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BONDO HIGHLANDERS: EVERYDAY LIFE CYCLE AND RITUALS

Abstract

Bondo Highlanders or upper Bondas, as popularly known in the region, inhabit the hill ranges and plateaus of Bonda Hills measuring an area of 35910.25 hac. / 35.9 sq. km which lies at an average elevation of about 3000 to 4000 feet above the sea level of the Khairput Block of the Malkangiri District. The Bondas are one of the thirteen Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Odisha State. Ethnographers were not unanimous in their reflections on the origin, identity and affinity of this tribe, when and how they moved to Bonda Hills for permanent settlement. However, they believed that, the Bondas speak an obscure Austro-Asiatic Language having Mongoloid cast of countenance. The Bondas were regarded as entirely savage, with the astonishing dress and appearance of their women, their violent homicidal way of behaviour and their unfamiliar tongue making them completely distinct from the rest of the tribes of the country. The Bondas live in thirty-two villages and their population is 7098 only. In this paper, the researcher intends to reflect through ethnographic narratives their everyday life cycle and rituals like puberty-menstrual cycle, conception and process of delivery (birth) marriage and divorce and death rituals.

Keywords: *Ethnography, Life-cycle, Bondo-Highlanders, Witchcraft, Traditional Knowledge*

Introduction

Bondo Highlanders or upper Bondas popularly known in the region and they call themselves as Remo (human) inhabit the inaccessible areas of hill ranges of Khairput Block of the Malkangiri District. The Bonda hills lie at an average elevation of about 3000 to 4000 feet above the sea level. The hill tops, hill slopes, and plateaus surrounded by the hills and terrains constitute the area of the Bonda Hills measuring an area of 35910.25 hac. or 35.9 sq.km. (as computed by ORSAC, Govt of Odisha, Bhubaneswar in 1991). They 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 obscure Austro-Asiatic Language-the

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inaccessibility of their abode” (Elwin 1950:1). A survey conducted by the colonial administration, engaged in conducting a topographical survey of Koraput, referred Bondas as a “primitive tribe” whose marriage ceremony, women’s dress and religious practices were “peculiar” (May, 1873).

Ethnographers are not unanimous in their reflections on the origin, identity and affinity of this tribe. 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 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 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 the linkage (Ibid: 212). Furer-Haimendorf is of the view that the language of the Bondos and Gadabas belong to the same family but it is difficult to identify as they speak differently. They share each other’s food and even in rare occasions inter marry. Although, differences exist in possession of materials, religious beliefs and dress and ornaments etc., a common cultural atmosphere persists among them as they belong to ancient Austro-Asiatic culture (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). Some of the striking features that make the Bondas distinctly different are primitive and backwardness of life.

The Bonda population according to the 1941 Census was 2565 only and within a decade time i.e. 1951, it increased to 3641. By the year 1991, Bonda’s numerical figure had increased to 7315 with 3475 males and 3840 females (Census Report, 1941, 1951, and 1991). The Bondas live in 32 villages with 1819 households having a total population of 7098. Out of which the female population (3819) is more than the male population (3279). The survey report of the Bonda Development Agency reveals the above fact that there were 1054 Bonda women to 1000 Bonda men (BDA, 2015). Another survey revealed the fact that out of 1819 Bonda families 412 families were headed by women members only (COATS, 2009). The literacy rate among the Bondas is very low. As per the survey report, the literacy among the Bonda population stands at 24.73 % (male-27.75% and female-22.15%) which is very low in comparison to other tribal groups in the state and let alone in the country. The government of Odisha has laid down a 13 kilometre concrete road very recently connecting Block headquarters at Khairput and the last village of the Bonda hills called Andrahal. Seven villages are located by the side of this main road, while another five to six villages are located within a radius of two to three kilometres and are connected to main road by cemented or tar roads. The rest of the villages

are spread over in the remote areas. Communication to these villages even today is too difficult. One can approach these villages by walking only or by motor cycle with difficulty. All villages are provided with electricity but the power supply is highly erratic. In the history of Bonda Hills, six months back they got the connectivity of bus service first time to Block and District headquarters under the Laxmi Bus service scheme of the state government. Private Jeep service operates between Mudulipada and Khairput daily depending upon the availability of passengers. The service provider charges Rs 50/- per passenger.

