

Note

Notes on type of land ownership and indigenous agricultural methods of the Bondo Community

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The interaction between human being and nature has always been reciprocal. This is apparently evident in tribal communities where there always exist a symbiotic relationship between their livelihood pursuits and the surrounding natural resource base like the forest, land, and water, out of which land is one of the vital source of livelihood for them. Agriculture followed by collection of minor forest produces are major sources for their sustenance. The present paper was an attempt to understand the pattern of land ownership and indigenous agricultural methods of the Bondo community found only in the Khairput block of Malkangiri district of Odisha. The study clearly depicts that, among the Bondo, land is considered as the most valuable tangible assets and categorised under individual and community ownership. With the age old practices, the Bondo has developed their own indigenous technique to cultivate different crops in a range of land. Hence, it is imperative to meticulously study these indigenous methods of agriculture practice by the Bondo community one of the particular vulnerable tribe of India.

Keywords: Bondo community, land ownership, indigenous agriculture method, shifting cultivation, Malkangiri, Odisha

Research Methodology

The present paper was undertaken through desk research by collecting pertinent secondary datas and information from various similar research studies conducted previously. Also certain relevant articles, monograms, journals and research papers were thoroughly reviewed after which major findings were compiled in the paper for further indebt analysis. Apart from it, intensive field visits were carried out by the researcher for the collection of primary data by organising focus group discussion, observations and personal

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interview at 5 villages namely, Bandapada, Bandhaguda, Bandiguda, Badapada and Kirsanipada of the Mudulipada panchayat of Khairput block which comes under Malkangiri district.

Research objective

- * To ascertain the pattern of land ownership amongst the target group
- *To find out agricultural practices of the target group

Brief note on the Bondo community

In Odisha, there are total 62 types of Scheduled Tribes including 13 types of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups out of which the Bondo is one. The Bondo community are known by themselves as “Remo” which means “Human”. Their origin and affiliations are obscure. It is assumed that, the Bondo belong to the group of “Proto-Austroloid”, racial stock (Elwin, 1950). They have their own language which is difficult to speak known as “Austro-Asiatic”, language known as Remo.

There are total 32 Bondo villages located at a height of about 3000-4000 feet above the mean sea level in the remote and high hill ranges of Eastern Ghatt falling under Khairput block of the district of Malakangiri of Odisha. The village lies between 18°. 15’-18 30’ North Latitude and 80°. 15’-80° 30’ East Longitude spreading out over an approximate area about 130 square kilometres (BDA, Mudulipada). This area is popularly known as the Bondo Ghati or Bondo Hills. According to Verrier Elwin (1950), a noted anthropologist writes, “their country is the wild and mountainous region north west of Machhkund river and they have preserved them comparatively unaffected by the march off civilisation.

Bondo Population as per the Bondo Development Agency, Mudulipada

1941 Census.....	2565
1951 Census.....	3641
1961 Census.....	4677
1971 Census.....	5338
1981 Census.....	5895
1991 Census.....	7315
2001 Census.....	9378
2011 Census.....	12000 (approximately)

This means the growth rate was 41.9% during 1941-51, 28.4% during 1951-61 and this shows a growth rate of 14.3% as against 20.08% for the tribal population and 24.99% for the general population of the State during 1961-71.

Results and discussion:

Pattern of Land Ownership

Among the Bondos, land of any type is considered to be the most important immovable property. Some categories of land owned individually while others are treated as communal property. Wetlands and terraces are owned on individual basis. These land are

acquired through inheritance, purchase and gift permanently, and temporarily by mortgage and share cropping. The individual families have every right to use these lands in whatever manner they like. During difficult times they may sell or mortgage these assets for money. Occasionally, the well to do families may like to give some plots of these lands as valuable gifts to their daughters in their marriages. A person hardly dares to encroach upon wetlands owned by others, as this act is viewed very seriously many a times leading to murder. Like wetland, the pada land is also owned by the individual families, but in a family where the father and the married sons live under separate roofs, jointly cultivate these land enjoy its products by sharing among them till a formal partition is made. Soon after the partition, each son becomes the sole owner of this own share and independently cultivate the land.

