is an adjoining area of Mewar state, yet these two districts of Banswara and Dungarpur along with a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district and a few villages of Udaipur district have their own specific collective historical as well as ethnic identity. These two districts, Banswara and Dungarpur along with a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district and a few villages of Udaipur district which cover a major part of the Tribal Sub Plan region, have their own distinct ethnic identity. They are jointly known as the Wagad region. Geographically the Wagad region is located in the southern part of Rajasthan. It spreads across 8292 sq. k.m. between 23 20 to 24 1 north latitude and 73 21 to 74 45 east longitude.

It is located on the borders of two contiguous states Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat in the Eastern and southern sides and Pratapgarh and Udaipur districts of Rajasthan state in the Northern and Western sides.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the term ethnic as: "Of relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, religious, linguistic or cultural origin or background."

Ethnicity is a wider term which covers under its umbrella many factors like race, religion, community, culture, nationality, language, etc. David Crystal, a well known sociolinguist, wrote a chapter on "Language And Ethnic Group" in his book *Sociolinguistics*. He wrote in this chapter:-

There is, then, no inherent or necessary link between language and race. It remains true, however, that in many cases language may be an important or even essential concomitant of ethnic group membership. This is a social fact, though, and it is important to be clear about what sort of processes may be involved. In some cases, for example, and particularly where languages rather than varieties of a language are involved, linguistic characteristics may be the most important defining factor for ethnic group membership.

Language plays an important role in determining the ethnic identity of this region, as the name of the Wagad region is derived from the word Wagadi. Wagadi is a dialect which is specifically spoken in this region. At the same time, it must be specified here that this region has had a

long historical background. Apart from this, a few scholars have given their own interpretation of the ethnic identity of the region. As Gourishankar Hirachandraji Ojhha, a prominent historian of the region writes in his book *Dungarpur Rajya Ka Itihas [History of Dungarpur State]*.

The ancient name of Dungarpur state was Wagad. The term Wagad resembles a word from Gujarati language “Wagada” which means forest area or an area of low density of people.

Some scholars of Sanskrit, Prakrit and other deviational languages also refer to this region as “Wagrat,” “Waggad”, “Waiyagad” and “Wagwar.” Sometimes they also call it “Pushp Pradesh”

(Flowers Region) and Gupt Pradesh (Secret Region). They call this region “Pushp Pradesh” or “Gupt Pradesh” as there are references in the great Indian religious epic *Mahabharata* that the Pandavas came and stayed here for a few months during their “Vanvas” (banishment). It was a dense forest area thus many Hindu saints are said to have come to this region for their ordeal or “Tapasya”. In ancient times, the southern part of Mewar State and the Eastern part of Gujarat state including some of the Western part of Malva, along with Banswara and Dungarpur districts, used to be specified as Wagad state. However, later the identity of Wagad state was confined to the two districts of Banswara and Dungarpur along with a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district and a few villages of Udaipur district.

There are a few ancient stone inscriptions as well as a few ancient copper plate inscriptions which give the references of this “Wagad State.” No historian has tried to explore the history of this region till date and no manuscriptologist has tried to interpret the manuscripts of this region. Hence, the manuscripts that are found in this region are still unexplored. Even then, these inscriptions are invaluable historical evidences of the references of Wagad state.

संवत् 1291 वर्षे पौष सुदि 3 रवौ वागड़ वटपद्र के महाराजाधिराज श्री सिंहड़देव विजयो दयी.

From the inscription found on the temple of goddess of Vijawa located in Bhekred village in Dungarpur district. [Vikram Samvat 1291]

Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens define folklore and say:

Folklore is informally learned, unofficial knowledge about the world, ourselves, our communities, our beliefs, our cultures and our traditions, that is expressed creatively through words, music, customs, actions, behaviours and materials. It is also the interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating and performing as we share that knowledge with other people.

Folk literature is considered as the representative literature of the culture, traditions and the traditional knowledge, etc. of the concerned community or the region. The references of the Wagad region in the folk literature of the region strengthen the specific ethnic identity of the region as Wagad region.

निज बरसौ मेहा मैं ।
मोठ बाजरीं वागड़ निपजे ।
मेहड़ा निपजे खादड़ मैं ।
नित बरसो मेहा वागड़ मैं ।

The singer prays to the clouds to bless his region which is named as Wagad with good rainfall, so that they may do their farming and grow grains.