The first classical book based on an Ethnographic study on Bondo of Bonda Highlanders was published by Verrier Elwin (1950), a British Anthropologist. After three decades, Nityananda Patnaik, a renowned Anthropologist, in Odisha conducted research and published a book entitled "The Bondos and Their Response to Development" (1984). Prof. Patanaik covered several aspects such as social organisation, economic life, political organisation, religious beliefs and practices etc. In the year 1994, another classical book was published by Bikram K. Nanda under the title "Contours of Continuity and Change: The Story of Bonda Highlanders", 1994. Nanda, a Sociologist by training, wrote at length based on his interaction with the Bondas and through narratives focussed on social history, subsistence production, pedagogy, prescription etc. B. Modak conducted a study on "Nutritional Status and Health Condition of Bonda Highlanders" in the year 2002 for his Ph.D. Modak mostly concentrated on the health and nutritional issues of the Bonda community. In the year 2005, Patnaik brought out another edited book on the Primitive Tribes of Orissa, in which, he devoted a chapter on Bondo covering briefly economic life, social organisation, political organisation and life cycle (2005). L. K. Mahapatra, another distinguished Anthropologist from Odisha along with R. P. Mohanty published a book titled "The Challenges of Self-Managed Development-The 'FIERCE' Hill Bonda Case," (2009). They covered mostly economic aspects like sharing resources, village autonomy, optimal use of resources, and their management and opportunities for development. Another study covering on the Physical aspects particularly the impact of alcohol on the health of Bondos has been published by Jayant K. Nayak under the title "Constructive Community Drinking: A Genome-based Socio-Cultural Study on Bonda Highlanders" (2012). A legal luminary by profession, born and brought into the community, Dambaru Sisa has published a book recently entitled "The Bonda Tribe's Socio-Cultural System and Change, My People" (2020). Sisa has tried to cover many aspects of Bonda life such as the socio-cultural system, economic system, primitive political system, material and non-material culture, folk lore and social change etc. Except for Elwin and Sisa, none of the authors, consciously or otherwise have made any emphatic narratives on the Bonda's life cycle and community rituals. Elwin's narratives were based on personal observation of Bonda's life cycle and celebration of community rituals, which is by now seven decades old. Sisa's narratives being an insider perspective, lacks coherence in

certain aspects of presenting the facts.

Against this back drop, an effort has been made in this paper to present ethnographic narratives on the life cycle and rituals of the Bonda Highlanders. Any attempt to write something on the life cycle and community rituals of any community or society at large, is a very delicate and sensitive issue. These are all value- loaded aspects. It is as good as touching someone's emotions and cultural ethos. Hence, one should be very careful while documenting, narrating and articulating the facts or events. The facts presented in this paper through step by step narratives are factual, insightful and accurate as far as possible. It was a gigantic and difficult task for the research team to collect information from the selective respondents, who are very familiar with the ritual processes, and in-fact have been involved in conducting those activities in the village. Information collection took several sittings and several months with the valued respondents, as most of them were available only during the afternoon or evening hours. While narrating the events or situations step by step, there could be a possibility of overlapping facts, in accuracy in interpretation or contextualizing the facts in an appropriate situation with proper sense or wording. If such instances come to notice, I would urge the enlightened readers to ignore them as it is not a deliberate intension of the researcher to hurt someone's (community) feelings and ethos.

Bonda: Life Cycle and Rituals:

Puberty/Menstrual Cycle:

The menstrual cycle is a biological process of every woman. She needs to pass through this process till she reaches menopause. When a girl experiences her first menstrual period, she immediately informs her mother or any female elder member of the house. The Bondas calls it as Selanga. Elwin observed that "most Bondos do not observe menstrual taboos; there are no special rooms for women in their periods and no second door for use". Further, he mentioned that a "girl without embarrassment appear before a visitor in her menstrual period with drops of blood running her leg" (1950 13&271). During interaction with the Bondapada women and girls and even women of other villages, we came across varied information on this matter. According to them, some girls including women observe the taboo of menstrual cycle whereas others do not follow and freely move in the community. The family which observes the menstrual cycle, the mother or elderly female member directs the girl to bathe immediately. She is provided with sanitary pads or clothes depending upon the economic condition of the family. It is a belief among some families that to stop heavy bleeding, they advise the girl to sit on a bigger- sized stone (tilugber), as it was revealed during the discussion, some of the families recommended the girl to jump over a sleeping dog. Another belief prevails in some of the families that, if the girl eats a cake prepared out of ragi(millet) by using

Sableb ulag leaves, it helps in reducing the flow of heavy bleeding. This cake is called Bolugsam. Now the girls and their family members are aware of health and hygiene concerning the menstrual cycle. Now-a-days most of the school and college going girls are using sanitary napkins. Those who believe in taboos related to the menstrual cycle, avoid going to sacred places. The government of Odisha has launched a scheme called KHUSI. Under this scheme, free sanitary napkins are distributed among the girl students. However, the practice of using clothes is still present among middle aged women and girls.

Pregnancy

The menstrual cycle is linked with to identification of pregnancy of a woman. The upper Bonda women decide whether a woman is pregnant or not when her menstrual cycle stops for a period of two to three months. Symptoms accompanied for determination of pregnancy are vomiting, dullness and loss of appetite. Based on all the information, a Bonda woman decides about the pregnancy. As per tradition, a Bonda woman wears a piece of broomstick or insigug (grass) on her hair to protect herself and the growing baby in the womb from evil eyes and black magic. The Bonda community does not follow any taboo/restrictions on food and work barrier during pregnancy. She is prevented from eating those fruits like berries and vegetables, which have an adverse effect on her health. The pregnant woman performs all kinds of work inside and outside of the house as a normal woman during the pregnancy period and even at the advanced stage.