On the other hand, the land under shifting cultivation is held communally. In earlier days, every Bondo village had a well defined area demarcated under the village boundary for practise of shifting cultivation by the village community. But, now a days, due to increase of their population and availability of limited Podu lands which are losing soil fertility for continues such practices. The land belongs to a village are allotted separately for the clan members in a contiguous area. The land is distributed among the individual households of the clan group assessing needs and capability of individual family members with the approval of the village community. The land is considered to be the property of a family, as cultivation, it may be allotted to other needy families. Among the Bondo, the rights of such land is inheritable within the male line, but if the inheritor deserts the village or dies without any successor, the land reverts back to the community domain for redistribution to needy families once again.

Agricultural practices of Bondo Community

The main occupation of the Bondo is agriculture followed by collection of various type of minor forest produces. They are both settled and shifting cultivators and their economy is still essentially a barter economy. The Bondo agriculture consists of dry, wet and shifting cultivation, the former being an age old practices regarded as the way of life of the people. These lands can be further classified into four categories, viz: (I) wet land, (II) up/dry land, (III) hill slope and (IV) kitchen garden.

Wet land

Wet land is considered as one of the best type of land available in the Bondo country. Because of its high market value, and high fertility, these are treated as precious possessions of the Bondos. Such lands are majorly located at the foothills along the stream beds and are very rich in earth content. These lands are made into terraces one lying above the other stretching upto certain height on the valley bottom. The terraced field are further divided into several cultivable plots over which water flows continuously round the year. One of the striking features of this type of terracing that, water never stagnates in one plot and flows out from the higher plots to lower plots without carrying fertile top soil in it. However, these type of land is meagre in the Bondo country and the average land holding size of wetland per family is very less. According to an estimate made by Bondo Development Agency, (BDA) Mudulipada, a Bondo household own on

an average 0.12. hectares of wetland which is suitable to grow paddy. Over the decades the hill Bondo had chosen to depend more and more on permanent terrace cultivation especially on the basins and stream beds of the hill streams, which yielded more gain than on the swidden fields (Mohapatro and Mohanty, 2009).

In the irrigated terraced fields a long duration variety of country paddy known as *sapur dhan* in locally is famous for its sweet smell and superfine nature, grown once in a year by transplantation method. It is noteworthy, that the Bondo women usually do the major strenuous works in paddy cultivation, such as transplantation, weeding, and harvesting, man of course do ploughing and assists women in harvesting and threshing. Agriculture in the wetlands starts from the month of February with the preparation of seedbed for raising of seedlings. Concurrently, ploughing and levelling are also done in other fields where these seedlings are to be transplanted. The next two months are entirely devoted for transportation of seedlings to the field for transplanting. With the pouring of first shower of rain, they keep themselves ready for weeding operation. Weeding continuous for next two months during June and July in the rainy season. Then after three months, harvesting operation starts in the month of November and ends till December. Generally, the Bondo never applies manure in the wetland.

Up/Dry land

Land which lie on the hill slopes in between the terraced and shifting cultivation plot comes under up/dry land category. These lands are less fertile and do not contain much soil. Also there is no irrigation facility for these types of land which makes its unsuitable for the paddy cultivation. As there is less amount of wet lands, therefore Bondos are compelled to utilise up land for growing three kinds of crops such as, *niser*, *ragi*, and *suan* on a rotation basis for three years. Both *niser* and *suan* seeds are sown during the month of February and harvested in September. After completion of three years, the land is kept fallow for some years. Bondos plough these land excluding stony patches before sowing seeds. The stony patches are hoed by means of dibble.

