

## **Bedia**

### **1. Introduction (Present demography, Origin, Migration, History etc).**

The Bedia a community of Bihar, they believe that they originally lived on Mohdipahar and have descended from the union of Vedbansi prince with a Munda girl. The other view is that a section of the Kurmis were outcasts and to be known as the Bedia or Wandering Kurmis.

The community has several names, like Bedia Kudmi, Choto Kudmi, Shershahbadia, Bhatia, Wandering Kurmis, Maldahiya and Badia and Bedia too, however its official name is Sharshahbadia

### **Origin**

The Bedia are found mainly in central and north West Bengal the Purnia Division of Bihar, Rajshahi District of Bangladesh, the Terai region of Nepal and southern Bhutan. In West Bengal, the Bedia are found mainly in the districts of Murshidabad, Malda, South Dinajpur and Darjeeling. In Bihar, where the community is known as shershahabadia, are found mainly in Kishanjganj, Purnea and Katihar

A community of Bihar, they believe that they originally lived on Mohdipahar and have descended from the union of Vedbansi prince with a Munda girl. The other view is that a section of the Kurmis were outcasts and to be known as the Bedia or Wandering Kurmis. Some of them rejoined the Kurmi fold by hosting a fest. The poor could not pay their way back and in course of time emerged as a separate community. They use Mahto as their title. They are non vegetarians and their diet consists of cereals of cereals like rice, maize, mandua, gondli and wheat, and pulses like urad, ghanghra, kurthi and arhar. They use sarguja, keongi and mustard oil for cooking. They drink mahua liquor and rice beer. Men chew tobacco and women smoke a hookah.

### **Present circumstances**

Traditionally, the Bedia were a pastoral group who used to breed buffaloes, sheep and goats, with the castration of cattle being a secondary occupation. By the 19th Century, the majority of the Bedia had settled down to cultivation, and majority were small and medium sized farmers. A small number of Bedia were also jotedars, or large landowners, particularly in Malda. Presently, the bulk of the community remains cultivators, with a smaller numbers employed in the military and police services.

The Bedia are endogamous group, and marriage occurs within close kin. In Bedia society, consanguinal kin are classed into two categories, the bhiad or minimal lineage and khandan or maximal lineage. Marriages are preferred within the bhiad. Bedia of west Bengal now belong to the Ahle Hadith sect, which distinguishes from other Bengali Muslim communities. The Shershahabadia of Malda and Bihar remain Sunni Hanafi.

Traditionally, each Bedia settlement consists of a paich, or [caste](#) council. These remain informal, and there is no [India](#)-wide formal [caste](#) association. The council consists of a hakim or headman, a jurist or mahat and a dhuli or messenger. All intra-group or inter-religious matters and disputes are settled by the paich.

According to Risley, the Bedia are divided into septs. However, the present survey identified some exogamous clans, namely Phecha, Kachhua, Mahua, Bambi, Suiya, etc. The marriage age for boys and girls is sixteen to seventeen years and fourteen to fifteen years, respectively. A marriage is arranged through monogamy is prevalent. Married women put a vermilion mark and wear an iron bangle as marriage symbols. The payment of bride price is obligatory. They follow the rule of patrilocal residence. Either spouse can seek divorce with social approval on grounds of adultery, barrenness, maladjustment, cruelty and laziness. Remarriage of widows and divorces is permitted and a widow can marry her late husband's brother. The Bedia live both in nuclear and extended families. Sons inherit parental property in equal measure while the eldest son succeeds to his father's authority. A woman contributed to the family income and is tonsured. The first cereal feeding ceremony is optional. The marriage rites are performed at the bridegroom's house. The dead are buried. The death rites observed are telnahan and daskarma.

The Bedia are the followers of the traditional tribal religion. Their family and clan deities are Mai, Mudkati Kundri Bansa Darha, etc. The village deities worshipped by them are Jher-buri Gawandeti Mahadania, Durga and the regional deities are Palcharu and Badpahari. They visit the annual fairs at Rajarappa, Hundru and Jonha falls and Jaganathpur. The Bedia celebrate festivals like Phagun, Sarhul, Karma, Jitia and Sohrai.

