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#### 4. Livelihood Practices of the Bonda Tribe of Odisha

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##### **Abstract**

*Traditional agriculture is an age-old practice that is associated with nature, culture, technology and food production through indigenous and scientific knowledge, rationality, etc. It is viewed as sustainable practice, where agriculture production is based on available local resources and crop species, and traditional tools and techniques embodied with culture are best adapted to local environments (Altieri and Toledo 2005; Netting 1993; Sabar 2012; DeWalt 1994).*

*The Bonda is one of the most primitive people who is still today practising their own traditional method of shifting cultivation known as Donger chas . The Bonda people mostly inhabiting both hill and plain areas of Khairput block of Malkangiri district, Odisha. The livelihood practices of the Bonda people based on shifting cultivation with depending upon forest produces. The study based on the objective to observing the changing pattern of agricultural practice among the Bonda community. Among the Bonda, the indigenous knowledge about shifting agriculture, plain agriculture, simple technology, skills and use of manure on their Donger land, preservation of seeds, conserving the Donger, and protecting the forest animals are available on their peripheral forest region. The study also focused on their preservation pattern of seeds, roots, leaves, and foods among them, and how it is sustainable for the year together. The study discussed on their pattern of agriculture and that are practiced among Bonda highlanders. The way of agriculture and livelihood practices of Bonda highlanders are not profit oriented, it is sustainable better for their life and provide maximum nutrition and protein from their staple food from finger millet. This paper tries to elaborately discuss on the livelihood practices of the Bonda tribe and they are struggling for their survival.*

**Key words:** *Bonda, agriculture, livelihood, economy, Indigenous knowledge*

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## Introduction

Bonda is one of the oldest mainland's and primitive people in India come under the list of 13 PVTGs of Odisha and the long inhabitation of the tribal land of Bonda hills. Accordingly 2011 census, there are more than 705 tribal / *adivasis* spread across India, which constitute about 8.6 per cent of the total population of India. As per the constitution of India, there are 75 tribal groups are considered as PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) and 13 PVTGs are coming under Odisha state. Out of these Bonda is one of the most primitive vulnerable *community, living in hilltop villages on the Kondakamberu mountain range of Malkangiri district in Odisha*, The Bonda people belong to the Austro-Asiatic ethnic group and they are believed that the part of the first wave of migration out of Africa, 60,000 years ago. Linguistically the Bonda speak in "Remo" language which is coming under the Austroasiatic language belonging to the Mundari group. As these people were living on the hills, they came to be known as Bonda Highlanders in the British reports. Verrier Elwin made them well known in the name, in the princely state records (1950), as 'Bonda Paraja' or Ryots. Later some Bonda families made settlements at the foot hills and were mentioned as lower Bonda. They are inhabited 32 villages located on the hilltops at heights of about 3000 to 4000 feet above sea level in the remote and steep hill ranges of the Eastern Ghats. These villages are coming under the Khairput Block of Malkangiri District. These villages are locally known as Bonda Hills or Bonda Ghati in the regional dialect.

If we will discuss about the traditional economy system of the Bonda community, the economy based on the shifting cultivation locally known as *Donger chas* and they are also depend upon the forest collection. Before they didn't allow outsider on their Bonda highlands and their livelihood practices fully adopted with based on their ecological condition. But after establishment of Bonda Development Agency (BDA), and the police station on their locality, the government development agencies were trying a lot for a long time to make the Hill Bonda's aware of the modern methods and introduced about the new technology related to agriculture and life style and after too much struggle it will be little success.

## The major objectives

- To study the livelihood practice by Bonda tribe
- To briefly discuss about the Bonda society and their agriculture and livelihood practices.

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### **Methods and Techniques**

The paper is focused on the livelihood practices of the Bonda tribe of Odisha and how the economy impact on their day today activities based on their occupation. The study was conducted in the Khairput block of Malkangiri district of Odisha and the village samples were selected by using sampling from the village's lower and upper Bonda habitation. The study was based on ethnography and empirical in nature. Both primary and secondary sources were used and the primary data were collected by using unique anthropological tool. Such as observation, interview, scheduled, focus group discussion, case study etc. The secondary sources were collected from journals, articles, newspaper, non-government and government survey report.

