

# Bonda Tribe and Higher Education: A Case Study in Odisha

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## ABSTRACT

Higher education has become a necessary condition in India for its people to sustain in competitive knowledge driven world. Taking cognisance of the circumstances there have been many organized efforts in this country so as to take higher education to a considerable population and thereby enable its people to live a more informed and confident life. This research article describes and explains how a vulnerable tribal population get the opportunity higher education in one of the State of Odisha. At the same time attempt has been made to bring the facts interms of socio-cultural, political and economic implications of higher education amongst the vulnerable Bonda tribal life. The investigator adopted descriptive study with case analysis design. The study was conducted in Malkangiri District of Odisha. Five Bonda tribes, who are graduates, had been involved as cases in this study. Semi-structured interview, informal interaction, close observation and recording of the interaction and interview techniques were adopted to study the cases. This article suggests that although Bonda tribes are found to have shown recessive characteristics amid socio-economic constraints interms of their participation in higher education gradually there has been a positive change in it because of the intervention of the State and Civil Societies. The progressive sign is that most of them are getting gainful employment opportunities either in private or public sectors besides their restricted participation in social and political affairs of their society. Although Bonda graduates are found to be instrumental in socio-cultural transformation, they are challenged by certain inherited traditions like taking excessive indigenous wine and animal slaughtering. The exposure of education has also helped Bonda to deal with a competitive environment especially the incursion of urban culture, which is found to be detrimental to their socio-cultural sustainability.

**Keyword:** Higher Education, Socio-economic life, Bonda

In the remote highland country within mighty Kondakamberu range of Eastern Ghats rising on the eastern side of Malkangiri district lives the brave and beautiful human race called Bonda. Bonda tribe community is found in Eastern Ghats side of Odisha in Khairput Block of Malkangiri district. They sparsely inhabit the upland towards north-west of the river Machkund confined within the group of high hills named after them- Bonda Hills in the lap of nature. Among the hundreds of tribal communities living across the length breath of the Indian sub-continent, the state of Odisha destines to 13 primitive tribes such as Bonda, Kutia Kondh, Juangs, Birhor, Dongria-Khond, Lanjia

Sauras, Didayi, Kharias, Lodhas, Mankidias, Paudi Bhuyans, Soura, and Chuktia Bhunjia. These tribes are primitive in nature from the cultural point of and known as Particular Vulnerable tribal Groups (PVTGs) among them Bonda is most venerable, deprive and backwardness group because this tribe is found with more isolation, archaic, homogeneity, small population, a slow rate of change. In the present context Bonda group is aboriginal who continues to pursue as primitive and ancient way of

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life (Paitnaik, 2005 and Ota, 2015). The Central and State Governments has time to time made separates plans, policies and launched the development and welfare packages for the identified PVTGs since 1963. It has been proved that in every Census report shows that the PVTGs of eastern India have shown low literacy level. So far as the status of women education is concerned, they are found to be deprived (Behera, 2014). When it comes to the matter of higher education the primitive tribes especially the Bonda Tribe has a very low rate of participation. Whatever recent development has been taken place is due to initiatives of Central Government, State Government and Civil Societies like Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) where Bondas take opportunity of Post- Metric Scholarship and Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship Scheme (RGNF). These initiatives have resulted in considerable participation of Bonda in higher education. However, there are very negligible studies in the area of participation of Bonda tribe in higher education and effect of higher education in their life. Looking at the developmental initiatives of the Government of India for primitive tribes where education is found to be vital social sector of development agenda here higher education of the tribe is taken into consideration. This study is proposed to examine the situation from multiple angles by putting all possible efforts and required strategies and understand how really higher education has benefited the Bonda tribe groups interms of pursuing higher education and the effect of higher education in their life.

### Socio-cultural and Economic Background

Bonda tribe community is found in Bonda Ghati Hills in the lap of nature in Odisha. They were well-known for their homicidal tendencies for their long occupation in a define territory in relative isolation in this region. The entire Bonda communities can be divided broadly into three groups of villages. They are the *Bara-jangar* groups the Gadaba group and the Plain group. Bonda villages are traditionally autonomous social discipline is maintained by a set of traditional functionaries (Mohanty, 2015). The dress of the Bonda is so peculiar that they are quite distinguishable from all other tribal communities. The Bonda women wear seven bend rings in head in their life span. They wear large number of

