

## **BONDA HIGHLANDERS: EXPLORATION INTO THEIR HABITAT AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Bishnu Charan Barik

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**Abstract:** The Bondo Highlanders are known as Bondas in the region and, live in the Bonda Hills of Khairput Block of the Malkangiri District, in two Gram Panchayats, namely Mudulipada and Andrahal, and, one village called Tagabeda of Rasbeda Grampanchayat form the areas of Bonda Hills. The Bonda Hills lie at an average elevation of about 3000 to 4000 feet above sea level. The hilltops, hill slopes and plateaus surrounded by the hills and hill terrains constitute the habitat of Bondas measuring an area of 35910.25 ha. or 35.9 sq.km. The Bonda Hills are full of picturesque natural beauty having a bounty of forest resources. The entire Bonda Hills environment is calm and quiet. The Bondas are one of the thirteen Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Odisha State. In this paper, through narratives, the researcher has attempted to reflect ethnographic details about the village settlement, housing pattern and social structure, such as kinship organisation, marriage, divorce, dress and ornaments, food and drinks etc. It also covers briefly their everyday life, including religious beliefs and practices. The data were collected through ethnographic research and the field work was conducted in the Bonda Hills for about a year and a half, i.e., from October 2021 to March 2023.

**Keywords:** Ethnography, Marriage, Kinship, Traditional Knowledge, Social structure

### **Introduction**

As per the 2011 Census, the Scheduled Tribe population is around 10.43 crores constituting 8.6 per cent of total population of the country. The Government of India brought out a Draft National Tribal Policy for Scheduled Tribes in February 2004 and identified 698 tribal communities. Subsequently, a revised version of the Draft National Tribal Policy was circulated by the Government in July 2006 which contained more than 700 tribal communities in the country.

These tribal communities live in 19 States and 6 Union Territories and they speak 106 different languages. The Government of India constituted Dhebar Commission to suggest measures for the overall development of the tribal communities. The Commission in its report, observed a pertinent point that within Scheduled Tribes, inequality existed in the rate of development. Hence, the Commission in the year 1973 suggested for creation of a separate category called Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs), which are less developed among the tribal communities (Ota, 2019:4).

The features for identification of such groups include simple - small scale societies with zero or negative population growth or diminishing in number, culturally homogenous having unique lifestyle and distinctiveness, backwardness, and living in relatively isolated and inaccessible tracts of hills such as mountains, plateaus and

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Bishnu Charan Barik, Former Tagore National Fellow, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi, a former Vice-Chancellor, Sambalpur University, Odisha and a former Senior Professor of Sociology, SRTM University, Nanded, Maharashtra.

forests and continue to pursue an archaic way of life with a pre-agricultural system of existence, i.e., practice of hunting and gathering, and extremely low level of literacy in comparison to other tribal groups. Accordingly, the Government of India identified 75 tribal communities as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) in the country and subsequently in the year 2006, renamed them as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). These PVTGs live in 14 States and a Union Territory (ibid: 4).

Against this backdrop, Odisha State has the third highest percentage of tribal population in the country, which stands at 9.17 % (Census Report, 2011). The Tribal population constitute nearly 22% of the State's population. The State has the unique distinction of having 62 different Tribal Communities and they live in almost all districts of the State. They speak 74 languages which differ from one tribe to another. They are identically different in their distinctive cultural practices and way of life. Another interesting feature is that, the Odisha State alone houses 13 PVTGs, the largest number in the country. These PVTGs live in 12 districts with an enriched cultural mosaic characterised by the scenic beauty of the nature.

The Bondos or Bondas (Remos) popularly called in the region are one of the PVTGs that live in Bonda Hills. The Bonda Hills lie at an average elevation of about 3000 to 4000 feet above sea level. The hilltops, hill slopes and plateaus surrounded by the hills and terrains constitute the habitat of Bondas measuring an area of 35.9 sq.km full of forests, surrounded by natural scenic beauty. They have been living with their traditional socio - cultural values, traits and strong bond of kinship relationships. The day-to-day community affairs and internal conflicts are managed by the traditional leadership.

In this paper, the researcher attempts to reflect through narratives, what had witnessed and observed the activities and events as a participant observer, and information gathered through interviews, talking to the youth, men, women and selective respondents of the Bonda Hills during the fieldwork. Earlier research works conducted during the colonial period and thereafter by the ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists and others have been cited -referred to in the appropriate contexts in the paper to make the presentation thematically sound, lucid and logically meaningful. The present paper will provide a holistic view of the Bonda Hills, its flora and fauna, its pattern of habitat and the social structure of the Bonda community.

### **Methodology and Fieldwork**

The paper is based on intensive fieldwork carried out in Bondapada village (sample village) and short visits to the neighbourhood villages of Bonda Hills. The visits were made to the villages keeping in mind to see the location of the villages, their settlement pattern and the sizes and facilities available. Data were collected using the Ethnographic method and Participatory technique. It is relevant to mention here the words of Levi-Strauss on Ethnographic study and I quote" the ethnographic study of societies must have a concrete, almost microscopic character; fluid, uncrystallized

attitudes, the subjective aspects of institutions, must be observed and described with the same care as institutionalised and sanctioned norms and behaviours. At the same time, a systematic, comparative and generalising perspective must complement the close range of views, so that the patterns which underlie the various manifestations of social life may be uncovered” (1963;xi). Keeping in mind the basic premises of the ethnographic study, the researcher visited the villages several times and participated in the village meetings, cultural programmes and other activities, whenever and wherever possible. The research assistant being an insider stayed in the villages and documented the Bonda Highlanders’ everyday life activities and rituals. Besides, information was gathered through interviews and interactions with the youths, men and women and clan leaders. Short and long interviews were also conducted with the identified senior persons of the community. Selective interviews took long hours of sitting and, hence, arranged on different days convenient to the respondents. Videography and photography of important locations, events and activities were captured through a camera. Theme based photographs are presented to enhance quality of the paper. The fieldwork was conducted in the Bonda Hills from July 2021 to October 2022.

**Study Area**

The Bondo Highlanders live in the Bonda Hills of the Khairput Block of the Malkangiri District. The Khairput Block has eight Gram Panchayats, namely, Andrahal, Mudulipada, Baddural, Govindpalli, Kadamguda, Khairput, Podaghata and Rashbeda. Andrahal and Mudulipada and one village (Tagabeda) of Rasbeda Grampanchayat form the area of Bonda Highlanders. The Bonda Hills lie at an average elevation of about 3000° to 4000 feet above sea level. The hilltops, hill slopes and plateaus surrounded by the hills and hill terrains constitute the habitat of Bondas measuring an area of 35910.25 ha or 35.9 sq. km (as computed by ORSAC, Bhubaneswar in 1991).The hills lie between 18°22’ -18°30’ North latitudes and 82° 15’ - 82°20’ East longitudes and fall to the east of the Machakund River valley.

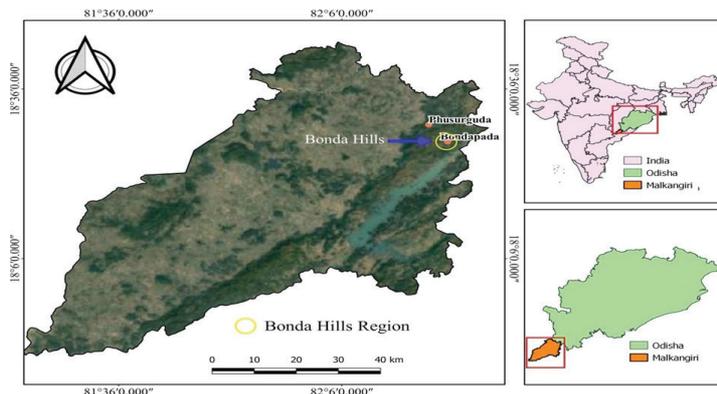


Figure 1: Map of Bonda Hills

### *Climate and Rainfall*

The district has a sub-tropical climate. The southwest monsoon is the principal source of rainfall. The rainfall pattern is uneven and erratic. The average rainfall gradually increases from the south-western to north-eastern parts of the district. The average annual rainfall varies from 994.05 mm to 1809.53 mm with around 81 rainy days. Monsoon generally starts in May and continues to the end of October. The climate of Bonda Hills is mild and healthy and quite favourable for agriculture and horticulture. It is characterised by summer, winter and rainy seasons.