The name of Wagad region is derived from the word Wagadi. Wagadi is a dialect which is specifically spoken in this region. Peter Trudgill and J. K. Chambers define dialect as: –

. . . a dialect is a sub-standard, low status, often rustic form of language, generally associated with the working class or other groups lacking in prestige. Dialect is also a term which is often applied to a form of language particularly those spoken more in isolated parts of the world, which have no written form. And dialects are also often regarded as some kind of (often erroneous) deviation from a norm-as aberrations of a correct or standard form of language.

Wagadi is a sub-standard and low status language which is spoken in the region and hence it falls into the category of a dialect. Though the region in which this dialect is spoken is not absolutely isolated, it is also true that this region has never been well connected with other regions close to it. The interaction of the people of this region with the people of surrounding regions has always remained very difficult owing to the geographical conditions of the region. Till date, Banswara district of this region is the only district of the state which is not connected by rail.

The distribution of Wagadi mother tongue in the districts of Rajasthan state as per 2001 Census is presented in Table.

If we analyse this data of the census 2001 tracing the speakers of Wagadi dialect we will find that there are 25,00,574 speakers of Wagadi dialect in Rajasthan. Among them 20,68,779 speakers, which makes up 82.73% of the total speakers, are from the two districts of Banswara and Dungarpur, while only 4,16,237 speakers which make up approximately 27% of Wagadi dialect community are from Udaipur and Chittaurgarh districts. This was because Wagadi dialect is spoken in a few villages of Kherwara tehsil in Udaipur district and at that time Pratapgarh used to be a part of Chittaurgarh district, but later on Pratapgarh was declared as a separate district on 26-01-2008. A few villages of Kherawra tehsil in Udaipur district and Pipalkhut Sub division of Pratapgarh district have also become the part of the Wagadi region.

Grierson identifies Wagadi dialect as a dialect specifically spoken in the southern part of Rajasthan, a specific region which is dominated by the tribals or Bhil community. He states:

Wagadi is a dialect of Bhil tribe which is found in Rajputana and the adjoining districts. In Mewar state we find them in the hilly tracts in the south-western. They are also found in the adjoining parts of Gwalior, Partapgarh, Banswara and Dungarpur.

In another research done on the seven dialects of Rajasthan, Grierson has specified Bhili dialect as a synonym of Wagadi dialect.

District	TOTAL			Rural			Urban		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Rajasthan	2500574	1252872	1247702	2391575	1196622	1194953	108999	56250	52749
Banswara	1240596	627679	612917	1193116	603184	589932	47480	2445	22985
Dungarpur	828183	408658	419525	780162	384038	396124	48021	24620	23401
Udaipur	388516	194042	194474	376574	187765	188809	11942	6277	5665
Chittaurgarh	27721	14251	13470	27274	13997	13277	447	254	193

Regarding Bhili/Bhilodi, it may be noted that though Grierson did not associate it with the Rajasthani group of languages, it has been included in the present Volume under the consideration that a:- towards the North and East of Rajasthan the Bhil dialects gradually merge into various forms of Rajasthani and b:- Bhil is one of the scheduled tribes of Rajasthan state at present. Though Bhili/Bhilodi language comprises several mother tongues, namely, Bhili/Bhilodi, Gameti/Gavit, Garasia, Kokna/Kokni/Kukna, Mawchi, Paradhi, Tadavi, Varli, Wagadi, etc. but in Rajasthan only Bhili/Bhilodi and Wagadi have been studied being state-specific. Accordingly Wagadi and Bhili/Bhilodi are synonymous in the state of Rajasthan.

Wagad region had always been dominated by the tribals, who are also called Bhils and hence a few scholars prefer to specify the dialect spoken by these tribals as Bhili dialect and not *Wagadi* dialect. Another reason of naming the dialect of the region as Bhili dialect is specified by Sebastian Mukharjee,

The term ‘Bhil’ is supposed to refer to a Dravidian word „Bhilli meaning, Bow which is the characteristic weapon of the tribe. A Sanskrit name ‘Bhid’ meaning ‘pierce’, ‘shoot and kill’, also is connected to their name with reference to their proficiency in archery.