necklaces of coloured beads and mental neck rings. The adult boys are found of wearing metal rings in fingers and ears, and mental bangles and like to adorn their hair with combs. The characteristic ornamentation of the bachelors is their head band made of leaves of the tree called *Ariei* (Patnaik, 2005, Mohanty, 2015). The Bonda culture is very unique. The Bando family is mostly nuclear composed of married couple and their dependant off springs joint or extended families are very rare. Bonda communities has unique festival observed by them like the annual *Jatimara* festival also called *Pus Paraba* which is celebrated with much enthusiasm. Yong boys and girls dance together and Bonda women help youth in several activities which give message of brotherhood and unity (Ota,2010). In the social organization of the Bonda, marriage is an important institution. The marriage rule is observed so strictly that the boys of one village are allowed to visit the girl's dormitory, *Selani Dingo*, of the same village in the evening and that visit may lead to marriage with some girls of the same village at the village meeting place known as *Sindibor*, is built at a convenient location within the village. The Bonda believe in the existence of a number of God and spirits and also, they believe that their world is full of supernatural powers. They worship mostly the deities of nature like the Patkhahanda, Maaparabu, Hundi or Bursung, Dhartani and Kaliarani the village Priest Sisa or Pujari conduct worship of these deities on varies occasions. The birth system of Bonda communities is unique when a woman conceives and becomes pregnant after marriage, it becomes a matter of great rejoicing and happiness. Bonda believes that the death is due to the work of the evil's spirits and effect of black magic and witchcraft. They practice both cremation and burial. The eldest son sets fire to the pyre. The purification rites are held on the 10th day. On this occasion the relatives and friends gather at the deceased house (Mohapatr, 2015 & Ota, 2015). The economic asset and livelihood of Bonda tribe mostly depends on forest collection and agriculture basically they practice three types of agriculture shifting cultivation in the hill slopes, upland cultivation at the foot-hill and paddy cultivation in irrigated terraced lands. In addition to agriculture, they collect roots and tubes, fruits and flowers and do hunting in the forest and also food gather for the most part of their existence.

Bonda drive their subsistence from out of shifting cultivation like Kulada, Jhola, and forest fruits. Men climb the salap (Sago Palm) tree to have a refreshing drink of Salap juice to which they are strongly addicted. Bonda men are aggressive by nature and they are skilled archers. They always out with their arms such as bow, arrows knife and axe (Ota, 2015 and Mohanty, 2015, Patnaik, 2005).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of present study are to study the nature of supports get and challenges faced by Bonda tribe while pursuing higher education. And to study the effect of higher education on Bonda tribe in term of their social stability, social participation, cultural transformation, Socio-cultural sustainability, health and hygiene and economic growth and sustainability.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The investigator adopted descriptive study with case analysis design. The study was conducted in Malkangiri District of Odisha. Five cases had been involved in this study. Semi-structured interview, informal interaction, close observation and recording of the interaction and interview techniques were adopted to study the cases. The collected data has been classified based on themes and further based on the common and unique nature of characteristics of the content the analysis has been carried out. Attempt has been made to draw conclusion and initiate discussions based on the findings of this study and review of related literature.

### **Case Profile**

In this study five graduated Bonda tribes from Khairput Block of Malkangiri District in Odisha were involved. All five of them belong to low socio-economic status, as per the criteria of Socio-Economic Caste Census (SESS, 2011) and Human Development Indices and Indicators (UNDP, 2018). Prior to their higher education three of them have done their schooling from their village schools and rest two have done their schooling from government school located in the Headquarter of Malkangiri. After completion of higher education in 2014 one graduate works as health worker and other two are recently, 2017, passed out and they are presently unemployment. Another one of them

completes Certified Teacher Training (CT) course from Mlakangiri and presently works as Language teacher and the other one completes graduation in 2013 from Malkangiri Degree College and presently works as Company employee in Bikash Company Project (OPLEP), Malkangiri.

### **Findings of the Study**

All the five cases have positive impression on the system and provisions of higher education. Three of them G. Challan, B. Dhangada and Malti Sisa, they get opportunities for development of life skills such as vocational skills and communication skills. For their higher education they get moral, financial supports form their family in the form moral support, financial supports for travelling to their destined institution. One common issue is found with them is initially the parents of these graduates hesitate for higher education owing to their financial incapability. However, when these parents come to know through local leaders that there is an institution which provides education free of cost, they agree and show the confidence for sending their children for higher education. The fourth case of the study name Pritika Dhangada Majhi completes her graduation from Biju Patnaik College of Education of Malkangiri and also takes Certified Teacher (CT) Training from Teachers' Training Institute, Khairput Block, Malkangiri. During her study at Biju Patnaik College, she gets hostel facility. She pays ₹ 1500 in every month towards mess expenditure. She gets scholarship support on yearly basis at the rate of ₹ 3000 for three years, total ₹ 9000 from the Government of Odisha. It is told that she struggles a lot to meet the requirement of mess fee. Many times, when she could not pay the required fee on time she has to go back to home and gives her labour with her parents in manual works and generate income to meet the requirement of fees of hostel. It is also narrated that she initially struggles a lot for educational guidance like choosing course, choosing steam because she was the first to show interest for higher education. While pursuing CT training her faces certain difficulties at the initial stage but gradually she feels confident and get encouraged for her training. She never feels isolated. She always gets support from her friends for training and education. During staying hostel her brother used to call and provide