The district passes through a hot and dry summer with rising temperature of 44 degrees centigrade during May followed by a rainy season and a pleasant winter season. The summer season extends from March to the middle of June, followed by the rainy season from June to October. The winter season begins in November and continues till to the end of February. December and January are the coldest with having the lowest temperature of 11 degrees (centigrade).

### *Geology and Geomorphology*

The entire region can be grouped into two broad divisions: Western and Eastern. The Bonda Hills form the part of Eastern Ghats and the type of rock found in the region belongs to the Khondalite group of rocks consisting of Khondalite, Quartzite and basement granite, while the Western part consists of basic rocks mainly Charnokite marked by its dark tone, massive rounded to sub- rounded in nature. Structurally, these Khondalite and Charnokite groups of rocks follow the general trends of the Eastern Ghats having weak zones, where, in joints, fractures and faults are observed.

### *Flora*

Flora of Bonda Hills is already degraded. This is mainly because of human interference. The growth of the Bonda population, the subsequent search for new settlements within the territory, and interference with the natural resources by practising swidden cultivation (slash and burn cultivation) are some of the culprits of the degradation. However, the natural flora of the Bonda Hills can be categorised as (a) dense deciduous forest, (b) open forest, (c) scrub forest and (d) grass/ barren land.

### *Fauna*

The Fauna that are found in the Bonda Hills include: wild pigs (*gubuh*), wild fowl (*gising*), tiger (*kukusah*), leopard (*dau-kukusah*), bear (*gimesh*), sambar (*seram*), deer (*elam*), monkey (*ghesak*), jackal (*kulu*), rabbit (*guluh*), wild rat (*uraain*), etc. Many species of birds seen in the Bonda Hills are parrot (*orle*), peacock (*kukum*), kite (*palang*), heron (*unkungda*), crow (*giga*), woodpecker (*kuramp*), mynah (*rambi*), waterhen (*kine*), green pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*), owl (*kurma*) etc. The

Bondas usually domesticate cows (*gaitang*), buffalos (*bungte*), pigs (*gubuh*) and goats (*gime*) as animal wealth. Dogs help in hunting expeditions besides guarding the home. They also keep a large number of hens to meet sacrificial needs for rituals and family consumption (Modak, 2002).

### **Capital of Bonda Hills**

Mudulipada, known as the capital of Bonda Hills, is now well connected by tar road constructed by the govt. of Odisha with the Khairput Block headquarters, down the hills, and, the distance is around 13 kilometres. The hill slopes are narrow and have sharp curves, full of steep slopes that invite careful negotiation while driving a vehicle. A few villages of the Bonda Hills are connected by tar and pucca road and the rest of the villages spread over at different interior locations are not provided with road connectivity. One must walk and cross the hills and the hill slopes to reach these villages. Andrahal is the largest village having 264 households in the entire Bonda Hills settlement. It is known as the second administrative unit for governance. The village is located on the eastern side of the Bonda Hills and, is now connected by road. To control insurgency activities by the Naxalite in the Bonda Hills, the Government of India has stationed a Border Security Force Camp on a hilltop nearer to Padeiguda village and another nearer to Andrahal village. This main road passes by the BSF camps. Due to the presence of BSF jawans and their close watch on the movement of Naxalites, the insurgency activities have come down drastically. This road also facilitates easy movement of the people living in the surrounding villages.

The Banapacheri Hill being the highest and steepest hill guards the entrance to the Bonda settlement on the Khairput -Mudulipada route. On reaching the top, one enjoys the scenic beauty of the landscape below and feels very high amidst the clouds. It is believed that, the sacred boundary is guarded by the hill deity called Dalkhai Maa, and, so every visitor passing through this road pays homage and reverence by offering twigs of some plants or branches of trees to the deity' at the stone slab placed beneath the large tree. Even the Bondas, whenever they leave for abode or go to the market and other places down the hills pay homage to Dalkhai Maa. Travellers to Bonda Hills while passing through Banapacheri Hill will see Cashew orchards, Banana plantations and Mango grooves on the hill slopes. These crops have been grown recently by the economically better-off Bonda families, for market purposes.



Figure 2: Dalkhai Maa

### ***Brief History of Bonda Settlement***

The history reveals the fact that, the Bondas were regarded as “entirely savage, almost as the classic savage type: the strange dress and appearance of their women, their violent homicidal ways, their unfamiliar tongue- they speak a difficult Austro-Asiatic Language- the inaccessibility of their abode” (Elwin: 1950:1). A survey of the colonial administration, engaged to conduct a topographical survey of Koraput, referred to Bonda as a ” primitive tribe” whose marriage ceremony, women’s dress and religious practices were” peculiar” (May, 1873). In the colonial Ethnography, the word’ tribe ‘ referred to “ a collection of families or a group of families, bearing a common name which as a rule, does not denote any specific occupation, generally claiming common descent from a mythical or historical ancestor and occasionally from an animal, but held together rather by the tradition of kinship; usually speaking the same language and occupying , professing or claiming to occupy a definite tract of the country( Risley, 1915:62). Ethnographers are not unanimous in their reflections on origin, identity and affinity of this tribe and when they migrated to Bonda Hills for permanent settlement (Barik, 2024). The Census Report of 1911 and the District Gazetteer passively reflect on the origin of the Bonda tribe by citing reference to C A Henderson. Malony quoting Henderson wrote in the Census of India that “the Bondos are as one of the three tribes into which Gadabas are divided as Bondo Paraja, the Gutob(Bondo Gadaba) and Parenga Gadaba”( Census of India: 1911). Thurston, based on the report of May and Henderson classified them as Porojas, and also described them as a section of Gadabas, calling themselves as Bonda Gadaba and speaking the language of Gadaba(1909:209). Later on, Thurston refuted the logical connection between Bondas and Gadabas as Bondas themselves disapproved of the linkage (Ibid: 212). Furer-Haimendorf is of the view that the language of the

Bondos and Gadabas belong to the same family but is difficult to understand as they speak differently. The Bondas speak a language called Romesam which is passed on from one generation to another and they do not have a written script. They share each other's food and even on rare occasions inter-marry (1945).

Although, differences exist in possession of materials, religious beliefs, dress and ornaments, etc., a common cultural atmosphere persists among them and they belong to ancient Austro-Asiatic culture (Nanda, 1945). Elwin further observed that the Bonda Highlanders "cannot be mistaken; the Mongoloid cast of countenance is at times very marked I have noticed, rather more often among the women than among the men" (1950:1). With this limited research, it is difficult to presume precisely on the origin and affiliation of Bondos but it is very fact that initially, they came to Jeypore hills for their settlement. Prof. Nanda emphasised how the Bonda tribe gained its name, stating that, the name from Bondi Mahadei, who proclaimed in exile that her son was the legitimate heir to the Kingdom of Bastar. Although, it was not easy to sustain loyalty and militancy among the people, the sword of the late King Jagadev did become the symbol of Bonda nationalism. The queen used this symbol to evoke the loyalty of every member of her tribe to reinstate her son at Chitrakote. This sword, over the years, gained the status of an important local deity and was subsequently known as Patkhanda Mahaprabhu.