Now- a- days, health care facilities are provided by the State government in rural and tribal villages. Under this scheme, the ASHA and Anganwadi workers play a major role in determining the pregnancy of a woman and also provide health care services to the pregnant woman up to post delivery time.

Pangan Biru

Pangan Biru is a ritual performed by the upper Bondas to keep a person away from evil eyes, witchcraft and spirits. In the case of a pregnant woman, the family shows serious concern and performs Pangan Biru to keep the woman free from evil eyes, witchcraft and spirits. Pangan Biru is performed in the initial months of the pregnancy. The village Disari is called to perform this ritual. The ingredients required by the Disari to perform this ritual are a black hen, gubain, lang, kumbarain, insingug, gide(frog), muragse, unga, tiriya, kurka, ursainsa, sansangber, tarla, mustard oil, bow and arrow, soil from termite mounds, soil from the junction of the road(four sides of the roads connected) and grined rice. While collecting soil, a person should collect it at one attempt with his left hand.

At the site of puja, a small human like putla (doll) is prepared out of that soil. The putla is placed vertically in a sitting position on the ground. The pregnant woman sits nearer to putla as per the ritual procedure and instruction of the Disari. The ingredients collected for the ritual are arranged in that place. The Disari initiates puja and first offers the sacrifice of a black hen. He recites the mantra and accordingly uses the ingredients as the process moves. The husband prepares small- sized bow and arrows using fresh bamboo sticks without using iron. After completion of puja, the Disari holds the bow and arrow in his hand and draws a cross on all sides of the woman. At the end of the ritual, the Disari shoots the putla and shoots arrows in four directions such as east, west, north and south. He prays almighty to keep both the woman and baby from all miss happenings. With this, the Pangan biru ritual comes to an end. The Disari is paid for his service with one bowl of paddy and alcohol.

The Process followed for the Birth of a Baby:

Pregnant women now prefer to take advantage of the local government health care facilities for delivery. But in remote villages as well as in many cases, the family members usually prefer delivery of a woman at home only as per traditional practice. When a woman gets labour pain, the elder members of the family call women from the neighbouring houses having experience in delivery process. They take the woman to a room attached to the main hall having an extra hearth (turusaang). As per requirement, the male members tie a rope to a pole of the roof tightly and after that the male members leave the delivery site. The female members boil water in a vessel. The warmth of fire coming out of the hearth helps in the delivery process. They advise the pregnant woman to catch the rope tied to the pole for extra support and to build pressure on the abdomen to make the delivery process smooth. After delivery, they use a blade to cut the umbilical cord and collect it in a pot. As per Bonda tradition, the placenta (sari) and umbilical cord (lunding) are buried nearer to the hearth (kundrasang) by the mother of the baby. But, not all the Bonda families follow this process. Few families bury the umbilical cord and placenta at any location inside the premises of the house. After delivery, the women give hot water bathe to the mother and normal water bathe to the new born baby. After that, the female members clean the delivery area. Once the delivery related activities are completed, the family members entertain the women guests by offering food and salap drink. After enjoying food, the women leave for their respective houses. Usually before entering the houses, they bathe.

After delivery, the mother and new born baby live in a separate room up to Sutak as the mother needs a lot of rest. She is provided food in her room only. The food is prepared without using oil and less spice for a considerable period. She cleans the area using cow dung where the umbilical cord and placenta are buried daily. As per tradition, the Bondas perform Gupasing and

on the day of Gupasing, the interested family arranges a feast, but it is not compulsory for all.

Gupasing (Birth)

For the arrangement of Gupasing, the ingredients required are turmeric, sacred water, a reddish brown hen (simedag gising), a white thread (tuli) and a banana thread. The invited friends and guests arrive on the day of Gupasing. On the guest's arrival, at the main entrance of the house, one of the family member sprinkles turmeric mixed water on them. The ritual starts. The mother and the baby sit at the identified place where the ceremony will be performed. The husband or a senior male member of the family who is well-versed with the procedure performs the ritual. First, the person offers sacrifice of a hen to the god. After offering sacrifice, he cuts a small piece from leg portion of the hen and using a white thread, ties it at the neck of the baby. He takes another white thread and puts a little turmeric powder to it. After that, he ties a small piece of turmeric. Then he ties thread to the baby's neck or hand. Next, he ties a banana thread called tunie at the waist of the baby. While tying the threads and offering of puja continues, at the other end, the family members prepare rice and curry of sacrificial hen called Saru jaang. Once Saru jaang is cooked, the husband offers Saru jaang to the god and goddesses. After offering, the family members only eat Saru jaang. For that, the family members observe fast and are not allowed to either chew tobacco or drink alcohol. If someone violates the rule and joins the family for Saru jaang, it is believed that such action will invite adverse effect on the baby's health. Separate arrangement is made for visiting guests. They are served rice and mutton or chicken curry depending upon the economic condition of the family. This is called Bilein jaang. The guests and family members bless the baby on this occasion. The name of the baby is given on this occasion. The celebration of Gupasing depends upon the convenience of the family to go for it. The Gupasing ceremony is usually arranged by the family four or five days after birth of the baby or on any other convenient day.