moral and financial support like advised to stay happy, adjusted in given environment. The fifth case name H. Majhi completes higher secondary school education from National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). While pursuing education he come across with several difficulties like financial inability to pay fees, social rejection likes marriage after 18 year and societal responsibility. After school education he also takes Certified Teacher (CT) Training from Teachers' Training Institute, Khairput Block, Malkangiri. He avails all kind facilities there till the end of his training.

The effect of higher education in the life Bonda tribes is visible as expressed by the immediate stakeholders, the graduates and the parents. The graduates contribute their families interms of solving problems aroused in their families, especially where the problems require knowledge and information which are non-traditional in nature. In the case of G. Challan, it is found that he contributes in the form of conflict resolution in peaceful manner instead of resorting to blood fight among the Bonda men, who exhibit very aggressive behaviour whenever conflict of interests aroused sometime which leads to lot of disturbances and unhappiness among them. When B. Dhangada works as labourer with Banda women she informs some knowledge-based practices like neat and cleanness, taking healthy food and safe drinking water and keeping good relation with others. Banda women within society. She also contributes motivates young friend for education and self-employment within society. H. Majhi inspires and provides guidance to community members for sending school to their kids and do not engage in farming work. During leisure time he teaches the kids and make them aware about the value of education. P. Dhangada resolves household violence within the Banda families which is happened seldom when the Bonda men and women take heavy alcohol. She faces some criticism in society due to her unemployment and un-marital status, because illiterate Bonda men hesitate to choose life partner with higher education. The higher education of graduates has also certain negative effect within their families and society. The community members and along with the parents of the graduates are of the opinion that their youth, after taking higher education, change their behaviour and found them with inadequacy

of their own cultural values and expectations. The graduates are found to have been trapped by urban culture in terms of their clothing, social interaction and relation.

In social affair the graduates participate in different local festivals like the annual *jatimara* festival, *Chaita Paraba*, *Patkhanda Muhahaprbhu* festival, and common function like marriage, village assembly (*Sindibor*), death ceremony, birth ceremony etc. The graduates' participates in dormitory (*Selani Dingo*) where the young boys and girls use to dance together wearing traditional colourful costumes of different villages for the purpose of selecting life partner. G. Challan works as leader and assist community for maintaining register in dormitory. In village there is meeting place "*Sindibor*" is build at a convenient location within the village where the graduates use to inspire and guidance to young mass and community's member for development work and also help others for smooth conduct of festivals. H. Majhi guides community members to avail various government schemes and measures like applying for compensation at the time of draught and paddy insurance. The community people fully depend upon the graduates when they face any problem regarding government schemes. In cultural transformation the Bonda graduates support and promote the existing practices. They are also called role model among illiterate young mass of Bonda community. B. Dhangada writes about cultural activities of their own. G. Challan as health worker in society he organizes awareness camps with the hospital staffs on the ill effects of child marriage. The graduates could bring major changes in socio-cultural dogmatism on health care. For example earlier the Bonda members use wine (*Salap*) on daily basis and drink direct stream water which often causes health problems and sometime chronic disorder like kidney failure and jaundice. M. Sisa contributes a lot in bringing social transformation. With all patience she attempts to stop child marriage and make aware her community people interms of maintaining physical growth and menstruation cycles of a Bonda adolescents' girls in hygienic manner. She co-operates the Bonda women during cultural activities specially in *Pus Parav* and call her friends to sit around fire to observe rituals practices. She encourages social movements and relation and try to learn the tradition songs

when the senior men and women dance together for promotion of their culture.

The economic life of Banda tribe is based on shifting cultivation and seasonal forest collection goods. G. Challan family economic condition has gradually developed because of he personally deals with sailing the goods like *Kulada*, *jhola* and oilseeds such as Kangu, suan, jana, oats, black gram, and niger etc. In their kitchen gardens his family grow maize, tobacco, fruits and vegetable. His family also get support from his song and sale agricultural produce in good price. After his joining as health worker in hospital as contractual basic his family became economically self-reliant and starts to earn more by utilizing skills and resources. Another graduate B. Dhangada after completion her graduation she stays at home and does tailoring work and prepare traditional clothes and sell the min market. Whenever she gets time she helps her parent on shifting cultivation and collection forest good like Kangu, suan, jana, oats, black gram, and niger etc., in this way she contributes her family in income and livelihood.