Figure 3: Patkhanda Mahaprabhu

A large Banyan tree standing at the centre of a grove, immediately at the right side of the main road nearer to Mudulipada, opposite Sitakund, one can see the ancient sword hanging on the tree. On the festival day, the sword is ritually brought down and worshipped" (1994:33). Referring to the social significance of the sword, Elwin writes" for Bonda psychology, this sword is of great importance: it has immense snob-value, it fortifies the tribe's self-respect by establishing that fragile link with the Rajput nobility which it is the ambition of every aboriginal to maintain"

(1950:145). Elwin further notes that “at the festival of Patkhanda Mahaprabhu, a special soru meal is prepared by the members of Kirsani clan in the name of God, and the Naikos of all twelve villages composing the Bara-jangar group share it” (Ibid:24). Hence, these twelve villages are tied together with sacramental ties and enjoy access to ritual communication with Patkhanda Mahaprabhu. The sister Bonda group does not enjoy such privilege. Nanda further argues that, in the case of Bonda Highlanders, the political and historical forces which contributed to their seclusion in the high lands did not confirm the assumption about the Aryan settlers (1994:35). Hence, the Bondas led an independent existence in the Highlands as a single homogeneous community (Ibid, 35).

Another religious place which significantly influences the religious life of the Bonda community is called Sitakund. Sitakund is located on the left side of the main road, at Mudulipada. Sitakund is associated with myths and legends about the social life of the Bonda Highlanders. According to the prevailing myth, during vanabas (period of exile in the forest), Lord Rama, with his younger brother Laxman and wife Sita, visited the Bonda hills.



Figure 4: Sitakund

The Maa Sita had only one piece of cloth (saree), which she used to wear throughout her journey. This cloth was called Amlan Bastra. One day, Maa Sita came to this stream to bathe. Maa Sita removed her only clothes and took a bathe in the stream. Some Bonda women standing at a distance, upper part of the hill, saw Maa Sita bathing without any clothes. The women could not control their laughter. They laughed very loudly. Maa Sita looked at those women and felt very upset. Maa Sita got angry and cursed the Bonda women, saying, “From now onwards, all women of the area will remain bald by losing beauty, and there will not be clothes on their bodies.”

## **Social Structure**

### *Bonda Village*

The settlement pattern of Bonda villages never reflects any pattern of uniformity.

This is because; the villages are located on the top of hills, on the edges of hill slopes and the foothills. Some villages are compact while others are spread over on a huge area. The villages are surrounded by trees like jackfruit, mango, banyan, tamarind, sago palm and other varieties of wild species. Mudulipada and Challanpada are located on the Hilltops while Andrahal is on the hill slope. Dantipada is in the valley while Katanguda and Bondapada (sample village) have different features of the location. While selecting a site for a new village the Bondas give importance to the following factors:

1. Source of water for drinking and use for other purposes,
2. Number of salap trees (Palm trees) available in nearby area,
3. Suitable hill slopes for swidden/shifting cultivation,
4. Availability of natural terrace wetlands for paddy cultivation,
5. Minimum wind flow.

The aerial view of a Bonda village looks very haphazard and unsystematic. Within the village, the roads are not connected with the houses and are well demarcated. If one house faces north, another comes up at its back facing the opposite direction. The Bondos build their houses, wherever, they find a convenient place for such construction. Generally, a Bondo village looks like a shapeless cluster or agglomeration, with tortuous or irregular foot tracks connecting each other houses.



Figure 5: Bonda Village and Housing Pattern

Hardly any village has a drainage facility to drain the excess water during the rainy season. As a result, many areas of the village get waterlogged for several days producing foul smells and keeping the entire village in swampy and unhygienic condition. Large numbers of fruit trees like jackfruit, mango, tamarind, sago palm and non- fruit bearing trees planted by each family surrounding the houses, and its falling leaves along with the by-products such as excreta of domestic animals like cows, pigs and poultry birds make the village filthy environment with full of pollution. Many villages have their boundary walls. In recent times, the families

belonging to other clan groups came to settle in the villages to render services and thereby many Bonda villages are now becoming multi- clan villages. Each Bonda village is considered ritually as a sacred unit and many festivals were celebrated throughout the year for the wellbeing of the villagers and production of bumper crops. Every Bonda village has a sacred megalithic platform called Sindibor.



Figure 6: Sindibor

Sindibor holds a significant position in the Bonda community. Sindibor is surrounded by a small and big rubble wall. The shrine of Hundi, the presiding deity of the village is erected very often nearer to Sindibor. Visiting guests to the village (gulong) are also received at this place. At this place, the villagers conduct religious ceremonies and meetings, and decide matters relating to the socio-cultural activities of the village. The men are much lazier and have often been seen lying in blissful drunken and relaxing at the Sindibor, observes Elwin (*ibid*, 272). We also observed men's blissful relaxation at the Sindibor platform many a time during our fieldwork.

### **Population and Education**

As described earlier, the Bonda community is divided into two group's i.e. hill Bondas (upper Bondas) and plain Bondas (lower Bondas). The upper Bondas live in an area which is full of natural museum of scenic beauty with rolling mountains, scattered streams, meadows and picturesque valleys, popularly called as "Bonda Hills". They live in thirty-two villages. The Bara Jangar group lives in twelve villages (gamrem) while Gautab group lives in the remaining twenty villages. The BaraJangar group initially lived within the ghat regions having their villages spread over the hill tops and on hill slopes amidst forest coverage and nearer to availability of water resources (Elwin, 1950:6-7). The Bondas of BaraJangar group are tied to one another under a relationship of brother-hood known as soru-bhai, who has eaten the same sacrificial food, a privilege available only to the members

of the twelve villages. During the celebration of the Patkhanda Mahaprabhu festival every year, a special soru meal is prepared by the members of Kirsani clan in the name of God and the Naiks of twelve villages relish the meal. Over the last couple of decades, the growth of population among the Bondas and the non-availability of homestead land within the village premises forced them to search for an alternative habitat site within the hill region. As a result, another 20 new villages have come up on the hill tops and hill slopes, where land and water resources are available for swidden and terrace cultivation for paddy to sustain life. The Bonda villages are, by and large, small in size. All members of the village treat one another as brothers and sisters and, that is why, there is the prohibition of any sexual relationship or matrimonial alliances among the residents of the village. They consider it as a collective responsibility of the community to keep harmony and security of the village and even protection of its boundary.

Some of the striking features of the hill Bondas that make them distinctly different and reveal their backwardness are as under:

1. Their inaccessible abode,
2. Prevalence of pre-agricultural technology (swidden cultivation),
3. Stagnant or little growth in population,
4. Low level of literacy,
5. Persistence of subsistence and barter economy with very little use of cash economy,
6. Rude and ruthless manner of expression,
7. Spirit of independence and sense of freedom,
8. Dormitory life and practice of marriage by capture to a large extent,
9. Marrying younger boys to girls who are senior to them by age,
10. Excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks,
11. Aggressive and violent propensities very often lead to homicidal offences; and,
12. Unconventional costume of the women folk (Mahapatra and Mohanty, 2009:19).

Sl.No	Name of the Village	Total no. of Households	Population		
			Male	Female	Total
1	Mudulipada	60	101	111	212
2	Padeiguda	87	160	187	347
3	Baraguda	21	37	34	71
4	Kirsanipada	100	201	229	430

5	Dantipada	72	141	166	307
6	Badpada	117	185	201	386
7	Tulagurum	40	69	99	168
8	Baunspada	31	59	67	126
9	Chalanpada	17	39	42	81
10	Bandiguda	57	105	145	250
11	Kichapada	108	199	276	475
12	Gapurpada	39	61	66	127
13	Bandhaguda	94	182	192	374
14	Pindaijanger	20	35	40	75
15	Kadaguda	24	35	40	75
16	Bondapada	48	90	93	183
17	Sambalpur	3	3	4	7
18	Tuseipada	37	58	75	133
19	Sileiguda	44	73	85	158
20	Ramliguda	29	51	58	109
21	Gulangpadar	9	21	22	43
22	Andrahal	264	445	533	978
23	Katamguda	33	66	66	132
24	Badbel	138	256	322	578
25	Goiguda	59	117	116	233
26	Baliapdar Birsapada	9	16	21	37
27	Kadaguda (Partraput)	21	39	37	76
28	Dumuripada	137	278	323	601
29	Utangguda	21	43	38	81

30	Bisoiguda	4	9	8	17
31	Tagabeda	42	52	76	128
32	Sonuguda	34	54	48	102
	Total	1819	3279	3819	7098

Source: Survey of Bonda Development Agency, Mudulipada, Malkangiri (as on 01.10.2015).