Hill slope land

The Bondos are primarily Swiddeners and they, 'are adept at providing for their own wants and unusually a self sufficient community (Elwin, 1950:40). Their economy is characterized as subsistence oriented that includes practice of crude method of swidden cultivation, food gathering and hunting combined with paddy cultivation in a few available terraces in valley region (Patnaik, 1984:40). Shifting cultivation otherwise known as *Birhi* locally being the age old traditional practice on the hill slop land even stretching upto hill top is a subsistence form of agriculture which incurs more labour and yield less return. These plots are cultivated by slash and burn method. It requires round the year involvement for the preparation of land suitable for cultivation. The involvement of women in this form of primitive and crude method of agriculture is more intensive in compare to their male counterparts. The detail process of shifting cultivation practice by the Bondo community is briefly outlined below;

- once the selection of the sight is done before the month of November, tree felling is done in the month of December,

- firing in the month of February, and hoeing in the month of May.
- In the month of July, seeds are sown by broadcasting method.
- After that, they watch the crops both in the day and night by staying in the field huts raised on the plots.
- A mixed crops of cereals, minor millets and pulses such as ragi, suan, kangu, biri, arhar, kandul, are grown in the hill slope plots. Finally, harvesting of crops is done in succession which last for three years.

Kitchen Garden

Kitchen garden is commonly found in every Bondo households which lies close to their dwelling abode. The kitchen garden is cautiously fenced in all sides either by stone or green/dry fencing in order to check the trespass of the cattle and wild animals. They plough the land of kitchen garden and apply farm yard manures. In the kitchen garden, they generally grows various kind of vegetables such as, brinjal, tomato, pumpkin, bitter melon, cucumber, banana, chillies, beans etc. During the seasons of winter and rainy, one can see beautiful small plots of Kitchen garden adjacent to their house. The produces are generally used for the household consumption, barter and seldom sold at the local markets.

Changing agricultural practices amongst the Bondo

With the gradual passage of time and interferences of various alien forces, the traditional form of subsistence agriculture is in a phase of moderate transition in the Bondo country. In this regard, the initiative of Bondo Development Agency (BDA), Mudulipada deserves special mentioned in introducing new cash crops like potatoe, among the Bondo. At the outset, the Bondo showed reluctance to cultivate this type crop, but after the persistent effort of BDA, they have accepted it. At present, many families are showing keen interest for potatoe cultivation in their land. Besides, a Integrated Tribal Development Agency was also set up at Malakangiri district headquarter, which also covers the Bondo country for implementation of various developmental programmes out of which promoting horticulture is one of the major initiatives.

Progressively, the Bondos have shown interest in settled type of agriculture with modern technology in place of primitive method. Comparatively plain and settled land where irrigation is available, the crop intensity has been increased by raising two to three high yielding crops including paddy, cereals/pulses and vegetables successively. The shifting cultivation areas are being covered to an extent with different fruit bearing trees. Also, through the help of BDA, water sources including flow water and underground water are being harnessed through mini diversion weirs and Dug wells.

Conclusion

The study throws light on the pattern of land ownership of the Bondo, which can be divided into individual and community ownership. As per the BDA, Mudulipada, the average land holding of wet land amongst the Bondo community is 0.12 hectare only. This land is considered to be the top fertile land for agriculture in compare to a range of lands, viz, up/dry and hill slope land found in the targeted region. But, the availability of

such land is less in the Bondo country. Interestingly, this could not have discouraged the Bondo, rather they have developed indigenous agricultural method through age old practices and experiences. Even hill top and sloppy land is used for growing various kind of minor millets, cereals, and pulses like; ragi, fox millet, kangu, kosala, green gram, horse gram, arhar, jhudanga, and oil seed like niser which provides them a major source of nourishment. However, it has been noticed that, the traditional agriculture practices of the Bondo community has been gradually changing now a days. With the advent of several alien forces, the Bondo has started growing cash crops like potatoe in their land. Under the initiative of ITDA, Malkangiri, hundreds of acres has been planted with cashew plants in the Bondo region. Despite of these, food security is still a major problem amongst the Bondo community. More agricultural extension services have to be provided to them which can reinforce their present agricultural practices.

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