After completion of formal higher education P. Mahji gets opportunity to work in private company contributes to her family in economic and livelihood. She also helps her family in selling fruits in market directly and also in collaboration of NGO. Earlier her family depends on people who deal with market called broker "*Dambha*" and they exploit. She confesses that her education has given her exposures about the world of works and markets. She feels empowered and that has brought changes in her family economic conditions in positive and sustainable manner. H. Mjhi who works as language teacher in their village school that brings economic supports his family. His remuneration as language teacher can supports his family's agricultural activities, functions and education of the other family members. He contributes economically in the education of his younger brothers and sisters. His earning supports the marriage of one of his sisters. The economic condition of M.Sisa's family is very precarious and weak. They mostly depend on marginal seasonal agricultural activities. Sometimes her father sells fruits in the markets. Sisa teaches children at her home. Some parent's volunteers financially for her educational guidance and supports to their children. The family of M. Sisa

Still the economic condition is very poor because her family only depend on seasonal agriculture and work as labour, very seldom her father sell fruits in market some time she helps her father in selling market using communication skill. At night she takes home tuition to primary children and very parents of children's give money to her.

### Conclusion

The voice "education is key to development" has been found a place among Bonda tribes too. Although Bonda tribe is found to have shown recessive characteristics in terms of their participation in higher education gradually there has been a positive change in it because of the intervention of the State and Civil Societies. The progressive sign is that most of them are getting gainful employment opportunities either in private or public sectors besides their restricted participation in social and political affairs directly or indirectly in their society. Higher education has been found as key in economic returns among the Bonda graduates. All of the Bonda graduates could get engaged in gainful economic activities because of their higher qualification. Their contribution to economy of their families is substantiative and supportive in a sustainable manner, where the latter depended on scarce agricultural resources. The other fact associated with the tribes is that the deprived and meagre financial condition of their families often do not allow them for higher education, despite of certain interventions by State and Civil Societies. Higher education plays constructive role in the life of Bonda tribes. However, the other side of the participation of this tribes in higher education is that, the graduates do not get much opportunity in social participation which mostly happen during their devotion for higher education and engagement in economic activities at a distance. However, they are also alleged to have deviated from their cultural traditions and rituals. However, during summer vacation they participate *Chaita Paraba*, *jatimara festival* and Youth Dormitory called *Selanidingo* for choosing life partner. Although Bonda graduates are found to be instrumental in socio-cultural transformation, they are challenged by certain inherited traditions like taking excessive indigenous wine and animal slaughtering. The exposure of education has also helped Bonda to deal with a competitive environment especially the incursion

of urban culture, which is found to be detrimental in their socio-cultural sustainability (Lal & Devanna 2016). Although majority of Bonda community still practice magi co-tradition it is told that the incidents of these practices have been reduced and weakened, where preference has been started given to institutional treatment particularly at the time of serious health conditions.

## NOTES

1. *Chaita Paraba*: A local annual festival of Bonda tribe, *chaita paraba* also known as *Bija pandu* which celebrate in the moth of March/April for the purpose of gets good rain, soil and free from disease and observer with great enthusiasm the young men and women rejoice by dancing after wearing their gorgeous costumes. Their dance of tennis performed during day and night.
2. *Jatimara festival*: the local festival of Bonda tribe also called *pus Perba* celebrate with much enthusiasm.
3. *Disari*: A person who astrologer-cum medicine man and master in magic system in the village. He also act as village shaman, he enjoy higher position and is consider more importance. He is believed to have possessed divine *powares* and is consider as the link between the living world and the alien world of evil and hosting spirits.
4. *Selanidingo*: The Matrimonial house middle of the village where young Bonda boys and girls visit for choosing their life partner. Each village of Bonda communities have such well organize youth dormitory system as these house act as matrimonial agency for right selection of life partners and allow free mixing of the boys and girls in oder to know each other.
5. *Sidibor*: The village council hold its meeting in a specified place under shady trees called *Sidibor* whereas communities' issues are discussed and adjudicates cases concerning village affairs. Cases violating social customs, tradition and conventions are brought to the assembly and decided. Punishment is given to the offender in accordance with the gravity of the case.

6. *Salapa*: Traditional Wine, Men climb the *salap* tree to have a refreshing drink of *salap* juice to which they are strongly addicted. They are always keep the *salap* when go outside both women and men even child are taking *salap* together.
7. *Ariei*: Ornamentation for bachelors use in their head band, made of leaves of the tree called *Ariei*.

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