

RINGA: An Identity of Bonda Women

Banita Behera

Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

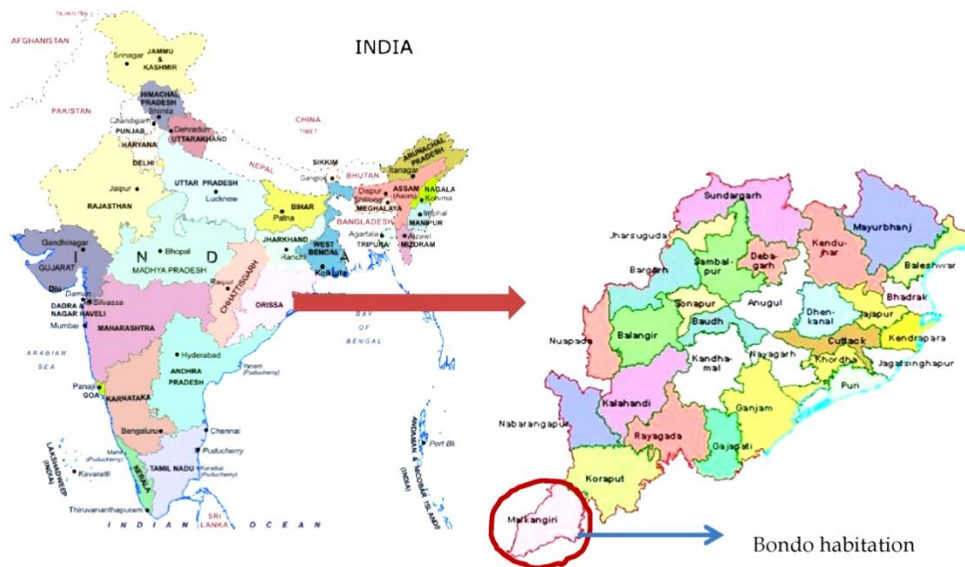
Abstract: The advent of weaving and wearing natural fibre among the tribal societies has been a long history. With the intervention of developed societies and Government policies and their acculturation and assimilation with the tribal societies has resulted in replacement of natural fibre in clothing with cotton threads. This present paper is an attempt to explore the socio-cultural importance of a fibre made loincloth among the Bondas of Malkangiri district of Odisha. This paper also tries to ponder upon the social values of making process of Ringa among the Bondas. The Bonda also known as Bondo, with very few population is one of the Particularly vulnerable tribe of Odisha in the district of Malkangiri. Odisha with 62 numbers of vibrating tribal communities holds first position in India for varieties. The indigenous tribal people of Odisha along with their culturally rooted aesthetic principles and associated moral and religious values emphasize their adornment pattern, art and craft as a unique one.

Key words: Bonda, Ringa, tribe, cultural identity, Odisha.

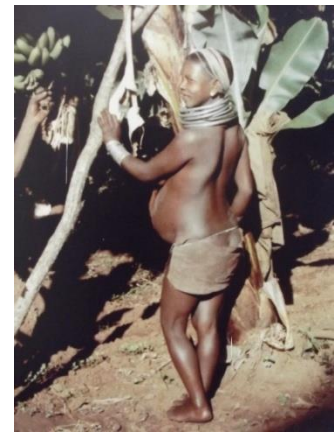
Introduction:

Just as archaeologist unearths with infinite care the brittle remnants of the past civilizations, the anthropologist contemplates with nostalgic affection the way of life of people he was fortunate enough to know before their traditional world fell to pieces. (Haimendorf, 1933). The adornment and decoration of the human body features is documented in all known cultures and societies. Practically, there are no sections of the society, which does not use one kind of ornament or the other. The love for adornment is practically ingrained in all human beings. There are differences in age, sex, and ethnicity of the wearer, the culture contact also accounts for considerable differences. The costume or adornment marks the person's belonging to a discrete cultural unit, and often indicates his or her position in the community.

Map showing Bondo habitation



The **Bonda** also known as **Remo** (meaning “people/Man” as per their dialect) comes under the list of 13 PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribes) of Odisha. The tribe is one of the oldest and most primitive in mainland India; and stands as unique among other tribes because of their adornment pattern. The long inhabitation of this tribe make this region as Bonda country and the hillock present in this region is known as **Bonda hill**. The inclination towards their own culture stands them as a most primitive tribe in India. The community gained its name from '**Bondi Mahadevi**'. The Bonda also known as Bondo are culturally two distinct groups as per their settlement pattern. In Orissa State they are only found in two Gram Panchayats, such as Mudulipada and Andrahal under Khairaput block of Malkangiri district. The Bondas those live in the foothill of Bonda hill are known as **Tala Bonda** (lower Bonda) whereas the settlers of the canopy are known as **Upara Bonda** (Hill Bonda). Autochthones of Bonda hill in Malkangiri district of Odisha known as Bonda/Bondo are synonymously known as Bondo Parajais are one of the most primitive tribe of the state. They call themselves as “Remo”, which means “Man”. They claim royal association and ancestry, found in Khairput block of Malkangiri district on the North-west part of the river Machkund. The clustered settlement pattern and beautiful head touching mud-plastered houses beautifully thatched with **Pir** grass reflect the nature



loving characteristic of the Bondas. The extraordinary culture of age gap marriage custom which mention the bride is usually older in age than the bride-groom is one of the significant character of this community which forces the researchers for study. The beauty of beads together with Ringa wears, the women of this community now becoming a muses of our rich tribal culture. As per their customary law the bride at her old age is assured of her husband's economic support. The Bonda women are very affectionate, loving and responsible, industrious and they are respected and honoured in the society