The Bedia who have settled down in West Bengal, are also known as the Bedia Kudmi, Choto Kudmi or San Kurmi. They speak in Kudmali, an Indo-Aryan language, at home and Bengali for inter-group communication. The Bengali and Devanagari scripts are used. <sup>[6]</sup>

## **2. Linguistic affinity**

### **3. Physical features**

#### **1. Material culture**

#### **2. Occupation (Economy, Livelihood, pattern)**

#### **3. Food habit**

#### **4. Village life (type of village)**

- 5. Dress & Ornaments**
- 6. Art and Craft**
- 7. Social organization (Society, Clan system)**
  
- 8. Rights and Rituals**
- 9. Life cycle (Birth, Marriage & Death)**
  
- 10. Political life (Customary law, Kinship)**

The Bedia Society is governed by customary community rules and these rules are traditionally laid down. The executive and judiciary functions of the Bedia community government are vested in the community panchayat consisting of the Ohdar, Mahto, Pahan and Gorait. All these offices are hereditary and the office-bearers are Bedias. In spite of the official panchayat in the area matters within the traditional jurisdiction of the community panchayat are brought before it for settlement.

In Ramgarh area the community panchayat flourishes and is an honoured institution. The offences against the customary rules include beef eating, violation of the rules of exogamy and endogamy. The punishments vary according to the nature of the offence and the status of the party concerned.

- 11. Religion**
  
- 12. Line of descent**
- 13. Disposal of death**

### **Points to be considered for the Ethnographic Study?**

#### **A. Name, Identity, Origin and History**

- 1. Name of the community, other name, name referred by other communities, meaning associated with the name.**

The community has several names, like Bedia Kudmi, Choto Kudmi, Shershahbadia, Bhathia, Wandering Kurmis, Maldahiya and Badia and Bedia too, however its official name is Sharshahbadia

- 2. Name mentioned above are considered derogatory in any manner?**
- 3. Traditional demography.**

Demography of Bedia Tribe

The Bedia Tribe reside in Singbhum, Ranchi and Hazaribagh

districts of Jharkhand. These areas are covered by thin forests. The Bedia Tribes speak the Panchpargania which is a part of the Indo Aryan family of languages. They use this language for inter and intra group communication. They use the Devnagiri script.

#### **4. History of origin of your community**

The Bedias call themselves Ved banis. The community was settled around the Mohudinagar garh in Barkakhana P.S. of the Hazaribagh district. Their last chief was Sampati whose fortress was located at Mohudinagar where the ruins are still found. The fortress was attacked on the Sohrai day by unknown persons and the whole community was killed except a Bedia boy and girl. They escaped and took shelter in Munda house. The present Bedia community claims to be the descendants of these two remaining Bedias who escaped from Mohudinagar. They consider the river Damodar as their sacred river and so they say that they settled after their fight, on both sides of the Damodar, on the Jerjere hill towards east. According to Risley, they are supposed to be a "mausiaut bhai" cousin through the maternal aunt, of the Kurmis. Formerly, it is said, Bedias and Kurmis intermarried, but a split occurred when it was discovered that the former ate beef, or more probably when the latter gave up eating it. They do not claim any connection with the Mundas, nor do the Mundas recognize them as cognates. Bedias take kachha food from Kurmis only, like the Khanghar Mundas.

The twelve septs of the Santals which are supposed to have been separated in Champa, and have long been separated from the parent tribe, bear the name of Bedia. It seems probable that the Bedias of Chotanagpur may be actually a branch of the Sanatals, who did not follow the main tribe in their wanderings eastward. Stastical account of hunter and the subsequent gazetteers tell us that they are a keen to the Mundas without advancing any concrete evidence as a matter of fact the bedias of Ramgarh P.S. claim a social status superior to the local Mundas and in support of it they say that they do not accept food and water from the Mundas which is not reciprocated.