Bad Biru

After completion of Gupasing, if the baby does not keep good health, gets often sick, loses appetite and suffers from diseases, in that situation, the family members feel that, the god has not been satisfied with puja on Gupasing. To appease the god again, the family arranges another puja. They call it Bad Biru. The entire process observed for Gupasing is followed for Bad Biru. Instead of a hen a crab is sacrificed. Interested families invite friends and relatives on this occasion and arrange a feast for them.

Marriage

The Bondas consider marriage as an important institution of the community. In earlier times, the Bondas practiced clan endogamy strictly.

They strongly uphold the view that marriage makes a person a full -fledged member of the community. The Bonda community strictly follows exogamy. While selecting a life partner for marriage, for example, a boy belonging to the Kirsani group of Padeiguda village cannot marry a girl of Mudulipada who belongs to the Sisa group. They are considered as brothers and sisters to each other. Hence, the Bondas always approved of a marriage proposal between a boy and a girl beyond the neighbourhood villages. Marriage by elopement was also strictly prohibited. The dominant traditional practice of marriage was that, a girl of twenty years of age marries a boy of ten to fourteen years of age. The premarital relationship was strictly prohibited. The practice of bride price was a common phenomenon among the Bonda community and this practice still continues without any change. The groom's family paid the bride price (ginning) to the bride's family. Usually, the bride price consists of one or two cows with one or two rupees in cash depending upon the economic condition. Marriage by force was also present. 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 alcohol of different varieties and khadu. They keep alcohol 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, then due process follows as per Bonda tradition. But in case, the girl's family does not agree to the proposal, then the family members of the girl visit the boy's family with the same bottle of alcohol and khadu for returning, and explain to the boy's family the reasons for being not interested in the proposal. In case the boy decides to marry that girl only, then, the boy's family apply all kind forces on the girl's family. They do apply various tactics including ruthless behaviour towards the girl's family to make them agree to the marriage proposal. Even the villagers join in these ruthless activities. If it is required, they do not mind threatening to kill the father or brother of the girl. These types of ruthless activities on the part of the boy's family continue for a year or even more than that. Finally, if the girl's family does not yield to pressure tactics and marriage proposal, then finally the boy along with his friends plan to lift the girl, whenever she goes to the market or the field for work or while she takes bathe in a nearby stream.

Arranged Marriage/ Marriage by Mutual Consent:

Now the younger generation of boys and girls do not like the traditional marriage system practiced by the community at all. Hence, the traditional marriage system has completely stopped. However, the practices of clan endogamy and village exogamy do exist in their earlier forms for finalising a marriage proposal. Marriage by mutual consent (arranged marriage) by both the families is a dominant practice in the Bonda community. Love marriage between a boy and a girl is taking place but in rare cases. The Bonda community does not encourage love marriage. In such cases, the married couple and the

family members have to face severe restrictions imposed by the community. During the field work only one love marriage case was reported to us. Two years back a Bonda girl while working in a prawn factory at Vishakhapatnam fell in love with a boy of another tribal community. After marriage, the girl is not allowed to enter the village and her mother along with two children is living with community mild restrictions.

The boy's family searches for a prospective girl through different channels like relatives and friends. Once the proposal is mooted and as per the practice, the girl's family inquires about property ownership like land, animals (cow, goat etc.) and salap trees by the boy's family. They too also inquire about the nature and behaviour of the prospective candidate (boy).