Table 1: No. of Households and Population (Village and Sex wise) of Bonda Community

Table-1 provides information about 32 villages, their total households (1819) and population (7098). It is important to note that the females (3819) outnumber the male population (3279). The sex ratio of the Bonda community stands in contrast to that of the all India sex ratio. During the year 1941, the total Bonda population was 2565 only. In a decade i.e., 1951, it got increased to 3641. By the year 1991, the Bonda's numerical figure got increased to 7315 with 3475 males and 3840 females (Census Report, 1941, 1951, and 1991). The survey conducted by the Bonda Development Agency reveals the above. While there was a gradual increase in the sex ratio from 1007 by 1971 to 1113 by 1981, there was a slight decline to 1105 by the year 1991. However, the recent figure reflects the fact that there are 1054 Bonda women to 1000 Bonda men (BDA, 2015). Another survey reveals that out of 1819 Bonda families, 412 families were headed by women members (COATS, 2009). The literacy rate among the Bondas is very low. As per the 1961 Census, 2.14% of Bondas were literate, out of which males formed 3.90% and females formed 0.22%. The above figure declined to 1.42% by the year 1971. However, the 1981 Census revealed the fact that there was a little increase in education percentage (3.61) among the Bondas. Male education increased to 6.81% while female education remained below 1% (0.74). Even today, education among the Bonda does not present an appreciable figure. As per survey report, the literacy rate among Bonda population stands at 24.73% (male-27.75% and female-22.15%) which is very low when compared to the other tribal groups in the state, let alone in the country. The dropout rate among the Bonda students is very high in the primary, middle and high school classes.

### Housing Structure

The structure of Bonda houses invariably reflects a uniform pattern in almost all the villages of Bonda Hills, subject to the availability of flat space on the hill tops and hill slopes where the village is to be located. The houses are scattered over a wider area of the village. Hence, all houses are physically separate from one another. It reflects upon the individualistic orientation of living in the Bonda community. Geometrically, the houses are rectangular in size, and, the length and breadth of the houses remain the same. The size of each house is around 22' in length and 18'

in breadth having a single door in the middle. The size of the door is 4' high and 2' wide. Entering the house through the door is not an easy task for an outsider. While entering the house, one has to bend and crawl inside. The walls of the house rise six to nine feet from the ground level and are made of bamboo splits, which are plastered with mud balls or cow dung. The roof is made of bamboo or wood bars (mein, wang), collected from the forest and thatched with locally made tiles, tin sheets or asbestos sheets. The walls are painted with brownish-red colour and look very decent. The Bondas do not decorate the walls of the house with colourful painting of Gods, Goddesses and Birds as other tribes do. The Bondas do not keep any windows in their houses; as a result, darkness prevails in the house even during the daytime. To get light inside the house/rooms, they keep the fire burning for twenty-four hours in the inner veranda. During the rainy and winter season, this fire keeps the house at a good temperature, so that, they do not need any extra clothes to cover up their bodies to protect them from the cold.

The family members contribute labour for the construction of the house and if needed, kinsmen extend their help in the construction process through exchange of labour. The Bonda women contribute more labour than men. The house is fenced by bamboo sticks and in the compound, the family plants bananas and grows vegetables like brinjal, chilly, okra (lady finger) and tomato for consumption. Elwin observed that, the Bonda house is a self-contained unit reflecting on a communal and democratic setting (1950:11). The house normally consists of two rooms- one big room and another small room. In the bigger room, an earthen platform is built and, on this platform, cooking pots and water containers are kept. The females use this platform as a pillow at the time of sleeping. This room is also used for sleeping purposes. The smaller room is used for storing grains and dress materials, and children usually sleep in this room. Inner rooms are not provided with doors. Usually, the hearth is fixed in the right-hand corner of the bigger room for cooking meals. Above the hearth, a set of hanging wooden racks are placed one above the other for drying fish, meat, particularly beef, and grains. This container is also used for preserving seeds and grains from attack by insects. The inner veranda is also used for other household related activities like de-husking of paddy, grinding millets, gossiping and often relishing beer among fellow men and women. The household articles are limited to bows and arrows, a few agricultural implements and fishing traps. Adjacent to the house, the Bondas always keep the domestic animals like oxen and cows in a cowshed, and pigs and goats in a small shed. Hens and other birds are kept in a corner of the living room.

The Bondas change the house sites on account of two reasons. The first reason is any incident of death in the house and the second is that if the family members feel that the house is no more auspicious to stay. For the selection of a new site for house construction, the village priest (Disari) is consulted. Following the traditional practice, the priest plants a wild plant at the new site. Kude at the chosen spot and six rice grains are tied to it with a leaf of lunda plant is placed. This activity is

performed by the priest himself or by the clan head or by the owner himself. After this, the plant is covered with a basket and the next day the basket is removed to see, whether number of grains has increased and broken into pieces. If it is so, the spot is considered auspicious for the construction of a new house. It is further believed that, the owner becomes prosperous and gets higher yields from agriculture.

### **Household Appliances**

The Bondo families lead a simple life even today. The most commonly used bed for sleeping is a mat prepared out of palm leaves, bamboo slits or a piece of cloth which they spread over the ground. Very few families use string-woven wooden cots for relaxing in the daytime and sleeping during the night time. During the winter season, the Bondos wrap their bodies with a piece of thick cloth to prevent outside cold. The hearth inside the house produces so much heat that they do not need extra clothes to cover up their bodies during sleep at night. They use aluminium, brass and earthenware vessels for cooking and preserving water. Plastic containers are being used now- a- days for storing grains.

### **Weapons**

Bondos are known in the area for their Bow (*wa*) and Arrows (*omb*). They are very good archers. They learn the skill from the childhood. They use this indigenous weapon for self-protection and hunting expeditions. It is worth mentioning here the observation of H.V. Blackburn: "Bondo youths are the quickest and sharpest he has seen; their eyesight is wonderful, and they are after the smallest target in a flash" (quoted from Elwin, 1950:51). A spear (*umbar*) is also used as thrusting weapon. In fact, the Bondos are very good hunters.

### **Cutting tools**

Bondos use various types of tools such as knife (*yunchuek*) used for cutting and piercing, scissors (*kantarai*) used for cuttings hair on the head, and axes used for cutting wood and hunting animals. Blade (*nuiboh*) is also used for shaving hair on head. Another kind of knife (*liasw*) is used to chop bamboo slices, and a sickle (*orien*) is used exclusively for reaping crops. The other tools used in day-to-day life are needle (*suji*), shovel (*unkur*), spade (*suji*), griller (*nubu*), striking tools like hammers (*gunuh*), pestle(*kunti*), digging tools(*unus*) and khurpi (*unso*).

### **Other appliances and hardware**

Baskets, broomsticks prepared out of local grass, and winnowing fan are commonly used for domestic and agricultural purposes. Nails, nuts, and locks (*kuchi*) are used in day-to- day activities. The Bondas used to make strong and durable mats out of grass and bamboo, which they collected in large quantities from the lower hill

sides. Out of this grass, they also prepare excellent twine, ropes and fishing nets etc. for day-to-day use.

### ***Basketry***

Bamboo is the natural resources of Bonda Hills. The Bondos commonly use bamboo baskets for a variety of activities. A large container (karaka) made of bamboo silt is used for storing grains. A winnowing fan made of bamboo silt is used for harvesting paddy and cleaning rice.

### ***Musical instruments***

The Bondo- Highlanders play various types of musical instruments like Drum, Tamak, Kinding and Kusang. Gunugu is a low voice sweet musical instrument played by females. Singhar or trumpet made out of Bison horn is played in each and every festival and ceremony.

### ***Dress and Ornaments***

Each tribal group in India maintains its indigenous and independent identity even today. Their identity is expressed through their respective dress, language, food habits, folk dance, oral traditions, practice of magic and healing of diseases through the use of traditional medicines etc. The Bondas do not have any language script. But the interesting fact is that, they are in no way an exception in maintaining their beautiful traditional culture by transmitting from one generation to another. This keeps them together with emotional feelings and expression of solidarity as a community even today.