#### **5. Myth and legends, if any, associated with the origin and migration of your community.**

#### **6. Any other information.**

#### **B. Habitation pattern**

##### **1. Type of village**

##### **2. Whether mixed with other communities/religious groups etc.**

##### **3. Neighborhood pattern**

##### **4. Dwelling unit. Ground plan of the dwelling unit i.e. rectangular/square/oval/circular/any other.**

##### **5. Any other information.**

The Bedias are settled in permanent villages with little planning. The houses are congested together in such villages. At other places they are dispersed, each family having land around the house. Their houses are mainly built of earthen sidewalls with tiled roofs. They are usually rectangular, with closed courtyards. The cattleshed is attached to the house. Their agricultural tools and implements are regional, which they make themselves except the iron

part which they buy. They buy their clothes also in the market. Their day-to-day household goods consist of cooking utensils, pots, cot, mat and machia etc.

### **C. Food and drink**

- 1. Type of utensil used for preparing and serving food and drinks.**
- 2. Staple food.**
- 3. Food items.**
- 4. Drinks and types of drinks.**
- 5. How many meals take everyday.**
- 6. Any other information.**

### **D. Dress and Ornaments**

- 1. Type of dress worn by a) Adult male/ Adult female – i) head gear, ii) Upper garment, iii) Lower garment. b) Male child/Female child – i) head gear, ii) Upper garment, iii) Lower garment.**
- 2. Uniqueness of the dress pattern.**
- 3. Type of dress worn during festivals/special occasion etc.**
- 4. Type of dress used by the Priest, Headman and Medicine man.**
- 5. Ornaments worn by male and female and parts of the body where worn.**
- 6. Materials used for preparation of the ornaments.**
- 7. Any other information.**

### **E. Family, Clan and other Analogous division**

- 1. Type of household**
- 2. Where a couple does usually reside after marriage**
- 3. Traditional practice of descent.**
- 4. Role of family members.**
- 5. Sub caste/sub tribes.**
- 6. Etymological significance of name of each sub castes/sub tribes.**
- 7. Myth and legends associated with sub castes/ sub tribes.**
- 8. Traditional occupation of sub castes/ sub-tribes.**
- 9. Clan/ Gotra of the community.**
- 10. How clan regulates marriage.**
- 11. Any other information.**

The largest social unit of the Bedias is the endogamous group divided into totemistic clan groups. Each such group is named after tree or an animal and killing or eating is taboo for the group concerned. The whole group is considered as a larger family; the members belonging to the same clan should not therefore marry within it. Similarly a Bedia should not contract marriage outside his or her community. If any one does so, the person immediately

loses membership of the community and on no account the community panchayat can readmit the person into the Bedia community so long as the marriage is not broken up. The family has such significance in Bedia society as they are devoted to joint farming. All types of families are found among the Bedias, but joint family is preferred. They are patrilineal, patrilocal and inheritance and succession goes through male line. They follow mainly classificatory kinship system.

#### **F. Economic activities**

- 1. Traditional occupation, main occupation pursued now a days and other occupation.**
- 2. Main crops produced.**
- 3. Months of the following activities i.e. Ploughing, sowing, weeding Y& harvesting.**
- 4. Activities usually performed by adult male, adult female, male child, female child.**
- 5. Magico-religious ceremonies performed during ploughing, sowing & harvesting.**
- 6. Implements used for ploughing, sowing & harvesting.**
- 7. Any other information.**

#### **Economy of Bedia Tribe**

The primary occupation of the Bedia Tribe is agriculture. They are basically land holding community engaged in pastoral economy. To earn a living they also sell firewood, gather lac and many other forest products. They even work as rickshaw pullers and employed in other labour jobs. Most of them are engaged in agricultural work and they often go out for hunting also. The Bedias have their own community council whose office is hereditary. The head of the office is responsible for resolving all social and economic matters. Many landless workers are occupied as daily wage workers.

