

Aragamee — Forty-Four Years of Asking Why Hunger Persists in a Land of Abundance

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Kashipur block sits in the Rayagada district of Odisha's Eastern Ghats — mineral-rich, forest-abundant, and home to Kondh tribal communities who have farmed these hills for centuries. The aluminium companies saw bauxite. Aragamee, which began work here in 1981, saw something different: the paradox of hunger in a land of abundance, and a group of communities who needed not charity but the institutional infrastructure to exercise what was already theirs.

That founding framing — a world without hunger and injustice — explains why Aragamee's work over four decades has ranged so widely from the same geographical base. Seed conservation, eco-village development, organic farming, women's SHG federation, RTI use, nutrition, watershed management, and most recently an Agriculture Production Cluster programme covering 3,000 women farmer households: all of these are answers to the same question, reposed in each decade's specific conditions.

Who They Are

Aragamee is a community development organisation working since 1981 in the tribal districts of Odisha — primarily Rayagada, Kalahandi, and Nabarangpur, with the Kashipur block in Rayagada as its founding geography. Their sister organisation Ama Sangathan (Women's Federation) works alongside them. Together they represent one

of Odisha's oldest continuous civil society presences in the tribal hinterland.

Their range of work is encyclopedic in the best sense: it has followed the community's needs rather than a predefined sectoral focus. Where hunger is the problem, the answer is agriculture. Where land degradation is the problem, the answer is eco-village development. Where information is the problem, the answer is RTI training. Where income is the problem, the answer is market linkage and SHG federation.

The Eco-Village: A Community Farming Model That Works

Aragamee's Eco-Village model — developed in Kashipur block in partnership with the European Union — is among the most comprehensively documented community farming approaches in Odisha's tribal districts. The model combines indigenous technical knowledge with improved techniques for organic farming, climate-smart agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and micro-enterprise.

The tangible outputs are specific and measured. In fifteen villages across Kashipur and Th. (Thuamul Rampur), 13,000 cashew trees were planted across 200 acres of denuded community land. Mahila Mandals — village women's groups — manage community land collectively, with earnings distributed to the Mandal. The commons have been rejuvenated. The result, documented by the Neo-Agri research platform, is that fallow cycles have been shortened, land productivity has increased, and food security has improved for households that previously faced seasonal hunger.

The innovation here is not the cashew or the organic technique. It is the institutional form: Mahila Mandal management of commons land creates accountability to the community rather than to a project cycle. When Aragamee withdraws, the Mandal remains.

The Agriculture Production Cluster Programme

In August 2024, Agragamee signed an MoU with Odisha's Horticulture Department to implement the Agriculture Production Cluster (APC) programme in 46 villages across five Gram Panchayats of Rayagada Block. The programme targets 3,000 Women SHG households with the goal of sustainably doubling their income. The APC model is a collaborative initiative involving six government departments, ten directorates, BRLF (Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, DMF (District Mineral Foundation), and 38 partner NGOs with PRADAN as Programme Secretariat.

Aragamee's selection as an implementing partner in this multi-agency model — alongside PRADAN's secretariat role — reflects the credibility that 44 years of consistent field presence in Rayagada's tribal blocks has built. The government is not inviting Agragamee because of a proposal. It is inviting them because of the relationships.

The Seed Savers and the RTI Users

Two of Agragamee's less-publicised programmes are among their most distinctive. Their seed conservation programme — connecting tribal farmers with the indigenous paddy diversity work of organisations like Sambhav, MSSRF Jeypore, and Desi Chasa Gabeshana Kendra — has documented and promoted traditional crop varieties that industrial agriculture has eroded. Tribal farmers who conserve these varieties maintain an agrobiodiversity that has national significance.

Their RTI (Right to Information) training programme teaches tribal communities to use the law to access crucial development information — a tool that is legally available to everyone but practically accessible only to those who know it exists and how to use it. The combination of these two programmes — seed sovereignty and information rights — is Agragamee's specific contribution to the broader tribal rights ecosystem.

Contact and Further Reading

Website: agramee.org | **Contact:** Kashipur, Rayagada, Odisha

Key evidence:

- Agramee website: agramee.org — APC programme MoU (August 2024), eco-village documentation, seed conservation
- Neo-Agri: *Eco-Village: A Holistic Approach of Climate Smart Agriculture* (2016) — Kashipur eco-village process evaluation
- India Together: *Food Security, Courtesy Odisha's Tribal Women* (November 2014) — Ama Sangathan commons farming documentation

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