### **Area and People of the Bonda**

The study has been conducted among the Bonda tribe on the Khairput block of Malkangiri district of Odisha state. The sample collected from both upper high land Bonda and lower plain Bonda areas during the month of June, 2022. The Bonda people mostly inhabiting three gram panchayat named as Kadamguda, Mudulipada and Rasabeda. Mudulipada is fully covered by hill Bonda and Kadamguda and Rasabeda is situated on plain area.

Bonda economy is visible when they practices some kinds of economic activities – such as exchange of labour in villages, exchange of things i.e. crops, goats, bulls, hens, pigs, and others. Bonda are very simple and honest people. Their economic mentality, thoughts, and ideas are collected and do not have profit motives. Still days, they are practising the barter exchange system with other caste and other outsider people. Bonda are so unique in their way of life, their life itself is a pattern of economic activities. Every Bonda family has its way of sustainable economic activities.

They domesticated pigs, cattle, goats, and chickens are, and crops are grown to their agricultural field as well as their kitchen garden also. Roots, tubers, wild vegetation, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, fruit, red ants, date-palm grubs, dung beetles, and silkworms (for medicinal purposes) are collected for consumption from their nearby forest or hilly area (*Donger*).

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Gram panchayat	Frequency	Percent
Kadamguda	89	37.87
Mudulipada	69	29.36
Rasabeda	77	32.77
Total	235	100.00
Villages	Frequency	Percent
Bandhaguda	115	48.94
Khuriguda	89	37.87
Nuaguda	31	13.19
Total	235	100.00

Source of Data Collection: Primary Field survey, 2022

**Demographic Profile of the Study area**

Age groups	HH members				Total	Sex ratio
	Male	%	Female	%		
Birth to 4 years	51	59.30	35	40.70	86	686.27
5 to 9 years	69	57.50	51	42.50	120	739.13
10 to 14 years	94	56.97	71	43.03	165	755.32
15 to 19 years	67	49.63	68	50.37	135	1014.93
20 to 24 years	56	52.34	51	47.66	107	910.71
25 to 29 years	38	45.24	46	54.76	84	1210.53
30 to 34 years	29	43.94	37	56.06	66	1275.86
35 to 39 years	33	50.00	33	50.00	66	1000.00
40 to 44 years	29	54.72	24	45.28	53	827.59
45 to 49 years	20	57.14	15	42.86	35	750.00
50 to 54 years	15	53.57	13	46.43	28	866.67
55 to 59 years	9	40.91	13	59.09	22	1444.44
60 to 64 years	17	36.96	29	63.04	46	1705.88
65 years and above	26	55.32	21	44.68	47	807.69
Age group combined	553	52.17	507	47.83	1060	916.82

Source of Data Collection: Primary Field survey, 2022

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The above table presents that the demographic profile of the study area. The table represents the age sex structure of the Bonda community of the study area and the age starting from birth to 4 year and continued up to 65 age group and above. The total population is 1060 and out of these 553 (52.17) are male and 507(47.83) are female. The sex ration of our study among the Bonda community is 807 females out of 1000 males.

### Occupational Status of the Study area

Occupation	Sex of HH member				Total	%
	Male	%	Female	%		
Collection of Forest Products & Sale	7	1.27	28	5.52	35	3.30
Craft Making and Sale	2	0.36	0	0.00	2	0.19
Cultivation	126	22.78	55	10.85	181	17.08
Allied activities (Animal Husbandry/Fishery)	1	0.18	2	0.39	3	0.28
Casual Labour in Agriculture	35	6.33	37	7.30	72	6.79
Casual Labour in Non-Agriculture	50	9.04	23	4.54	73	6.89
Own Business/Shops	7	1.27	1	0.20	8	0.75
Salaried (Govt/Pvt)	24	4.34	11	2.17	35	3.30
Traditional Occupation (e.g., artisans, etc.)	1	0.18	1	0.20	2	0.19
Housewife	3	0.54	103	20.32	106	10.00
Too Old/Young to Work	60	10.85	40	7.89	100	9.43
Unemployed	11	1.99	15	2.96	26	2.45
Student	209	37.79	165	32.54	374	35.28
Pensioner	11	1.99	20	3.94	31	2.92
Others	6	1.08	6	1.18	12	1.13
Overall	553	100.00	507	100.00	1060	100.00