After the identification of a suitable girl, the boy's family initiates the process of a marriage. The boy's family visits the girl's family with marriage proposal and carries with them different types of alcohol. After arriving at the girl's house, they offer varied containers of alcohol to the girl's family. This step of marriage is called Salagbai uyaanai. If the girl's family agrees to the proposal, then the family members happily enjoy alcohol. From that day, other necessities for marriage between two families start. The processes of exchanging alcohol between two families take 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 would- be daughter- in-law from her parent's house. Once the date is decided by the Pujari, the boy's family communicates the same to the girl's family. So, the day on which the bride is brought from her house is called Uyaai bai. On that day, the boys and girls in a group go to the girl's village. As per customary practice, the mother of the boy joins the group and she leads the visit. After reaching the village, the mother along with the girls goes to the girl's house. The accompanying boys stay outside the village and wait at the road side. They are not allowed to enter the village as per tradition. The visiting group is served vegetarian food at lunch time. The boy's group waiting at the roadside is also served vegetarian food. If the boy's and girl's houses are located within a walkable distance, the group would go on a walk. But if the distance is greater, the group needs a vehicle for the visit. Around the evening time, around 8 o' clock or night 9 o' clock the girl leaves her house with the company of the visiting group. While she leaves her house, she weeps a lot to express her natural feelings of attachment to the home, parents, and villagers. Due to this, sometimes, it takes a little more time for her to leave the house. During this process, the girl's brother joins the boy's group waiting at the road side. They move to a strategic location on the roadside and hide there. The moment the visiting group along with the girl reaches that point, the boys start throwing cow dung and a particular variety of leaves along with fruit Kundung at the group members. The moment the leaves come in contact with the 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 today onwards, it is your responsibility 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 and wife of our dear brother. So, you do not worry. Everything would be good for you in our village. While returning, the visiting group stops at the junction point (where two or three roads meet) nearer to the village. The prospective boys with villagers reach at the junction at the time of the arrival of the group. As per the direction of Pujari, the boy and the girl sit together at the junction point of the road. Then the Pujari offers puja by breaking a coconut and offering a sacrifice of a hen. After this ritual, both of them enter the village. The newly married girl as per customary practice does not go to her in-law's house. As per the practice, she goes to stay in a girl's dormitory or any relative's or friend's house. In the present situation, the dormitory system does not exist in practical sense. Now, either her paternal aunt or maternal aunt or any friend 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 with villagers and her in-laws family. On the next day of the arrival of the newly married girl, her in-laws family arranges Gupasing for friends, relatives and guests. Depending upon the convenience, the families arrange a feast with beef or mutton or chicken. The female members of her mother in-law side, particularly sister in-law carry her to the stream for catching fish and for collection of fuel wood. This is done particularly to make her familiar with the in-laws family members and gradually to make her to adjust with the new environment. Even sometimes, it has been observed in the past that the girl failed to adjust with the new environment, and ran away to her parents. In order to avoid that kind situation, the near relatives and the girls, particularly, provide her company throughout the day. After one week, the husband or the husband's family take the newly married girl to her parents to stay with them for about a week. After one week, either husband or family members go to the daughter in-laws house to bring her back. After arrival, she lives in her in-laws house. As per the custom, the groom's family offers bride price to the bride's family. It depends upon the status of the bride-groom family and mutually agreed upon quantum of bride price (Gining). If the economic condition of groom's family is sound; in that case, the bride price could be an ox and a cow. This bride price is usually given between a time periods of one month to a year. Even a few families do not demand bride price. The reason is that as the bride's family is economically sound and they do not desire for bride price. Alternatively they agree that instead of offering 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 divorce takes place between a husband and wife. If they decide to

get separated in a given situation, a meeting is called by the villagers and they discuss the matter in the meeting. They try to resolve the matter amicably between the husband and wife. However, painful life she under goes in her in-law's house, she tries to bear all those pains and does not wish to leave her husband house putting her children at lurch.

Death Rituals:

The upper Bonda community performs death rituals depending upon the nature of death of a person. The community follows common process of death ritual to a point, and, there after adopt separate procedure case to case basis depending upon the nature of death. The death ritual process varies from one village to another. For example, the process of death ritual followed in case of a normal death and the ritual followed in case of a pregnant woman's death are different.

Gaise

It was used to be the one and only final ritual and most common ritual of the upper Bonda community. But, today some changes have taken place in the performance of death ritual as what they are seeing or learning from other cultures. The death of pregnant woman and suicidal cases are exception to it. These cases make mandatory to include Gunupa as one extra ritual to make it full circle.

Preparation and Taboos observed during Death Ritual:

During the death ceremony, the villagers involve themselves in making Dana (pomui) and, here, one thing to note is that the Dana should be prepared without removing the stem from leaf. But this practice varies from one village to another. To perform death ritual, a cow, bowl of rice, a pig, a hen, aarpa, kumpendag, siali leaves, turmeric and an egg are required. On Gaise day, the relatives and family members are not allowed to touch the trees present in the house yard, the crops in the field and the food grains stored on the roofs. The Bondas believe that if they touch these items, these items will perish gradually.

General Death Case

The process of death rituals followed for all cases:

- Information passed on to all friends and relatives.
- Keep the body till the relatives and friends arrive at the deceased house.
- The common rituals observed are Susudagma, Jujuraisangar and Gaise.
- In case of death of a pregnant woman and suicide committed by a

married woman, an extra ritual is exclusively performed called Gunupa.

- If an old person dies having no family members, in such a case the process of performing death ritual is little different.

If a person dies due to ill health, the process followed is simple. After receiving the death information, the relatives and friends gather at the deceased house. If the death occurs during day time, information is shared with the friends and relatives immediately, and the family members including villagers prepare for performing the last rite before evening. In case, the death occurs during evening time or in night, the information is passed on to the friends and relatives immediately. Since, it is night; it is too difficult for the family members to make necessary arrangements for last rite in the night. Hence, some families keep the body inside the house, while others keep the dead body at varandah. The family members sit around the dead body and mourn throughout the night.