The Bondas have their indigenous looms. It is prepared using wooden bars. The women know the skill to weave the clothes ( Ringa) for use. The colourful Ringa (two feet in length and one foot wide) is prepared with indigenous technique. The Ringa is used to cover up the lower part of the body. This manifests the Bonda women's weaving skill and expertise.



Figure 7: Ringa Weaving by a Bonda Woman

The Ringa is prepared out of Kerang, a fibre abundantly available in the forest (Elwin, 1950:66) or with coloured yarn (coloured thread) purchased from the market or from the traders who frequent the Bondo villages for trading purposes. The quality and finish of the woven cloth bring honour and recognition to the weaver (Bourdieu, 1977:115). Elwin observed that, there is an absolute taboo on Bonda women wearing any other kind of cloth around their waist, and those who, under the influence of so called reform in the villages, have broken it are regarded as untouchables and classed with Doms (Elwin, 1950:62). Things have been changing over the years. The Bonda women coming across modern culture are now using modern dresses. The Bonda women are fond of wearing various types of ornaments in the day-to-day life and on the occasions of festivals and ceremonies. The married women use two types of headbands round the shaved head i.e. "Turuba" or Kurtop made of date palm leaf and lubeidak made of beads. Aluminium or brass band 'Ghagla' of various sizes around 8 to ten in numbers are put around the neck along with around 100 to 120 bead necklaces (mali) to cover up the upper part of the body. To decorate their hands, women, use aluminium bangles of various sizes (kharu) and adorn themselves with three to four pairs of earrings (limbi) and finger rings (arati). The women do not use any type of ornaments on their noses and legs. Another important feature of Bonda women is that, they do not tattoo their bodies as widely practised among other tribal communities in India. The interesting feature of Bonda women is that they remain half naked. The running down folklore over the years explains an explanation to the state of affairs. While visiting Bonda Hills, one cannot forget to visit the most beautiful and religious site called 'Sitakund'. It is located on the left side of the Khairput- Mudululipada main road, very close to Mudulipad. It is a small perennial stream flowing down from the hill locally called as Kund. Sitakund is associated with the lore of 'Ramayana'. While Lord Rama with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana were in exile for fourteen years, they spent a part of their exile in the Bonda Hills. One day, Sita was taking a bathe in the stream. A party

of Bonduni (Bonda women) was walking by. They stopped and giggled at Sita's manner of taking a bath. Hardly, they control their laugh. Maa Sita got enraged at them and cursed them instantly. Since, that unfortunate incidence, the Bonduni shave their heads completely; do not feel the need to cover up the upper part of their body with clothes and, covered up the lower part of the body wearing a small cloth called Ringa. (Elwin, 1950 and Nanda, 1979:174;).

Now, the young school and college going girls coming under the influence of modern culture have started using golden coloured ornaments such as necklaces and beads available in the market and have now begun wearing a variety of coloured sarees during the festive seasons and at the time of group dance. Newly married Bonda boys and male bachelors use headband (Omageboh) made out of a tree called "arli". The male Bondos use brass earrings and aluminium bangles (sungrai). They also use bead necklace called 'thanglimali'. The children usually remain without dress for up to 4 to 5 years and after that they are dressed in children's clothes. Coming in contact with the outside society, the aged males is now- a- days- wearing lungi and readymade shirts, purchased from the local markets.

The upper Bonda community is now exposed to market economy and the outside world due to relatively better communication and road connectivity between the villages. Economically better -off families are now using mobile phones, motorcycles and TV etc. The old generation women usually wear traditional dress, only on the occasions of festivals and ostentatious presence before outside guests visiting hills. The younger generation, both boys and girls, use modern dress materials for everyday use.

### **Food and Drinks**

The staple food of the Bondas is gruel (*Untra*) prepared out of Ragi (*mandia*) and other minor millets. The gruel is taken along with little rice (Kiang), boiled green leaves or vegetables or fried dry fish (Patnaik and Choudhary, 1984:24 and Sisa, 2020:28). Other cereals they consume are Suan (*Rider*), Kakar Akhi (*Punui*), Kheta-Jana (*Jana*), Makka (*Jana*) and Kangu (*Wider*). Among pulses, Biri (*Rumak*), Dongor Rani (*musuri*), Kalath (*Kalath*), Kandula (Gibegang), Jhurung (Gibegang) also form part of the meal. They use oilseeds like Alasi (Alari), Kusurn(umbang) Karanja (Karaji)Pengu(Pengu) and Champa (Simpi). The Bondos take two meals in a day, one in the mid-day and another in the evening. During agricultural operation seasons, mid-day meal is always taken in the field, and evening meal is taken at home after returning from the field. Whenever, they leave home in the early morning hours for work in the field or visit a relative's home, they eat gruel as breakfast mixed with chillies, onion and salt all mixed. Besides, they collect different types of leaves, flowers and mushrooms from the forest are used in curry preparation. Vegetables grown in the kitchen garden like, banana, brinjal, pumpkin, bottle-guard, chilly, lady finger etc. are used in curry. In the preparation of curry, the ingredients used are salt, turmeric, chilli, onion, mustard seed and garlic. The Bondas

do not use spices in curry preparation. On special days like visit of a guest to the house or on ceremonial occasions, the Bondos like to enjoy eating non- vegetarian food, like chicken, beef, and pork or any other animals or birds killed in individual or collective hunting. They relish eating crabs very much. They catch crabs from the nearby streams and paddy fields. Besides, the Bondos enjoy eating insects like Sindhri Poko (Burai), Tenker (Un-tai) and To-penga (Aub) in their meals. These insects are collected from the nearby habitat area and from the jungle. The Bondos eat various types of fruits, the most common among them being banana, jackfruit, mango, papaya and black berry. Although, the Bondos domesticate cows, they do not milk the cows; use the milk and its products. The rationale explanation is that, “milk for the calf”. Hence, they have been practising it, for centuries. On the occasion of birth, death and marriage or collective gathering, rice with beef curry is preferred.

As per the tradition, the women cook the meal and serve to all members of the family and after serving to all, she joins them. During the agricultural operations, mid-day meals are carried to the field sites in aluminium vessels. At the field site also, she serves meals to all male members first, and, at the end, the female members eat together. She keeps meals separately for the elderly members at home for lunch.

Food type	Name of the season		
	Summer(yaan)	Rainy(lingda)	Winter(ruan)
Main food	Rice (Kiang) Suan (Rigdar) Kangu(Widar) Finger Millet (Saame)Sorghum(Biri Jana/Ked Jana)	Rice (Kiang) Suan (Rigdar) Kangu (Widar) Finger Millet (Saame) Sorghum (Ked Jana/ Biri Jana)	Rice (Kiang) Suan (Rigdar) Kangu (Widar) Finger Millet (Saame) Sorghum(Ked Jana /Biri Jana)
Secondary food	Gruel of Ragi Pusuidag Black gram curry (Rumak ab) Curry of fish, egg, meat Bambooshoot curry (Le ab)Red ant curry (Auub ab) Vegetable curry Curry of leafy vegetables Mushroom curry(Untui ab) Buraain ab	Gruel of Ragi Pusuidag Black gram curry (Rumak ab) Curry of fish and egg, meat Bamboo shoot curry (Le ab) Red ant curry (Auubab) Vegetable curry Curry of leafy vegetables Mushroom curry(Untui ab) Buraain ab	Gruel of Ragi Pusuidag Black gram curry (Rumak ab) Curry of fish, egg and meat Bamboo shoot curry (Le ab) Red ant curry(Auubab) Vegetable curry Curry of leafy vegetables Mushroom curry(Untui ab) Buraain ab
Alcoholic drinks	Sago palm juice (Sapung) Wine made from rice(Pendum) Beer (Sagur	Sago palm juice (Sapung) Wine made from rice (Pendum) Beer(Sagur)	Sago palm juice (Sapung) Wine made from rice (Pendum) Beer (Sagur)
Narcotics	Dingza(made from tobacco leaf) Tobacco of different kind(Pudia)	Dingza (made from tobacco leaf) Tobacco of different kind (Pudia)	Dingza (made from tobacco leaf) Tobacco of different kind (Pudia)

Table 2: Food and Alcohol Consumption of the Bonda Highlanders (Season- wise)

Table.2 provides information regarding the season- wise food and alcohol consumption of the Bonda Highlanders.