Ringa :

The Bondos are known for their sparse use of clothes. Their use of adornments as a mode of dress is a reference of their attire. The unique cloth of the Bondos forms an inseparable part of their cultural identity (Kanundo, 2000). The Ringa also known as Nadik is a remarkable scanty cloth of this tribe and a significant part of unconventional attire of Hill Bonda. This small piece of woven cloth is made out of *Kerang* fibre and usually used by the women of this community to cover their lower body. The merely use of this strip garment as a cloth, which tie around their waist in such a way as to leave the left thigh bare. Bonda woman looks very exceptional among other tribe when they are in their traditional attire. The Bonda women will not accept as bride among their society if they do not wear Ringa as a bridal costume in their respective nuptial ceremony. This wear of Bonda women is very peculiar and very distinguishable from all other tribal communities. The cloth measures only 2 - 3ft long in length and 8-9inches in width is used by the Bonda women to cover their private part.



Myth behind the Object:

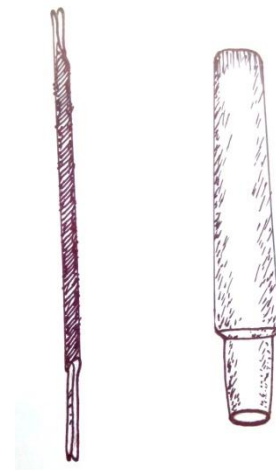
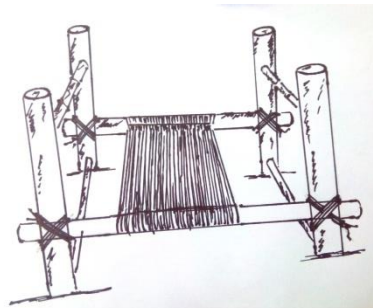
The Ringa which they firstly use in '*chait parb*' according to the myth that somehow related to the great Indian epic Ramayana, "during the exile period of Lord Ram , Sita and Laxman, Sita used to take her bath in Sita kund . One day, during the moment when Sita was taking her bath, some Bonda women who were passing by saw her in naked body with shaven head and laughed at her. Being embraced, Sita cursed the Bonda ladies to remain physically least adorned with a single piece of cloth and shaven headed so that in future people would laugh at

them. It is that curse Sita had announced; the Bonda women are still maintaining this traditional look of nakedness. According to the social custom male person cannot enter in the loom room where the Ringa is being prepared. The small girls after 5 years use Ringa to cover their private parts. Among all the characteristics of adornment pattern of the Bonda which make them unique from the modern society and giving them a special position now becoming a great market value in this modern era. The impact of western culture becoming a threat for the culture of Bonda which encouraging them to refrain from wearing of Ringa now.

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Making Process:

The word fiber and cloth are always used as synonyms for textile. However there are differences in these terms in specialised usage. Their incredible artistic skill is not only manifested in their dance and music but also in their dress and ornaments and the combination of artistic skill and innovative ideas being resulted in their technology of weaving. They use the Kerang fiber to weave Ringa which they collect annually in the “Smegelirak” festival. As a first step of weaving to make the fiber strong they rinse the fiber under the local flowing string for 2-3 days and later make it dry in sunlight. The collected fibers are creatively coloured by different vegetative dyes like black, blue, red, yellow, green & orange. For the longevity and prominence of the colour they again polish the dried fibers. There after they start to weave Ringa with their small indigenous looms consists of four vertical and two horizontal wood.



Spindle used for Kerang fibre Traditional pitloom Yan This traditionally scanty and colourful cloth is now becoming a great market value in this modern era. Now-a-days use of soap and detergent is common in almost all house holds to clean their clothes. But the cleaning procedure of Bonda women is somehow different by using ash and warm water as a cleaning raw materials.

They put the wet clothes in outside and dry in cool sunlight. For preservation they keep that inside the cavity of the bamboo body or hangs on bamboo pole hanged in the sleeping room. And sometimes they also keep the washed Ringas which are used in ceremonial occasions in bamboo baskets .The Bonda women with head band named '*Tureibu*' , made of grass, garlands of coins on body and colourful beads with this skimpy thick durable skirt and look look majestic. A Bonda girl weaving Ringa in Traditional loom



Conclusion:

Traditional culture and customs are something that retains the originality of a particular group. The modern adornments and pertaining to the availability and comfort is the main reason of attraction for the new generation. They even consider them suitable to be worn while interacting with the outer world. The traditional piece of cloth is complained to be unsuitable referring to the shortness of the size. As far as anthropological outlook goes, it is the job of every researcher to inculcate the traditional costume that creates uniqueness of the primitive groups. Some collaborative exercise should initiate to demonstrate their skills of craftsmanship by using locally available materials and input of the innovative ideas which may help to save such kind of indigenous craft from the verge of extinction. To create a sustainable atmosphere for these diminishing craft culture a chain should be developed between the artisans and the global market through the government or non-government organization with minimized or no mediators resulting in profitable transactions.

To the best of the knowledge this report being first kind of a report from anthropological perspective can bring up scope to aware the new generation of the community the uniqueness of their belonging and to motivate them through workshops on performing arts through the older generation to create instinct to retain the traditional culture.

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