Susudagma:

After receiving the death information, the relatives and friends gather at the deceased house. They console the family members at this critical time. They bring along with them like sapung and sagur. The neighbouring families provide cooked rice. The whole process of last rites begins with, giving bathe to the dead body. This ritual is performed by women only. They give bathe to the deceased either sleeping position or in sitting position. It is not mandatory to remove the clothes while giving bathe. After giving bathe, they wipe the body with a towel or a cloth. They put kajol mark on the face or on any portion of the body. As per belief, they do it before the last rites, in order to identify whether the same person has taken re-birth. This is determined through this mark. After this, they cover the dead body with a mat and they tie the entire body using rope from head to leg. A male member prepares Anabsang. It is prepared using Siali leaf (Pomui) and husk of the rice (Anab) is added to it. They put small pieces of burning wood in it. At the other end, the male members arrange pyre at the cremation ground. While arranging woods for pyre, the members whisper themselves 'Oh my Dear you died, but, what is the actual cause of death. We don't know, but we want your soul or spirit to decide whatever is right. You do with that person who did witchcraft and made you to die.'

Earlier the Bondas were using Piri or lang for last rite. Now, due to non-availability of piri in sufficient quantity, this practice has been discontinued. Carrying the dead body to the cremation ground varies from one village to another, such as, in one village two persons can carry the dead body to the cremation ground by their hands, while in other villages, Rangda is prepared. The dead body is placed on Rangda and four persons carry the Rangda on their shoulders.

The person, who prepared the Anabsang walks ahead, followed by both men and women carrying the dead body to the cremation ground. The male members go to the cremation ground with the dead body and the female members' return back after covering some distance. Accompanying females cry with loud voice. Even while returning, they cry by saying "Ohh suna, ohh maina, ohh qui and ohh meei etc." While crying in grief, they scratch their own faces with nails. Some of them beat their chest. If someone cries very sadly, and loudly, it is called Ukseigit. The body is placed on the pyre along with all his or her belongings. Two persons who lit the pyre, one of them should be from family and the other should be a close relative. Both of them go to the pyre. One person stands at the head side of the deceased and the other person stands at the leg side. The person standing at the head side lits the pyre first using Anabsang. Similarly, the person who is standing at the leg side also lits the pyre. Once, the first round of igniting the pyre is over, they move around the pyre two times. After that, the person who lits the pyre at the head side goes to the leg side and lits the pyre. The person who lits the pyre at the leg side moves to the head side and lits the pyre. With this, the process of igniting pyre gets complete. The process of firing the pyre varies from one village to another. Once the wood catches fire completely, the members return to the village. On the way, they take bathe and rub mango leaves on their body. After that, they return to their respective houses. While entering to the house, another ritual is performed. They sprinkle water by mixing an egg larva or turmeric mixed with water by using a branch of bamboo, kumpendag and aarpa leaves for purification. Usually, the family members make a query in which direction the flame (Muksang) of the pyre was blowing. On the basis of the reply, they decide as, if the flames of pyre blows vertically upward towards the sky, it is believed that the soul has reached to god and he or she will live peacefully, and the death is natural. If the smoke tilts to the village or the forest side, it is believed, that the death is caused due to witchcraft. The spirit will not remain in peace; instead it will roam all around the forest, river, village and sea. Two members who lit the pyre are provided special meals on the day of Gaise.

Juju Raisangar:

After few hours, two or three members of the family go to the cremation site to check whether the dead body is completely burnt or not. If they notice that something has remained, they try to push those to the pyre using bamboo or wooden sticks. They do not burn the body completely for ashes. According to some Bondas, it is believed that, if the dead body is completely burnt to ashes, the Bansa(generation) of that family will come to an end.

Gaise or Pita/Bud:

The upper Bondas do not consider 10th day as an important day for

celebration of death ritual. This ritual can be performed on any day as per the convenience of the family. Previously, thirty years ago, the villagers of upper Bondas used to celebrate Gaise or Pita ceremony after a week or two weeks or even after a year of the death of the person. But, now, Gaise ceremony is celebrated after two days, or it can go up to one month. The reason being, not having sufficient money for celebration of this ritual. To perform Gaise, two Disaris are called for performing this ritual. The family takes the help of experienced cooks of the village for cooking meals. They are offered alcoholic drinks and rice a day before of the Gaise. A big feast is offered to the villagers and guests on this occasion. For preparation of food on Gaise day, the cooks have to observe fast until the Gaise is over. The family members prepare Saru jaang, rice and chicken or mutton curry. The family members offer Saru jaang along with small amount of alcohol to the spirit at the site nearer to entrance of the door. They put a layer of ashes on the floor of the door step to know about that the spirit has come and has eaten food. The foot prints of the spirit will be visible on the ashes, as they believe.