Thus, Wagadi dialect is sometimes confused with Bhili dialect. Bhili dialect has not been specified as a dialect in itself till the date. It is considered just a specific way of pronunciation by

a particular primitive community who themselves prefer to identify their dialect as Wagadi dialect. Sebastian Mukharjee specified this in his research and wrote:

The present study has been conducted in Rajasthan state under Linguistic Survey of India – Rajasthan Scheme. The informants located in Udaipur, Banswara, Dungarpur were identified by the competent authority of Rajasthan state for collection of elicited data. Accordingly, the informants named Shri. Babu Bhil (from *Mada*

village, Dungarpur) and Shri. Devo Bhil (from Banswara) were contacted for field data collection. As per the information of the above informants the Bhili speakers in the region like to identify themselves as Wagadi speakers. Hence the present report gives a description of the Wagadi variety of Bhili under the title Wagadi.

Historian Grierson has also specified Bhili as a language and connected it specifically with the Bhil or tribal community. He is of the opinion that this language is not confined to the Wagad region but is also found in many other regions of India. Grierson writes :

Bhili/Bhilodi is an Indo-Aryan language under central group. Ethnographically Bhils are sometimes stated to be Dravidians and sometimes to belong to Munda stock. But whatever their original speech may have been, there can be no doubt that, at present they speak an Aryan dialect, closely related to Gujarati and Rajasthani [but it should be borne in mind that the Bhils are not of Aryan origin, and that they have, accordingly, adopted a foreign tongue]. We cannot under such circumstances expect the same consistency as in the case of the genuine Aryan vernaculars, and as a matter of fact we often meet with a state of affairs that reminds us of the mixed character of the language of other aboriginal tribes, which have, in the course of time, adopted the speech of their Aryan neighbors.

Bhili dialect is spoken in a specific manner which can be articulated by tribal or Bhil community only. The most important quality of this dialect is that it can be spoken only by a Bhil/tribal only and particularly the tribals who live in the scattered areas of the region. Even the tribals who live in the non-scattered villages cannot articulate in this manner.

Tribal community is a primitive community and they reside in the forest areas or the remote areas. It has already been specified in the paper that Wagad region is a TSP region which is dominated by tribal community. The Wagad region is dominated by tribal population and 80% population of the total population of the region are tribals. It is an

obvious fact that 80 % population of the Wagad region communicate in Bhili dialect and only 20% population of the region communicate in Wagadi dialect.

The richness of any language or dialect may be accessed on the basis of number of speakers, richness of the diction, availability of written script, grammar and the literature available in the language or dialect. A comparison of Wagadi and Bhili dialect may be done on the basis of the above specified parameters to compare these dialects. It has already been specified that Bhili dialect is spoken by tribal community only, which dominates the total population of the region by 80% and Wagadi dialect is spoken by remaining non-tribal population which is 20% only in the region. The diction in both the dialects is almost the same. There are a few words which are different in Bhili and Wagadi dialects. Both the dialects do not have any specific script to write, Devnagari script is used to write in both the dialects. Grammar in both the dialects has not been specifically identified yet. The richness of tribal literature in the region may be accessed on the basis of the fact that it is represented as the representative literature of the Wagad region. Many scholars have done their researches on the tribal literature, tribal culture, tribal traditions, tribal value systems and many other aspects of tribal community. Every researcher collects his/her data for research from the tribal community but most of the time he/she attributes this data to culture, traditions, etc. of the Wagad region.

Bhili dialect has been traced as one of the major fifteen languages spoken in Rajasthan state in the linguistic survey of India 2011.

“Out of the major 15 languages of Rajasthan, 1. Hindi and 2. Bhili/Bhilodi have been the subject of the present volume since these two languages are state-specific.”(LSI 2011)

Wagadi dialect is considered as a dialect of Bhili language in the linguistic survey of India- 2011. It writes :

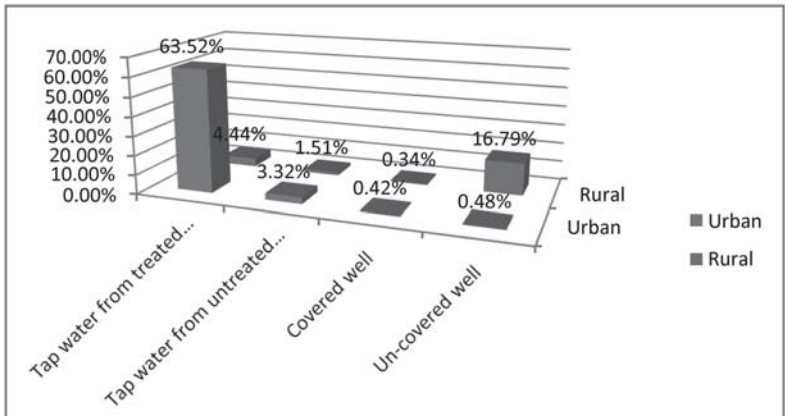
The most important feature in the Volume is that, except Wagdi, all other languages/mother tongues surveyed under the present Volume

are the grouped mother tongues of Hindi as per classification and presentation of Census data on languages/mother tongues since 1971 Census onwards. Wagdi is the mother tongue grouped under Bhili/Bhilodi language.