**Source of Data Collection:** Primary Field survey, 2022

The above table presents the occupational status of the Bonda villages. Out of 1060 people 553 are coming under the male and 507 are female and their occupation based on the collection of Minor forest Produces, cultivation, craft making, animal husbandry causal labour on agriculture and non-

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agriculture field, business, house wife and so on. The major occupation among the Bonda is cultivation and 181 people are engaged on cultivation and out of these 126 (22.78) are male and 55(10.58) are female. The collection of minor forest produces are 35 and out of 7 (1.27) are male and 28(5.52) are female engaged. 72 number of people are working as casual labour on agriculture field and out of these 35(6.33) are male and 37(7.30) are female. 73 people are working under non agriculture labour and 50(9.04) are male and 23(4.54) are female. People are having their own business and 7(1.27) are male and 1(0.20) is female. Only 01(0.18) male and 01 (0.20) female is engaged their traditional work. 106 people are doing household work out of these 103 (20.32) are female and 3(0.54) are male. 100 people are coming the age group under either too old or too young and 60(10.85) are male and 40 (7.89) are female. 26 are unemployed and out of these 11(1.99) are male and 15(2.96) are female. 374 are coming under the students and out of these 209 (37.79) are male and 165(32.54) are female. 31 people are coming under Pensioner and out of these 11(1.99) are male and 20(3.94) are female. Other is 12 and out of these 6 (1.08) are male and 0 (1.18) are female.

#### **Status of Income on the study area**

<b>Status of Income</b>		
Income groups	Frequency	Percent
I (>7863 Rs.)	5	2.1
II (3931 - 7862 Rs.)	17	7.2
III (2359 - 3930 Rs.)	22	9.4
IV (1179 - 2358 Rs.)	60	25.5
V (1179 Rs.)	131	55.7
Total	235	100

**Source of Data Collection:** Primary Field survey, 2022

#### **Patterns of Agriculture**

The Bonda tribal people they are practising the various types of agricultural pattern of Malkangiri district. These are discuss below -

- a. Step farming or terrace farming - it is mostly seen in hill or mountain regions to check soil erosion through water current on the slopes (Edelstein & Kislev, 1981),

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- b. *Jhum* cultivation or slash and burn agriculture - it is the process of growing crops by first clearing the land of trees and vegetation and burning them thereafter (Kleinman et al., 1995),
- c. Shifting cultivation - it is an agriculture system in which a person uses a piece of land, only to abandon or alter the initial use a short time later. This system often involves clearing a piece of land followed by several years of wood harvesting or farming until the soil loses fertility (Conklin, 1961).
- d. Use of technology and use of manure: Bonda people rarely use the modern technique for agriculture - they are mostly traditional agriculturist, they use a simple technique, use manure like cow dung (*Gobar*), leaves, straws
- e. Rural Economy - Subsistence and Self-sufficiency: whatever agriculture they do is mostly subsistence, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency.

### **Agriculture Practices among the Bonda**

There are main two crop seasons in Odisha state e.g. *kharriff* or the season of summer crops and *rabi* or the season of winter crops. Therefore sowing in Odisha, in the *kharriff* season begins generally on the onset of Southwest monsoons in the mid June, while the *rabi* season starts at the beginning of cold weather season, i.e. at the end of October or early November, when the Monsoon has receded. The food crops grown in *rabi* season are: Paddy, Jowar, Bajra, Maize, Pigeon Pea, Green Gram, Black Gram, Groundnut and Sugarcane. The food crops of *rabi* season are: Wheat, Lentils, Bengal Grams, Peas and potatoes. These crops require cold weather and moderate supply of water. The harvesting periods of *kharriff* crops starts at the end of Monsoon, i.e. September to October and the *rabi* crops are generally harvested from March to April.

The highland and low land Bonda's are cultivated crops are: Rice Paddy (*Kheram*), Maize (*jahna*), Jawar, Finger Millet (*Same*), millet (*Sua- Rigdar*) (cereals), Black gram (*ruma*), Red gram (*Kulthi*), Green Gram (*Muga*), Til, Mustard, Groundnut (*badam*), jinger (*ada*) etc.