After preparation of food, the Disari offers it first to the spirit of the deceased person. After that the Disari carries two Danas, one filled with rice, and the other, filled with curry and goes to the cremation ground. Another person carrying two Danas, one filled with water and another with little amount of alcohol follows the Disari. The Disari offers puja at the cremation site. It is believed that the spirit will come and eat the food and drink the alcohol. If the alcohol is finished, they believe that he or she is a foodie person. After this, they invite all the villagers and relatives to carry food in Danas to their respective houses. It was a practice of past, that, on the day of Gaise a cow or a buffalo was slaughtered and there was no colour specification for choosing an animal. Now a day, the cow or buffalo sacrifice has been considerably reduced on account of economic condition of the family and changing circumstances. Families who wish to offer chicken or mutton curry on this occasion, willingly go for it. Two persons who lit the pyre are called as Pukturse. They are specially served double the amount of rice and curry on the day of Gaise for their service.

Gupase:

Gupase is arranged especially for the Disari who came to perform the death ritual. The Disari will not eat cow meat on Gaise day. That is why; they are served with rice and goat or chicken curry.

Gunupa

Gunupa ceremony is performed to offer peace to the spirit. The Disari performs puja on behalf of the family. Only for married woman this ritual is performed subject to following conditions:

- (i) If a married woman dies committing suicide by hanging on a tree using a rope or clothes or hanging inside the house or dies consuming poison.
- (ii) If a married woman dies due to the domestic violence.
- (iii) If a pregnant woman dies having baby in the womb.
- (iv) If a pregnant woman dies after delivering a baby.

The community believes that if a woman committed suicide, her spirit will not get peace and her soul will not reach to the god. That spirit will roam around in the forest, river and in the village. If the spirit desires to drink water, it cannot do so; if the spirit wants to sit at a place, then also it cannot do it; and if the spirit wants to talk to her family members, then also, she cannot do it. It is a common believe that the woman who has committed suicide might have undergone severe pain while dying. Hence, to console and appease the spirit, the Gunupa ceremony is performed. For performing Gunupa, as per the recommendation of the Pujari, a pig or a hen is sacrificed. It is believed that if the family does not perform Gunupa, the spirit will harm the members by coming to the house, village, and also will destroy crops in the field and harm the animals in the shed. They further believe that if the spirit touches any tree, that tree will die or the fruits of that tree will get rotten. Generally, on the day of Gunupa, the family offers different food grains and a pig to the brother of the deceased woman. If the deceased woman does not have a brother, then it is offered to the cousin brother. This is given to them to fulfil the loss of their sister. The Gunupa ritual performance is little different in the death case of a pregnant woman. The pig that is offered to the family members of diseased woman will not be taken to their village. They consider it as a taboo. Before reaching the village, at a suitable location in the crop field, they kill the pig. They also cook rice and pig curry. They invite friends and relatives to join them. After eating food, they leave for village. Now they are allowed to enter the village.

Death Ritual of a Suicidal Case:

The death rituals followed for normal death cases are also followed for suicide cases with an additional ritual called Gunupa. Gunupa is performed only for suicide case of a married woman. All articles, she used before her death and the rope or clothes she used for hanging are taken to the cremation ground. For those women who committed suicide inside the house or those who committed suicide hanging on a tree, a small portion of the wooden pole or a small piece of branch of that tree is collected and taken to the cremation ground. Other ingredients they carry to the cremation ground along with dead body are little rice, ragi, suan, and koloth etc. They keep these ingredients on the dead body. After this, the family members lit the pyre.

Death Ritual of a Pregnant Woman Who Dies with Foetus inside the Womb:

The process adopted for a normal death is followed in this case. But, additional Gunupa ritual is performed. The process of performing Gunupa and the burial of a woman who dies along with the foetus inside her womb are quite different. Before thirty years ago, the death cases of pregnant women were more in number as compared to today. The villagers used to bury the dead body of a pregnant woman at different locations outside of the village. They never buried the dead body in the graveyard. The Disari used to utter a few mantras and after that the male members bury the dead body inside a deep pit. They cover the pit with soil. After that they cover the area with the branches of thorny plants, heavy objects like janta (traditional heavy stone grinder) and broom stick.

The reason is that such woman after death will turn to a Puepui (a witch). She will turn into ugly appearance which normally cannot be seen. It is believed among the Bondas that she will eat small children, whenever she comes across in the village. Hence, the villagers put heavy objects and spikes on her burial, so that the dead body should not get a chance to come out in the form of a witch. Even the elders of the village used to fear to go outside during evening hours. The community believes that, the spirit of a pregnant woman who dies carrying a foetus inside is very dangerous in comparison to other spirits.

On the day of Gunupa, a taboo is attached to this ritual performance. The brother or cousin of the deceased should come and remove those spike branches using an axe from the burial site. It is believed that, she will get relief from the pains; she had undergone keeping the baby in the womb. After removing the spike branches, they take bathe in the village tank or stream outside of the village. They collect Gunupa such as a goat or a pig, two bundle of fire wood and four kaudi of rice. At a suitable location nearer to the village, they cook food and invite near relatives and friends to join them. After eating food, they go back to their houses. A belief is attached that if they carry the animal to their village, they may invite misfortune. The animals of the village will die or it may invite health problems to the villagers.