The tribes in India are known for their indigenous knowledge of brewing alcoholic beverages. Alcoholic beverages have a definite place in the socio-cultural ethos of the tribes. The Bondas are no way exception to it. According to the Bondo ideology, the choice of alcoholic beverages is contextual. Its meaning varies according to its context of use. No life cycle event is ever meaningful and complete without the use of alcohol. Alcoholic beverages of different kinds not only provide nourishment to the Bondo for their survival but also enliven all kinds of social interactions and cultural celebrations. In the true sense of the term, it adds colour and vigour to festivity. Without alcoholic beverages, the dignity of living as a tribe would be meaningless and Identity would be in crisis. The Bondas using indigenous knowledge prepare three types of alcoholic beverages using local ingredients (Mohanty, 1992:69-74).



Figure 8: Researcher Observing Traditional Method of Distilling Liquor

They are known by different names such as: alcoholic products collected from the sago palm tree (palm wine); alcoholic products prepared from the fermentation of food grains (beer) and distilled alcoholic products (spirit). They consider palm wine as sweet in taste and tender in the stomach. They think spirits burn the liver, whereas, fermented gruels (beer) fill their belly and make them lazy (Nayak, 2012:182). Hence, the Bondas enjoy Safung (sago-palm) juice. For them, sago palm juice is alcohol as well as food. Palm wine is the routine tippie of every day. They maintain a symbiotic relationship with the sago palm. Elwin has vividly described how alcohol plays a role in the formation of the Bonda character. The women drink but never in excess; have the men drunk heavily, consistently and enthusiastically than any tribe. A boy begins to taste the sweet flavour of palm –wine while he is still at his mother’s breast; as he grows up; it is a proud moment when, at last, he

is allowed to accompany his elders to family palm.....throughout turbulent exciting days of youth, alcohol assist him in long labour of ploughing, the dramatic quest for love, and through tedious business of marriage ceremony (1950:60).That is the reason why, every and every Bonda family owns minimum two to three sago-palms trees either in their orchards or in their swidden lands to meet, round the year, juice requirement. They believe that the sago-palm juice contains a good amount of nutrients, provides energy to carry out all kinds of physical work and removes weakness in the body. It does not have any adverse effect on the body (Nayak, 2012:187).

For healthy growth of the sago-palm tree and also for a good quantity flow of juice, the Bondas offer magico- religious rituals at the time of planting a tree, at the occasion of the first tapping of juice and when the quantity flow of juice reduces. To increase the content of alcoholic power, they add barks of various plants such as Achki, Artun, Gosangte, Tangri, Pitamari and Ukusi in the sago-palm juice.

Other varieties of alcohols the Bondos commonly drink are Pendum (unfettered beer prepared from rice or millet) and Boun Sagur (beer prepared from both cereals and different types of fruits, which is filtered), which are prepared through the process of distillation at the nearby streams with the help of indigenous equipment. It is a part of the tradition that, whenever liquor is taken, he or she has to pour a drop of it on the ground in honour of the Earth Goddess. During the fieldwork, we observed that a Bonda woman was in distilling liquor at the Sitakund stream site. Even at other places, distilling work was done by the female members of the community only. Even we observed that the Bonda women sale liquor at different locations on the main road. We never came across a single occasion of the involvement of a Bonda man in helping the women in the process of distilling liquor or selling liquor on the roadside. The Bondas consider alcoholic beverages, meat and boiled rice as prestigious food, and sharing and offering these items among the neighbourhood and relatives determines the social status of the family in the community. On the occasion of rituals like marriages and deaths and ceremonial gatherings, large quantities of rice beer are brewed for enjoyment.

### **Health and hygiene**

It is a fact that the Bondos suffer from minor to severe ailments throughout the year. The reasons for such ailments are poor hygienic condition of the village and the house, sanitation, strange cultural practices, poor quality of drinking water; belief in supernatural power and quality of food including beverages they consume every day. The Bondos suffer from various diseases like cold, cough, fever, burns, stomach disorders and scabies and the most common sufferings are gastrointestinal troubles and malaria fever. New-born babies and children suffer the worst as the mother hardly wraps the body of the babies by clean clothes even in the winter season. The children are not provided with dress up to five years. When someone in the family

falls sick, the advice of the Disari is taken for treatment. The magico – religious practitioner called Disari is a medicine man and traditional healer. He has obtained this title by the favour of God and must prove this title by the accuracy of diagnosis and efficacy of his advice, observes Elwin (1950:160-161). The Disari offers pills, time, sympathy, compassion and attention. In the process of treatment a delicate rapport is built in the trajectory of the healer- suffer. (Nanda and Talib, 1989:144). The Disari performs rituals (puja) and offers sacrifices like a hen, fowl and other birds to please evil spirits. If the patient is not cured and suffering is aggravated, the Disari suggests an animal sacrifice preferably a cow. The traditional healing practice has deep roots in the Bonda community and continues even today. The Primary Health Centre cannot cut into Disari's traditional domain, because, the Disari is himself a highlander, proficient in healing methods acceptable to his community and the community of spirits which has been bestowed on him establishes his gaze with legitimacy.. He invokes ancestors and mourns the dead as naturally as he communicates with the spirits in the valley. It is because of this rapport that magic, counter-magic, sorcery, witchcraft, herbal medicine and highland astrology compete with Allopathy's antibiotics (Nanda, 1997:185). The highlanders do visit the Health Centre, though the decision to visit the physician is taken as an alternative treatment to back up traditional healing in the case of acute infection and to save life as a last chance. We observed such beliefs and practices during our field work. When the patient's health condition becomes serious, the Bondos take the patients to the nearby Primary Health Centre, located at Mudulipada or at Khairput, for treatment as a last chance to save the life.

Regarding hygiene and cleanliness, it is worth mentioning the narratives of Elwins " the Bondos are not very clean. They have bad teeth. A man will spit and not bother to wipe his chin of saliva. A woman will urinate and come into your camp with her legs splashed with the stale. A girl will, without embarrassment, appear before a visitor in her menstrual period with drops of blood running down her legs. Bondo men certainly bathe often, cleansing hair and body with a clay that serves as soap. But the women rarely wash their skirts, and the villages are indescribably filthy. .... Hivale saw a girl of twelve relieved herself in front of her house; she had no leaves, so she walked dirty as she was into the kitchen, brought out some leaves, wiped herself, dropped the leaves on the veranda and went about her duties. I have often seen boys urinate in front of my camp, facing me, without a trace of self- consciousness" (1950:271). Now the village environments of Bonda Hills are undergoing changes. These changes are occurring due to the entry of education, communication and various development initiative launched by the State Government. It's a gradual process. It will take a lot of time to see improved health and hygienic environment of the Bonda population in the Bonda Hills.

### **Kinship (Kuda Organization)**

The Kuda or Manda is a bigger unit within social organization of the Bondas, which

comprises of a number of families related to one another by blood. The Kudas are nothing but exogamous patrilineal clans named after the village functionaries such as – Badnaik, Challan, Sisa, Dhangada, Kirsani, Majhi, Muduli etc. Initially, a village used to consist of one Kuda only. With the passage of time, and migration of other Kuda families, the village is losing its Kuda hegemony. However, the authority and leadership of the village remains with the Naik. The Bondas suffix their Kuda name to their names always. The real essence of Kuda is nothing but a functional corporate group to work and share the responsibility in the event of marriage, death ceremonies, magico-religious celebrations and agricultural operations. Common ownership of land in the hill slopes and groves goes with the Kuda. The Kuda members cultivate the land and distribute the products equally among the families. On the occasion of celebration of festivals, each Kuda representative assists the village priest and is also responsible for collecting subscription amount from the member families both in cash and kind (Patnaik and Choudhary, 1984; 37).