The Bedias are cultivators and they say that at Mohudinagar also they had been cultivating land. Many among them have Khunt Katti status and they still regret those days when there was no Salami for reclaiming forest. Farming does not give subsistence for the whole year and to all of them, and they supplement their living by earning cash at the collieries, factories, earth work or similar work near-about. Their agricultural season is from June to September, and from October to December they are busy with harvesting and social engagement; and by that time their earnings from agriculture are exhausted. Sometime ago large numbers of Bedias used to migrate temporarily to Bengal and Assam for work in earth-work in tea gardens. Now employment opportunities are available at the local collieries, factories, earth and brick etc. and they work in these places during these months. In their economic life there are two credit systems which need special reference. These two institutions deal with the rate of interest. Corn is available at the annual rate of 50%. But the principle of cash credit is that for every five rupees the debtor have to return during next paddy harvesting period a Kath (roughly one maund) of paddy. If the person fails to deposit the required amount of paddy the whole amount would be converted into cash @ Rs. 10/-

per kath. Both the credit systems provide for compound rates of interest. Aa kath is equivalent to a maund and thus the rate of cash credit comes to 100% in a year.

### **Fishing & Hunting**

- 1. Where & how do you fish and how?**
- 2. Implements used for fishing & hunting.**
- 3. Any other information.**

### **G. Life style**

- 1. Beliefs associated with conception. Barrenness, prolong delivery, delivery of dead child & maternity death.**
- 2. Restriction imposed on mother during pregnancy on – Diet, Work, Visiting any place.**
- 3. Who provides assistance during delivery.**
- 4. What type of instruments is used to sever umbilical cord?**
- 5. How placenta is disposed off.**
- 6. Duration of confinement of mother after delivery.**
- 7. Any other information.**

Birth brings impurity for six days in the family and the end of the period is duly celebrated with feasting, and drinking. There is no initiation ceremony among them and the child is a constant companion of the parents and other members of the family and he or she learns social ways according to his or her future role. The daughter is mainly attached to the mother and the son to the father and thus the parents in the Bedia society are traditional teachers of their children.

### **Marriage**

- 1. Age of marriage**
- 2. Type of marriage (elopement, capture, service etc)**
- 3. Whether following practices are prevalent – Child marriage, widow marriage, widower marriage, remarriage, polyandry, polygyny, levirate, sororate and divorce.**
- 4. Custom and practices associated with marriage.**

### **Customs of Bedia Tribe**

The Bedia Tribe is divided into septs. They are exogamous clans named Phecha, Mahua, Bambia, Suiya, Kachua, Chidra. The title used by them is Mahato.

Boys are married off at the age of 16 to 17 while girls are married at the age of 14 to 15. Marriage takes place either through negotiation or mutual consent. They usually follow Monogamy but in certain instances Polygamy is also practised. Married women apply a vermillion mark on their forehead and wear an iron bangle in

their hand. Divorce is allowed on grounds of infertility, adultery, maladjustment, laziness, cruelty and others. Widow Remarriage is also allowed but the widow needs to marry her deceased husband's brother. Bedias live in both nuclear and extended family. Property is equally shared among the sons of the family and the eldest one becomes the heir of this father's authority. Women on the other hand are responsible for household work but they also contribute for the family income.

### **5. Dowry and Bride price.**

Dowry system is followed among them. A bride can be arranged only after paying bride-price which is called as Dhalitakka among them. Dhalitakka consists of Rs. 5/- in cash, five sarees and a basket of sweets etc. the Bedias have a peculiar custom; the bride price items must be equal to the items spent at the Chhathi of bride. If there is anything short the parents of the bride are entitled to compensation.

### **6. Any other information.**

Marriage is solemnised by putting vermilion; and services of the barber and potter are utilised. The well-to-do Bedias also engage Brahmin to conduct the marriage ceremony. There is no restriction in the number of wives a man can have but usually their economic standard does not allow them to maintain more than one wife. Remarriage through sagai is allowed among them. In the event of death of wife the husband is entitled to marry her younger sister. In case there is no one suitable in the family the whole amount of the bride-price has to be returned. But after the death of the elder brother the younger brother treats his widow as mother and so no marriage takes place between them. They say that the elder brother is just like father and after his death his wife is to be respected accordingly. The average marriage cost among the Bedias varies between Rs. 200/- to Rs. 600/-.