The agriculture pattern of the Bonda tribal community rice, ragi, maize, niger, black gram, horse gram, zinger, turmeric and seasonal vegetables. The soil type is red lateritic and black in color.

Rice is the staple crop of the Bonda Highland people although cereals crops like ragi, maize, suan, beans and other pulses varieties they are grown on their field.

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### **Shifting cultivation among the Bonda**

Shifting cultivation is not only an economic pursuit of Bonda community, but it accounts for their total way of life. Their social structure, economy, political organization, and religion are all accountable to the practice of shifting cultivation.

Bonda traditionally dwells in hilly and forest areas, due to the absence of permanent plain land they adopt shifting cultivation to sustain. They consider forest is their asset and they clear the patch of forest land for shifting cultivation depends upon the strength and stamina of family. Once the monsoon is active they sow all variety of seeds includes pulses, millets, paddy, vegetables, grains by making small furrows with digging stick. The technology used for this type of cultivation is very simple requires only some digging sticks, hand axe, sickle, crowbar and spade. The crops grow naturally and the burnt ashes act as good manure for the growth of crops in the cleared land. They do not use animals, pesticides and inorganic manure in shifting cultivation process. After harvest they leave the cultivated land fallow, abandon it and move to next fresh patch of land for another cycle of shifting cultivation. Since it is one of the important livelihood means which provide considerable food and nutrient supply was under threat due to restriction from forest department and impacts the Bonda livelihood negatively.

### **Cropping Pattern**

The Bonda tribal focus of the cultivation is twofold, either to cultivate food grains and vegetables for their self – consumption or rest part of their cultivation and sell to nearby the market, especially vegetables. Food grains includes such as rice, and coarse of grains such as maize (*jihna*), jower and millet like ragi (*Same*), bajra, Suan (*Rigdar*), kango, alasi, Koda and pulses like pigeon pea (locally called as Kandul), rice beans (locally known as *Dangar Rani*), green gram, black gram, horse gram and varieties of beans. The oil seeds are groundnut, seed-mustard. Among the vegetables pumpkin (*Kumunda*), cucumber (*sarlai*), orka (*saruha*), ridge gourd, bitter gourd (*kalarah*), ladies finger (*vendi*) cabbage Kobi), cauli flower, beans (*gianga*), brinjal (*yum*), tamato (*bijiri*), raddish (*mula*) and leafy vegetable (*saga*) and green chilies (*buramar*) are important.

### **Seasonal Collection of Minor Forest Produces Bonda Tribe**

Bonda economic activity - this Mahua flower is collected, Bamboo, Kendu leaves, Mahua flower and Tamarind are the most economic and valuable items for the Bonda tribe. The major varieties of grasses



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and fibres are collected from the forest and grasses are prepared for *jhadu* (broom stick) and Siali fibre are prepared and primarily used for binding thatched house.

**Other economic activities:** there are other economic activities that they practice among the Bonda communities – such as mangoes, cashew nut, guava, jamun, orange, tamarind, dates, different vegetables, bamboo shoots, varieties of mushrooms, roots, siali leaves and fibres leaves. Thus, the Bonda economy is very much sustainable and self-sufficient.

#### Seasonwise collection of MFP on Bonda Area

Sl No	Season	Month	Type of MFPs
1	Spring ( <i>Basanta</i> )	Mid Feb to mid April	Tamarind, castor seeds, siali leaves, broom sticks grass, tendu leaves, tendu fruit,
2	Summer ( <i>Grisma</i> )	Mid April to mid June	Siali leaves, mahua flowers, tamarind, tendu leaves, tendu fruit, mango, Myrobalan, leafy vegetables, yam, Indian blackberry, date, Kusum , Kusum seeds
3	Monsoon ( <i>Barsa</i> )	Mid June to mid August	Siali leaves, mahua fruit, leafy vegetables, Myrobalan, wild mushroom, bamboo shoot, bamboo mushroom, yam, Indian blackberry, date
4	Autumn ( <i>Sharata</i> )	Mid August to mid Octobe	Siali leaves, custard apple, wild mushrooms, guava
5	Winter ( <i>Hemanta</i> )	Mid October to mid December	Siali leaves, castor seed, guava, citrus fruit (narngi), orange, fuel wood
6	Winter ( <i>Sita</i> )	Mid December to mid February	Siali leaves, tamarind, citrus fruit, orange, fuel wood

**Source:** Collected by primary data through field work

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### Hunting and Gathering

Bonda communities it is seen as amusement. They collectively go to the jungle a group-wise. There they hunt and gather - such as wild birds, rabbits, quarrels, and others animals as well and they collect different fruits, roots, and leaves from the jungle collectively. They bring and distribute equally among them all the products whatever they collect from the jungle.