Pregnant Woman who Dies Immediate after Delivery, Leaving the Child Alive:

When a pregnant woman dies after giving birth to a child, the family members including the deceased husband were not ready to take care of the new born baby. They used to think that who will take care of such a baby and from where the family will get mother's milk for feeding the baby. And how the baby will survive. These questions were haunting their minds. In many occasions, the family used to throw the new born baby on the pyre of her

mother. Perceptible change has occurred in the minds of the Bondas now. Now- a- days, the Bondas refrain from committing such kind of heinous crime. Moreover, the government is taking care of orphan children by opening many orphanage homes. This scheme has had some impact in the community understanding, what is right and what is wrong. Now days such kinds of incidents do not take place in the Bonda community. During our field work, we received information of two such cases of two decades back.

Death Ritual of a Child after Immediate Birth:

If a child dies immediately after delivery, the family buries the baby inside the house nearer to the hearth (turusang). At the side of hearth, they dig a small pit nearer to placenta and umbilical cord (buried earlier) and bury the baby. The mother cleans the area using cow dung mixed with water. The community doesn't bury the baby outside, because the baby would be food material for the animals like dogs, jackals and other wild animals. In case, such thing happens, it will give a lot of pain to the father and mother and entire family. Another belief roams around that the witchcraft performer will take advantage of the situation and may use the baby for witchcraft.

Death Ritual of a Child who Dies after 21 day of Birth:

If a child dies after 21 day birth ritual or at any age before 12 years, the body is taken to the graveyard for cremation. If the child dies suffering from small pox, chicken pox and measles, the Bondas bury the body at a distant place from the village. They believe that this disease is caused due to the god and it is fatal for health. If they burn the dead body, the smoke coming out of pyre will touch everyone in the village and the disease will spread among the villagers. So the community prefers to bury the body in a deep pit.

Alcohol Consumption during Death Ritual:

The Bondas drink alcohol of different fermentations including salap during performance of death rituals to bear the pains and sufferings of losing a member of the family, a friend or any relatives.

In Lieu of Conclusion:

Let us recapitulate succinctly some of the salient features emerging from fore going narratives in lieu of a conclusion. The Bondos(Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) inhabit in the Bonda hills of Khairiput Block of the Malkangiri District. This indigenous community has been living with distinctive cultural identity which no way can be compared with other tribal communities in the country.

The Bonda women do not consider menstrual cycle as a taboo. The observation of Elwin on this aspect holds good even today. They apply traditional

knowledge to restrict excessive oozing of blood during the menstrual period. With passage of time, the young generation school and college going girls including the girls who are going for jobs outside are gradually getting conscious about it through acculturation process and now prefer using scientific napkins in place of traditional napkins. They refrain from visiting sacred places during the menstrual period. From the day of conception till to the day of delivery, the pregnant woman has to undergo several traditional rituals to keep the mother and growing baby in the womb from the evil eyes. The Bondas approve a marriage proposal between a boy and a girl beyond the neighbourhood villages as practice of endogamy is strictly prohibited. Marriage by elopement is also strictly prohibited. With the passage of time, earlier practice of marriage of a girl of twenty years marrying a boy of ten or less than ten years of age is now completely stopped. The younger generation boys and girls do not show any interest in such marriage system so also in boys (Ingresin) and girls (Salenidingo) dormitory system. The Bonda community do not tolerate premarital relationship between a boy and a girl. Bride price forms a dominant feature of upper Bonda marriage system even today. Appreciable fact is that, in rare occasions, divorce takes place between a husband and wife.

So far as death rituals are concerned, the facts narrated above reveal about its complex nature and procedures adopted by the community. Procedures are adopted based on nature of death, case to case basis. A common procedure of death ritual is followed to a point and thereafter, separate specific need based procedure is followed to complete the ritual. There is a strong community belief regarding black magic and sorcery. In each and every event, a sacrifice is offered to appease the god or evil spirit. It is a strong believe in the community that woman after death will turn into a Puepui(witch)and hence, appeasing a spirit or god by offering sacrifice of animals and birds is a must. The rituals followed by the community are based on oral tradition which has been passing on from one generation to another. No document or script is available. This is how, the community way of life such as cultural values and rituals passes on from one generation to another. I put forth the views of a middle aged Bonda during interview for a case study. He expressed his concerns about preservation of traditional rituals and cultural values as their identity as Bondos from the onslaught of modern forces. Otherwise the Bondo Highlanders are going to lose their Identity in the larger society, in near future.

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Bonda Terminology, Words and their meanings:

Bonda dialect and words are obscure to understand and also equally tough to find out an appropriate meaning in English and other vernacular languages.

Disari- astrologer and traditional healer; Pujari- village Priest; Gige-sacrifice; Pendum- country beer; Salap- Sago palm tree juice; Bansa- a clan; Piri- local grass; Sagur- beer; Saru jannng-sacrificial food.

End Note: 1- The name Bondo or Bonda has been used interchangeably in the running text.

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