### **Moiety (Bansha)**

The Moiety (*Bansha*) which is a larger exogamous group continues among the Bondas. It divides the entire tribe into two blood groups: *Ontal* (cobra) vis- a-vis *Killo* (tiger). Among them, a large chunk of the population belongs to the *Ontal* (cobra) group preceded by *Killo* (tiger) group. Each moiety has a myth behind its origin. The moieties as their names signify are totemic. As per the thumb rule of *Bansha*, the families having affiliation to Cobra will not kill a Cobra and, the same is the case with *Killos*. The kinship among the Bondos is largely classificatory in which, the terms used for primary relationship are also applied to the affinal and collaterals in identifying their proper behaviour pattern. Over the years, it has been observed that the *Ontal* group is finding difficulty in getting suitable proposals from the *Killo* group. As a result of that, marriage within the moiety is allowed now. The Bondos operate the kinship terms in four fields, namely among their own family members, agnates, non-agnatic (*Moitra*) kins and affines. A joking relationship exists between a woman and her husband's younger brother and sister, between a man with his wife's younger sister and brother, and between persons with their grandchildren. A woman cannot enjoy a joking relationship with her husband's elder brother, and, so also, a man cannot have a joking relationship with his elder brother's wife.

### **Moitra**

Besides affinal and consanguine kinship relations, the Bondas enter into another type of relationship, which is called as *Moitra*. Persons belonging to the same sex and age develop intimacy and bind themselves by a bond of friendship through a ritual performed by the village priest. Once, such a relationship is socially formalised, both the friends must attend socio- religious ceremonies held at each other's house

and exchange gifts. Such a relationship between the two families does not permit a proposal for matrimonial alliances between the siblings as they are considered brothers and sisters to one another.

### **Marriage**

The Bondas consider marriage as an important institution of the community. They strongly uphold that, marriage makes a person full-fledged member of the community. The Bonda community practices clan endogamy strictly. Marriage of a boy and a girl is not allowed within the village as they will be in relation as brother and sister. There is another restriction also while formalising a marriage proposal. While considering a marriage proposal, for example, a boy belonging to Kirsani group of Padeiguda village cannot marry a girl from Mudulipada, who belongs to the Sisa group. They are considered as brothers and sisters to each other. Hence, the Bondas always approved a marriage proposal between a boy and a girl beyond the neighbourhood villages. Marriage by elopement is discouraged by the community members. Another aspect of marriage prevailing in the earlier days was that, a girl of twenty years of age marries a boy of ten to fourteen years of age. This traditional marriage system is not being appreciated by the community now and, the youths do not approve this marriage system. The premarital relationship was strictly prohibited in the community. Bride price was prevalent in those days also. The groom's family paid the bride price (ginning) to the bride's family. Usually, bride price consisted of one or two cows coupled with one or two rupees in cash depending upon the economic condition of the groom's family.

Marriage by force was also present in the earlier days. When a boy shows interest in a girl, the family members along with the boy and a few villagers visit the girl's family. They carry liquor and khadu with them. They keep the liquor and khadu in one of the corners of the house. Then they come out of the house and declare that, they have come here for the marriage proposal of the girl. If the family members of the girl agree to the proposal, due process follows as per Bonda tradition. But in case, the girl's family does not agree to the proposal of the boy's family, then the family members visit the boy's family with the same bottles of liquor and khadu for return, and, explain the reason, they are not interested in the proposal. If the boy is determined to marry that girl, then, the boy's family starts applying force on the girl's family. The boy's family applies all kinds of tactics including ruthless behaviour on the girl's family for this marriage. Even the villagers of the boy's family join in these ruthless activities. Sometimes, they even threaten to kill the brother and father of the girl. These types of ruthless activities on the part of the boy's family continue for a year, or even for more than a year, on the girl's family. Finally, if the girl's family does not yield to the proposal, then the boy along with his friends forcefully lifts the girl, whenever she goes to either the market, or to the field for work or while taking bath in a stream. Marriage by force is not occurring in the

community nowadays. We hardly received any information about this marriage practice during fieldwork.

### **Marriage by Mutual Consent**

The earlier practice of marriage has undergone tremendous changes in the upper Bonda community. The practices of clan endogamy and village exogamy do exist but not in its earlier form. Marriage by mutual consent (arranged marriage) is a dominant practice among the Bonda community. Love marriage between a boy and a girl is also taking place but on very rare occasions.

As per tradition, the boy's family searches a prospective girl for the marriage through different channels like relatives and friends. As per the practice, the girl's family looks to the property particularly land, animals (cow, goat etc.) and salap trees owned by the boy's family. They also inquire about the nature and behaviour of the prospective boy before agreeing to the proposal of marriage.

Once the boy's family identifies a suitable girl, the boy's family initiates the process of marriage. The boy's family visits the girl's family with the marriage proposal, carrying different types of liquor with them. After arriving at the girl's house, they offer varied containers of liquor to the girl's parents. This step of marriage is called Salagbai uyaanai. If the girl's family agrees to the proposal, then the family members happily drink the liquor.

From this day, the process of negotiation between the two families starts. The process of exchanging liquor between the two families takes place on every ceremonial occasion. This continues for about a year. The boy's family consults a Pujari for a suitable day to bring the daughter-in-law from her house. Once the date is decided by the Pujari, the boy's family communicates the same date and day to the girl's parent. So, the day on which they bring the girl from her house is called, Uyaai bai. On the scheduled day, the boys and girls from the boy's side go to the girl's village. As per the taboo, the mother joins the group but not the father. After reaching at the girl's village, the boys stay outside of the village and wait at the road side, as they are not allowed to enter the village. The mother of the boy accompanied by the girl goes to the girl's house. They are served vegetarian meal. If the distance between the boy's and girl's house is walk-able, they do not need a vehicle. But if the distance is greater, they arrange a vehicle for travel purposes. Around in the evening, 8 o' clock or 9 o' clock, the girl leaves her house in the company of her mother-in-law and the visiting girls. While, she leaves her house, she weeps a lot to express her natural feeling of attachment to her home and parents. Due to this, sometimes, it takes a little more time for her to leave the house. Outside of the village, the young boys along with the girl's brother wait, hiding at a strategic location. The moment the group reaches there, the boys start throwing cow dung and a particular plant foliage along with fruit Kundung at them. The moment the plant leaves come in contact with body the body starts itching.

Through this unseemly act, the boys express malicious feelings of anger that you are permanently taking away our lovable sister and you are giving us a lot of pain. From now onwards, your responsibility is to take care of our sister. She should live happily in the family. Otherwise, we will see you all. During the journey, the girls sing songs and console her with the words ‘Oh dear, you are new to our village and you are going to be the sister- in-law of someone’s and wife of our dear brother. So, you do not worry. Everything would be good for you in our village’.

At the village junction, where two or three roads meet, the group stops there for a while. The prospective boy reaches there at the time of the arrival of the group. The boy and the girl sit together at the junction point as per the advice of the Pujari. The Pujari offers puja by reciting mantras (hymns) by breaking a coconut and offering a sacrifice of a hen. After this ritual, both of them move to the village. As per tradition, the girl does not go to her in-law’s house. As per practice, she stays in a girl’s dormitory or in any relative’s or friend’s house for some days. In the present context, the dormitory system does not exist in the villages. For convenience, either her paternal aunt or maternal aunt or any friend in the village takes her to stay with them for some days. Because, she is familiar with them and she can stay with them freely. This is a practice to make the girl fearless and get acquainted gradually with the villagers and her in-law’s family members. On the next day, her in-law’s family arranges Gupasing for friends, relatives and guests. Depending upon the convenience, the family arrange a feast with beef or mutton or chicken curry. The female members of her sister in-law’s side, particularly sister in-law carry her to the stream for catching fish and for collection of fuel wood. This is done keeping in mind to make her familiar with the in-law’s family members and gradually adjust to the new environment. It has been observed in the past that, the married girl failed to adjust with the new environment, and ran away to her parents. To avoid that kind of situation, the near relatives and the girls, particularly, provide her company throughout in the initial days of marriage. After one week, the husband or the husband’s family take her to her parents to stay with them for about a week. After a week, either husband or family members go to bring her back. Again, after a weeks or two weeks’ time, the same procedure follows. This time the parents and relatives accompany the girl and leave her in the in-law’s house. From this day, she lives with her in-laws.