Hunting activity among them has cultural and religious significance. Hunting is another collective leisure activity of natives whenever they are free from farming activity they hunt animals. Only men take part in hunting operation. Due to the restrictions on wildlife hunting from forest department present days the day of *ChaitiPurnima* (Full moon day month of March) the hunting activity is a rare and they hunt only small animals for the sake of cultural and religious believe practices.

### List of the Collection MFPs by Bonda tribe

Name of the MFPs	Used plant part	Primary Use	Collected by
Mahua	flower	Food / Drink	Female and children
Mahua	seed	oil	Female
Tamarind	Fruits /Seed	Food / Medicine	Female
Siali	Leaves	food	Female
Broom sticks grass,	Leaves	Household use/ Selling	Female
Fuel wood	Branches	Household / selling	Female
Kendu	leaves,	Biri making	Male and Female
Kendu	fruit	food	Female
Wild mushroom,		food	Female
Bamboo shoot	Stem	food	Female
Indian blackberry	fruit	food	Female
Datepalm (sindhikoli)	fruit	food	Female
Custard apple	fruit	food	Female
Guava	fruit	food	Female

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Kusum	fruit	food	Female
Kusum	seeds	Body oil	Female
Siali	seeds	food	Female
Siali fibre	Bark	Household	Male
Jackfruit	Fruits/ seed	food	Female
Wild vegetables	Fruits and leaves	food	Female
Mango	Fruits	food	Female
Cashew	Fruits and seed	Food	Female

### Result and Discussion

The Bonda people live in the subsistence economy by depending on their symbiotic relationship with forest and depend upon the traditional livelihood sources like forest, agriculture, etc. The diversity in terms of life and livelihood among Bonda give rise to number complications and ruins their egalitarian society by damaging their basic feature and sociocultural identity. They are highly dependence on natural resources for their livelihood practices, agriculture, hilly and rugged topography, unabated degradation of resources and high potential for natural resource based development, watershed development has emerged as an important development strategy in the Bonda tribal areas. Once upon a time, they were living in jungle, hills, mountain top and the present day for searching food they are moving to the plain areas from the hilly and settled to the plain areas and cultivated agriculture on plain land for their livelihood practices. For time being, they resided on villages where they practiced permanent agriculture. Now it becomes their rural economy through a simple technique and uses various skills with market economy.

**Use of Technology and use of Manure:** Bonda tribe rarely use the modern technique for agriculture – they are mostly traditional agriculturist, they use a simple technique, use manure like cow dung (*Gobar*), goat dung, leaves, straw prepared by their own indigenous practices. The tools are used for cultivation.

**Sale of agriculture and forest produce:** Once upon a time there was huge demand for MFP but due to advancements in technology and modernization new synthetic products and packed foods penetrated into market and lessen the demand of MFP of tribes. Earlier *Siali* leaves along with *kendu* leaves were used as plates or containers in many social gatherings, festivals and religious occasion for [www.theresearchers.asia](http://www.theresearchers.asia)

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-serving foods among number of communities were vanished and replaced by paper and plastic plates and cups.

Whatever agriculture they do is mostly subsistence, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency. Bonda never go for a commercial crop. They always practice agriculture as their daily use and whatever extra - food grains they get are stored for next years and use for 'Madait' purpose as 'barter system'

Money is the medium of exchange system practising on the Bonda community on the present days. Most of the Bonda people were not aware of the monetary system. But after the establishment of BDA and with the help of OPELIP, these people are come forwarded to interaction with outer economy throughout the weekly market place and establishment of cooperative bank of Khairput block, Malkangiri. They have all aware about the contribution of money as most popular medium of exchange of good and services in the Bondaghati area.

The processes of modernisation and good transport and communication, people moving towards education have a significant impact on their livelihood and standard of living conditions of Bonda people.

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