

IN ODISHA'S NAYAGARH, A DATA-DRIVEN SOLUTION TO CHILD MARRIAGE

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Nayagarh in Odisha is recording information on all adolescent girls in the district. Nagara Gopal

With the aim of eradicating child marriage, Nayagarh, a tiny Odisha district, has adopted a unique initiative by scrupulously recording information on all adolescent girls in the district.

From birth registration date to Aadhaar number, from family details to skill training, information of 48,642 adolescent girls can be found in registers named Aliva.

Nayagarh, with a population of 9,62,789, has a skewed sex ratio at 855. Child marriages in isolated locations of the district are still considered a part of their social life.

Observing that child marriages are solemnised in the age group of 14-19 and dropouts among girls' students continued to be high, the district administration launched the Aliva programme in January this year. Anganwadi workers had been asked to identify every adolescent girl in their jurisdiction and keep tabs on them. There are 1,584 registers available in 1,584 Anganwadi centres of the district.

The 100-page register maintains a record of the girl, along with the name of her father. From the third page onwards, each page contains data of the adolescent girl, including address, education status, birth registration date, Aadhaar Card Number, contact details and family details. The age of the girl is approved by the local school headmaster, father, supervisor and child marriage prohibition officer (CMPO).

Towards the end of the register, information about child marriage, educational progress, skill training status and health issues of the adolescent girls is available. Nayagarh district has decided to maintain the record for a period of 10 years — 2020 to 2030. As per Odisha's child marriage prevention strategy, the State aims to eradicate child marriage by 2030.

The register has been useful for law enforcement agencies, as parents attempt to lie about the age of their girls to escape punishment. "When tipped off about child marriages, district administration and the police these days refer to registers for ascertaining proof of girls' age," said Ipsita Agarwal, district coordinator of ActionAid, a non-government organisation, which works closely with district administration to prevent child marriages.

Though different districts have come up with other innovative ideas, the Aliva registers are by far the most comprehensive ones that keep tabs on girls' lives. Ganjam district is maintaining register of every marriage to prevent child marriages.

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