Bhili is an Indo-Aryan language under central group whereas Wagadi is a dialect considered as a mother tongue grouped under the Bhili language. Even then, all linguistic surveys considered Wagadi dialect as the dialect spoken in the Wagad region because of the region that it is observed that the people of the region represent themselves as they speak Wagadi dialect and not the Bhili dialect. The reason of this appears quite clear that they do not want themselves to be identified as Bhils or the inhabitant of the region which is dominated by the Bhils. The people of the region are very well familiar with the fact that the people of the remote areas has a general perception about this Tribal dominated region is still that they are with bow and still living an aboriginal life which is far away from the mainstream of the development. Probably the inhabitants of this region found it derogatory to be identified themselves with these images. The people of this region had been introducing themselves as the inhabitants of the Wagad region for many decades or centuries. Consequently, the researchers might have to use Wagadi dialect to present the data of the speakers of the region.

There may be many other factors which may play pivotal roles in the formation of the ethnic identity of the region. The socio-economic status of any community represents its status of living, economic strength and overall profile of a community. The socio-economic status of any community affects the culture, traditions and language; it also plays an important role in determining the formation of the ethnic identity of the region and also in determining the dominance of one community on another community. If one tries to analyze the socio- economical status of the tribal community with the non- tribal community of the Wagad region, one will have to analyze the socio-economical status of the urban areas and the rural areas of the region, as tribal community resides only in the rural areas of the region. Banswara and Dungarpur district cover a major part of the Wagad region hence; the data of the two districts

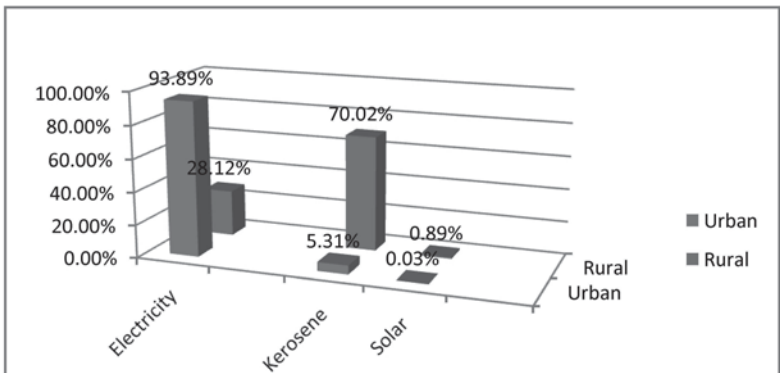
were selected to analyze the socio-economical status of the rural and the urban areas of the region.



Banswara district

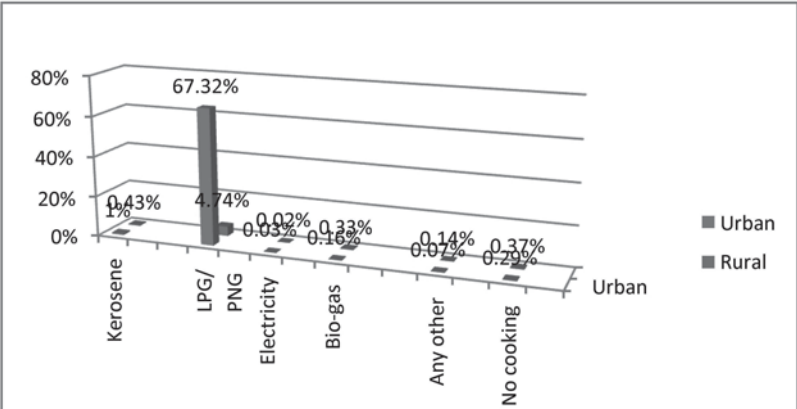
Percentage of Households Using Water to Drink from different Types of Sources

The above data clarifies the fact that the 63.52% of the urban population is drinking tap water from the treated sources whereas only 4.44% of the rural population has the availability of the tap from the treated sources. 16.79% of the rural population is using water from the un-covered well as the drinking water.