### **Death**

- 1. Beliefs associated with death.**
- 2. Rituals performed and ritual objects used at the time of disposal of the dead body.**
- 3. Place where dead body is disposed off.**
- 4. Manner in which dead body is disposed off – Cremation, Infant, accident death.**
- 5. Who prepares the site for cremation.**
- 6. How the dead body is placed in the grave/pyre/**
- 7. What are the offerings made to the deceased.**
- 8. Rituals performed at the time of disposal off.**
- 9. Duration of pollution period.**
- 10. Restriction observed during pollution period.**
- 11. Who officiates in performing death rites?**
- 12. Any other information**

The Bedias follow the birth and death rituals. They celebrate

Chetti, a ritual that is observed after the sixth day of the birth of the child. On this day the purificatory and child naming ceremony takes place.



The Bedias bury their dead people and observe cremation rites such as Daskarma and Telnahan. Cremation involves much expenditure so only old and respected Bedias are honoured with it. In any case every personal belonging of the dead go with the person and are deposited in the grave or on the funeral pyre, along with the corpse. When children and person die of pox or in any other unnatural way, they are buried. Five bones from (1) head, (2) chest, (3) hand, (4) & (5) both knees of the dead person who are cremated are collected and they must be deposited in the Damodar as an act of spiritual merit. There are two places in the Damodar, (a) Sondhara, P.S. Mandu and (b) Kundru in Ramgarh P.S. which are considered holy places for such bone depositing. The well-to-do take these bones to deposit them in holy places of the Ganges. The Brahmin is invited to conduct the death ceremonies and these last upto the 13<sup>th</sup> day from the day of death. The Bedias offer water to their death ancestors annually, till the last offering is made at some religious place.

## **H. Religion**

- 1. Supreme deity.**
- 2. How supreme deity is associated with the life of the people?**
- 3. When this deity is propitiated?**
- 4. Village deity.**
- 5. Clan deity**
- 6. Malevolent spirit**
- 7. Ancestor worship.**

## Religion of Bedia Tribe

The Bedia Tribe follow their traditional tribal religion. They follow Pahan worship at the Sarana. In the Sarna fowl is sacrificed. Though they themselves drink *haria*, they do not offer it on religious occasions, except in the occasion of Sarhul in Sarna. They worship family deities like Mai, Kundari, Mudkati, Darha, Bansa and others. The village deities worship are Gawandeti, Durga, Chandi, Jher- buri. Their regional deities are Bad Pahari and Palcharu. The Badia also have sacred specialist like Pahan Bhagat and Ojha who also belong to other communities. They also pay visit to annual fairs at Hundru, Rajarappa, Jagannathpur and John falls. The Bedias celebrate and observe festivals such as Sarhul, Karma, Phagun, Sohrai and Jitia. They have strong roots in their traditional tribal life.

## **I. Traditional system of social control**

- 1. Traditionally recognized agency/traditional/political organization (eg Customary law, Panachayat, etc. ) If yes, are there any permanent set of office bearers.**
- 2. Functions of traditional/political recognized agencies.**
- 3. Any other information.**

The Bedias do not exchange food and water with many but confine it to their villages and on the days of special feasts. Their women do not accept food from any one except from the people of their own community. But in contact with others in towns and markets or work

places these restrictions in food and water are observed by them. They explain that impurity is associated with oven and not with the food.

## **CHAPTER – II**

### **Five Criteria**

- 1. Primitive traits.**
- 2. Distinctive culture**
- 3. Shyness of contact with the community at large**
- 4. Geographical isolation**
- 5. Backwardness**

### **Conclusion**

## **CHAPTER – III**

### **Replies to the queries made by RGI/National Commission for SC/ST**

## **CHAPTER – IV**

### **Conclusion**