As per the practice of the Bonda community, the groom’s family offers the bride price to the bride’s family (Patnaik, 2005:90). It depends upon the status of the bride -groom family and the mutually agreed upon quantum of bride price (Gining).If the economic condition of groom’s family is sound; in that case, the groom family may offer an ox and a cow. This bride price is usually offered within a year, depending upon the economic condition of the groom’s family. In some cases, a few families do not a demand bride price. The reason is that the bride’s family says that they have sufficient money and they do not need the bride’s price.

Alternatively they agree that instead of offering a bride price, the groom's family should take care of their daughter and she should live happily.

### **Divorce**

Among the Bonda community, divorce is not a common phenomenon. Very rarely does a divorce take place between a husband and wife. If they decide to get separated in a given situation, a meeting is called by the community members. They listen to both the parties and discuss the matter in the meeting. They try to resolve the matter amicably between the husband and wife. However, with the painful life she undergoes in her in-law's house, she tries to bear all those pains and does not wish to leave her husband's house putting the children in the lurch.

### **Socio-Political Organisation**

The Bonda- Highlanders have a rudimentary form of political organisation. Each village has its headman called Nayak. The elders of the village unanimously select a person to hold the village head position for a period of three years and this position is not hereditary. After completion of three year tenure, the Nayak position goes to another person duly nominated by the elders. The Nayak is vested with power and authority to preside over the village assembly and adjudicate the matters/cases pertaining to village affairs such as theft, conflict between families, divorce, etc. As a reward, the villagers offer him half an acre of land for his services rendered to the village. The Nayak is assisted by a Challan and this position is hereditary in nature. The Barik (messenger) who belongs to the Dom community is the only link between the Bonda community and outside the world, and keeps them informed about what is happening outside their territory. Although communication system (road and other networks) has improved over the years, still Barik plays a role of messenger to communicate the message among the people living in the interior villages of Bonda hills.

The post of Pujari is hereditary and the person who acts in this position is paid 15 kgs of food grain by each household of the village during the harvest season in return for the services he renders to the village community throughout the year. There is another functionary called Disari whose job is to determine and fix the date for village festivals to be performed and celebrated throughout the year. He acts as an astrologer and predicts about the future happenings about the good or bad of a person's life and suggests remedies. He is a specialist in herbal medicine and professionally a sorcerer who knows many magical performances and methods of curing diseases through appeasing spirits. Depending upon the nature of disease, the kind of sacrifice is decided at the altar of black magic. In the case of an ordinary disease, a fowl or a hen sacrifice could satisfy the ghost for cure of the disease. But in critical cases, the sacrifice of a cow is suggested; otherwise, the disease will not

be cured. The payment made to him is in cash or kind depending upon the services rendered and it varies from case- to -case basis depending upon the amount of time spent performing the ritual.

### **Conclusion**

Let us draw some conclusions from the reflective narratives above. Ethnographers are not able to arrive at a definite conclusion in their assessment of the Bonda community, when and how they moved to Bonda Hills for permanent settlement. However, the oral myth (folklore) which has had a deep influence among the local community is that, the Bondas migrated from the bordering country, Myanmar, around three hundred years back. The Bondas belong to ancient Austro-Asiatic culture and exhibit akin to the Mundari group. The Bondas do not have a language script. However, the language they speak passes on from one generation to another and is too difficult to understand. They live in thirty-two villages. The Bonda Hills are full of natural beauty having a bounty of natural resources. The village settlement pattern is not uniform as the villages are located on hilltops and hill slopes. Some of the villages are compact while others are spread over a wider area within the hill ranges. While selecting a new site for a village, the Bondas give priority to the availability of perennial sources of water like a stream and free flow of air.

The structure of Bonda houses invariably reflects the uniform pattern in almost all the villages of Bonda Hills, subject to the availability of flat space on the hill tops and hill slopes. The houses are scattered inside the village and, hence, all houses are physically separated from one another. Geometrically, the houses are rectangular in size, and the length and breadth of the houses remain the same. The size of each house is around 22' in length and 18' in breadth having a single door in the middle. The size of the door is 4' high and 2' wide. Entering the house through the door is not so easy for an outsider. It reflects upon the individualistic orientation of living in the Bonda community.

The Bondas maintain a symbiotic relationship with nature and, therefore, worship living and non-living beings like air, water, earth and plants. Besides they have three religious institutions such as Sindibor, Patkhanda Mahaprabhu and Sitakund, which shape the life and guide the everyday journey of the Bonda Highlanders.

The Bonda women's traditional dress and indigenous costumes of various types add to their separate identity. The Bonda women do not wear a saree, a traditional dress of Odia women. They prefer to wear a night dress (gown). Hence, the upper Bondas enjoys a separate identity among the tribal groups in the state, let alone in the county.

The Bonda family is patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal and of nuclear type. The family consists of a father, a mother and unmarried children. Kinship relations among

the Bondas observed are very strong and that shapes everyday life dealings. The Kuda or Manda is a bigger social organisation and it comprises many families related to one another by blood. The Kudas are nothing but exogamous patrilineal clans named after the village functionaries such as – Badnaik, Challan, Sisa, Dhangada, Kirsani, Majhi, Muduli etc.

The traditional marriage practice of a girl of nineteen marrying a boy of ten, much below her age is no longer liked by the youths (both boys and girls) of the community. Marriage by mutual consent, arranged marriage is a dominant practice among the Bonda community. Love marriage between a boy and a girl is also taking place but on very few occasions. Pre-marital relationship between a boy and a girl is strictly prohibited in the community and the community deals with such occurrences severely. The bride price is still in practice. Occurrences of divorce between a husband and a wife do take place but in rare occasions.

The Bondas staple food is gruel (untra) prepared out of finger millet (ragi or mandia). The gruel is taken mixed with rice (Kiang), boiled green leaves or vegetables or fried dry fish. The Bondas love to eat a lot of chicken, pork, mutton, and beef. The Bondas enjoy salap juice as liquor and also enjoy other house-made liquor like pendum, rice beer etc.

With the passage of time and coming in contact with the outside world, the youths of the Bonda community are gradually moving away from the traditional practices like Boy's and girl's dormitory (Ingere and Sunge), traditional marriage system (a girl marrying to a boy much lower to her age), wearing woman dress called Ringa, bracelets and headbands and women shaving hair on their head. The school and college going girls are no longer interested to follow these traditional cultural practices, which put them on a low profile in modern society. These are perceptible changes that occurred in due course of time the Bonda community. However, they are very much conscious of their culture and traditional practices. They wish to preserve their traditional culture and values of the community from the on-sault of modernity. Let me quote the words of a Bonda youth "accepting modern dresses and gradually changing over to new food pattern is not that bad, but, neglecting worship of the village deity, not showing respect to the Sindibor and neglecting the celebration of rituals for which the Bonda has had a special identity in the society, that, identity would be in crisis. In the long run, the Bondas should not lose their identity. If it happens, he will feel sorry for it".

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### *Endnotes*

1. This paper was delivered as a Key note address at the National Seminar entitled "75 Years of Independence: Exploring Tribal Culture, Philosophy and Sustainable Growth" organised by the Department of Sociology, Iswar Saran Degree College, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, from January 10-11, 2025.
2. Bondo and Bonda words are interchangeably used in the text.
4. In the running text, in many places, Bonda's words are used. It is too difficult to translate Indigenous Bonda words to other languages, even into Odia. One has to read and draw the essence or meaning of the word.

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