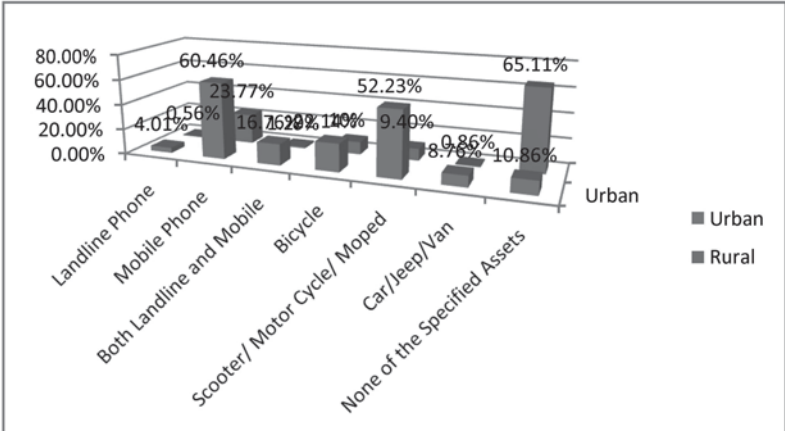
Percentage of Households Using Different Sources as the Main Source of Lighting

The above chart shows that electricity is available to 93.89% of the urban population in the district whereas only 28.12% population of the rural areas has the availability of the electricity facility in the district. 70.02 % population of the rural areas has to use kerosene even in 2011 whereas this percentage of the people using kerosene in the urban areas is just 5.31.



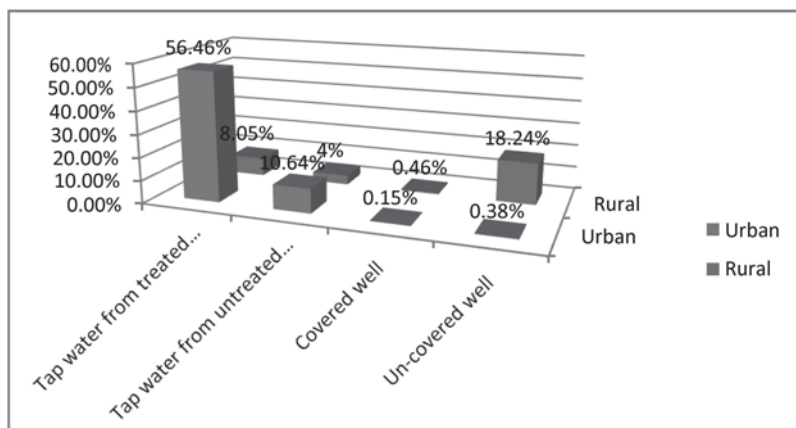
Percentage of Households using different Types of fuel for Cooking

67.32 % is using LPG as the fuel to cook in the urban areas and only 4.74% of the rural population is using LPG.



Percentage of Households having each of the Specified Assets

52.23% people of the urban areas has scooter or motorcycle and these facilities are availed by only 9.4% population in the rural areas of the district. 65.11% people of the rural areas do not have landline phone, mobile phone bicycle, car and other specified assets as per the census data of 2011.



Dungarpur district

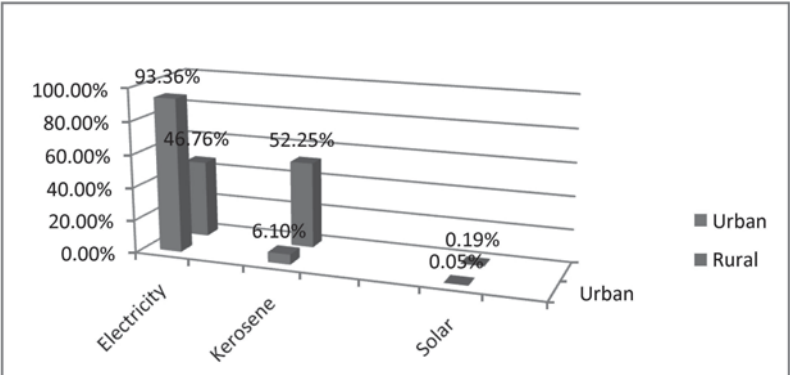
Percentage of Households Using Water to Drink from different Types of Sources

56.46% population of the urban areas is using tap water from the treated sources whereas only 8.05% people of the rural areas has the availability of the tap water from the treated sources.

18.24 % people of the rural areas are bound to drink water from the un-covered wells .

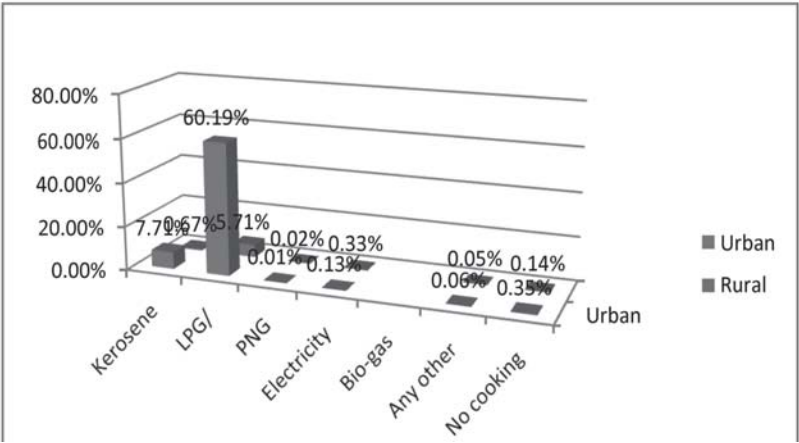
Percentage of Households Using Different Sources as the Main Source of Lighting

93.36 % urban population of the district has the availability of electricity in their houses whereas only 46.76% people have electricity in the rural areas. 52.25% population of the rural areas is bound to use kerosene.



Percentage of Households using different Types of fuel for Cooking

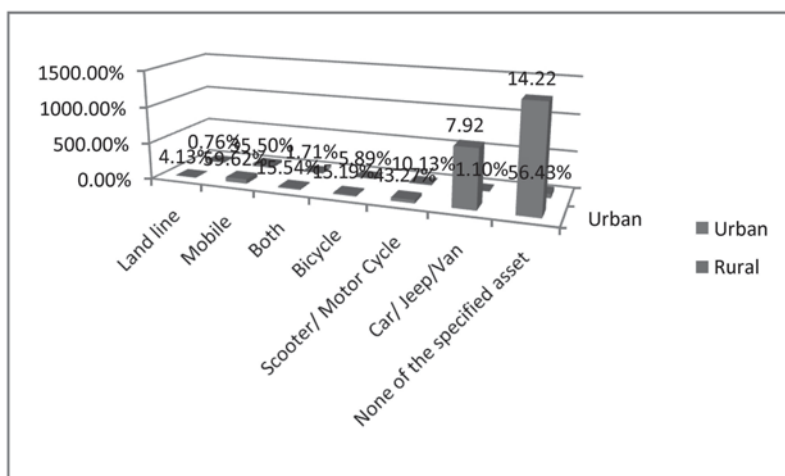
60.19 % population of the urban areas is using LPG as fuel in their kitchen whereas only 5.71 % population of the rural areas has the availability of the LPG in their kitchen.



Percentage of Households having each of the specified assets

43.27 % people in the urban areas of Dungarpur district have scooter or motorcycle whereas

56.43 % people in the rural areas do not have land line phone, mobile, bicycle, scooter, motor cycle, car jeep or other specified assets.



The socio-economical status of the urban and the rural areas of the other areas of the Wagad region namely a few tehsils of Pratapgarh district or the areas of Udaipur district are the same. Though it is a fact that rural areas are socio-economically weaker areas yet the above analysis of the specified data of census 2011 strengthen the fact that the rural areas are socio-economically weaker in comparison to the urban areas of the region. The tribals or the Bhils resides in the rural areas of the region only and the non-tribal communities reside in the urban areas of the region. Socio-economically richer sections of the society always dominate the weaker sections of the society. The non-tribal communities of the region who speaks Wagadi dialect ethnically dominate the socio-economical weaker tribal community of the region who speaks Bhili dialect.

The speakers of the Wagadi dialect are just 20% of the total speakers in the region but it has become a well known dialect or an identical dialect of the region. And, the percentage of the speakers of the Bhili dialect in the region is 80% of the total population even than Bhili dialect can never be identical of the ethnic identity of the region. Owing to the socio-economical dominance or other identical reasons, the region has been ethnically identified as the Wagad region, after the dialect spoken by 20% speakers of the total speakers of the region. Though, it is not

claimed that these are the last words on the issue, but at the same time it is also true that it appears quite convincing reason for the formation of the ethnic identity of the region as Wagad region. A detailed research on the reasons behind the formation of the ethnic identity of the region as the Wagad region is required to be done by the researchers.

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