

Alternative Rural Livelihoods: Bada family in Sundargarh, Odisha

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Abstract

The Human Development Indices of the tribal population in India show that in terms of parameters such as education, health, income, etc. their condition is relatively poorer than the rest of the population. Though the poverty rates have declined among the scheduled tribes, they have done so slower than the rest of the population. The case study discusses the life of one such family, the Bada family, situated in Gangajal village, in Sundargarh District. The family serves as an example of how people from tribal communities in Odisha have sustained themselves by generating multiple livelihood opportunities. The case study bestows light on how alternative livelihood measures could improve the overall conditions in the rural area and further reduce people's migration from rural to urban dwellings.

Keywords: *alternative livelihoods, opportunities, socioeconomic, tribal community, Odisha,*

Introduction:

Khatu Bada sat down for a wholesome meal of Ragi gruel and a curry of Brinjal and Tomatoes plucked from the kitchen garden with his wife and three daughters. He had a contented smile on his face. Life was not prosperous, but the family was able to meet the daily needs and provide for a measure of education for their three daughters. By the standards of the tribal dominated village of Gangajal of Sundergarh district, it would not be wrong to call them a well-to-do family. Khatu Bada was the eldest member of the Bada Family. He and his wife Emrencia Bada were matriculates, having studied only till the 10th standard. However, they wanted their three daughters Jharna, Sandhya and Renuka to complete their graduation and endeavored towards the same.

The eldest daughter Jharna was 19 years old and was studying in the first year of graduation. Renuka, 15 years old was studying in the 10th standard. The youngest daughter Sandhya, 11 years old was in the sixth standard. Khatu looked forward to the mealtimes with the family which was a time for family banter and gossip. While getting back from the Kirana store for dinner, as he was walking past the village choupal, few of his neighbours informed him about the Government of Odisha's initiative to increase cultivation of Jowar in the Sundergarh block. They discussed how some of them were thinking of moving away from Ragi towards cultivating Jowar. The conversation during this meal therefore focused on the incentive by Government of Odisha to cultivate Jowar and whether the family should move towards it. By the end of the meal the contented smile of Khatu Bada and Emrencia was replaced by a frown as they sat back long after the girls had cleared the dishes, pondering over whether they should move from cultivating Ragi to Jowar.

The Bada Family's Livelihood

Khatu Bada was a hardworking man. When he first came to the village, he worked as a taxi driver for a private taxi owner. The income was low, and he had to be away from the village for a good measure of time. However, soon after the birth of his first child, he started a grocery shop in the village so that he could generate more income as well as spend more time with his family. As a self-owned store, he made more money than working as someone's driver. This enterprising spirit was imbibed in every member of his family and every family member of the Bada family was engaged in an income-generating activity. Khatu Bada ran the only 'Kirana' store in the village and also undertook agriculture. The eldest daughter Jharna, used to stitch and knit clothes to earn a part-time income. Renuka took tuition classes for the Anganwadi students in the village, and even young Sandhya supported her father in running the Kirana store. Emrencia Bada, apart from being a loving mother, was also a member of the Farmer Producer Company, Jana Vikash, in Gangajal village.

The family owned multiple agricultural lands in the village Gangajal and the nearby villages. They grew paddy and ragi in those lands. However, agriculture was not their primary source of income. The Kirana store which was the only grocery store in the village and sold items of daily usage was their major source of livelihood. Additionally, they had a kitchen garden and grew seasonal vegetables and fruits there such as papaya, banana, pomegranates,

chillies, lemons, brinjals, tomatoes, radish, cauliflowers, and beans. They also had a few hens and a poultry area to serve their own needs. The surplus eggs, chicken etc. were sold to the villagers. They were also the owners of a number of sandalwood trees in a land which they saw as an investment.

Socio Economic Background of Gangajal Village

Gangajal is located in the Kutra block of Sundergarh district, under Gangajal Panchayat. Sundergarh district has a population of 20,80,664 of which 10,62,349 (50.75%) are Scheduled Tribes and 1,91,660 (9.16%) are Scheduled Castes. The district has been recognized and declared as one of the Scheduled Areas by the government of India as more than 50 per cent of the total population in the district are tribals. The district is geographically abundant with natural resources with 40.4 per cent of its total land covered by forests. Yet, dwellers of these mineral-rich regions, the tribals still struggle amidst the adversity of poverty and under-development. The region also sees a lot of out-migration of people for better opportunities and income.

Gangajal has around 487 families as its occupants. The Panchayat has a population of only 2,046, of which 50.05 per cent is male, and 49.95 per cent is female. The average sex ratio of Gangajal Panchayat is 1043. The child sex ratio is 998. The literacy rate of the panchayat is 57.67 percent. Male literacy stands at 66.02 percent, while the female literacy rate is 49.32 percent. The population of SCs is 141, of which 48.94 percent are male, and 51.06 percent are female. ST population is 1,397, of which 49.03 percent are male, and 50.97 per cent are female.

However, the village Gangajal has elementary infrastructural facilities. There are no financial institutions. The village has only a few grocery stores and food stalls. For the rest of their needs, the villagers travel to the block headquarters at Kutra. Kutchra roads connect Gangajal with other villages in the block. Out of the total 246 houses in the village, majority of the (211) houses in the village are kutchra houses with a few (35) semi- pucca houses. There are three Anganwadi in the Gangajal village comprising the social infrastructure.

The village has a fertile soil, and the seasonal monsoons makes it suitable for practicing agriculture. Not surprisingly, therefore most of the tribal population has agriculture as the primary source of livelihood.

Evolving Pattern of Livelihoods

Due to the rich forest cover in the area, traditionally villagers had relied heavily on forest resources for their livelihoods. They used to go to the adjacent forest and collect various minor and major forest produce and fuel woods. The locals relied on minor forest products to meet their requirements. Forest materials were utilised to make mats, beds, wooden stools, baskets, cups, and plates in Gangajal households. The woodland was being managed by the inhabitants who used to cultivate forest land and harvest forest resources. It was mostly a monocropping system, and their economy was based on survival. During the rainy season, the local people cultivated paddy as their primary crop. To date, even a few households were growing rabi crops in their fields, with a focus on pulses like urad and arhar. The number of such households is now significantly less.

However, with depleting forest cover the Government also put in restrictions on timber cutting and felling of trees. Non-tribal interventions have also impacted the traditional livelihood patterns. Additionally, the livelihood patterns of the people have changed significantly due to changing seasons, loss of market for crops such as Ragi and excessive reliance on agriculture. Many people had also started working in daily wage jobs or migrated outside due to the limited resource. When looking at the evolving patterns of livelihood in the village, it can be seen how much it has changed through time. It needs to be seen how the changes initiated under Odisha Millet Mission impact the livelihood pattern of the region and whether they can spur the agricultural activity and increase agricultural income of the village.

Agriculture at Gangajal

Agriculture has been highly profitable in the village due to the rich soil fertility and bumper produce of crops, but the condition had changed over the past few years. Ragi and paddy were the major crops grown in the area, as they entailed several benefits for the farmers. It had a high MSP rate of Rs. 32.95/quintal for Ragi and Rs. 18.77/quintal for Paddy and took less time and effort to produce. However, there was a black market for Ragi and Paddy crops in the past few years due to excessive production and limited demand (in terms of the market). Due to which the market MSP rate for these crops fell to Rs. 22/quintal for Ragi and Rs.

8/quintal for Paddy. This resulted in a loss of income and limited the farmers' producing capacity.

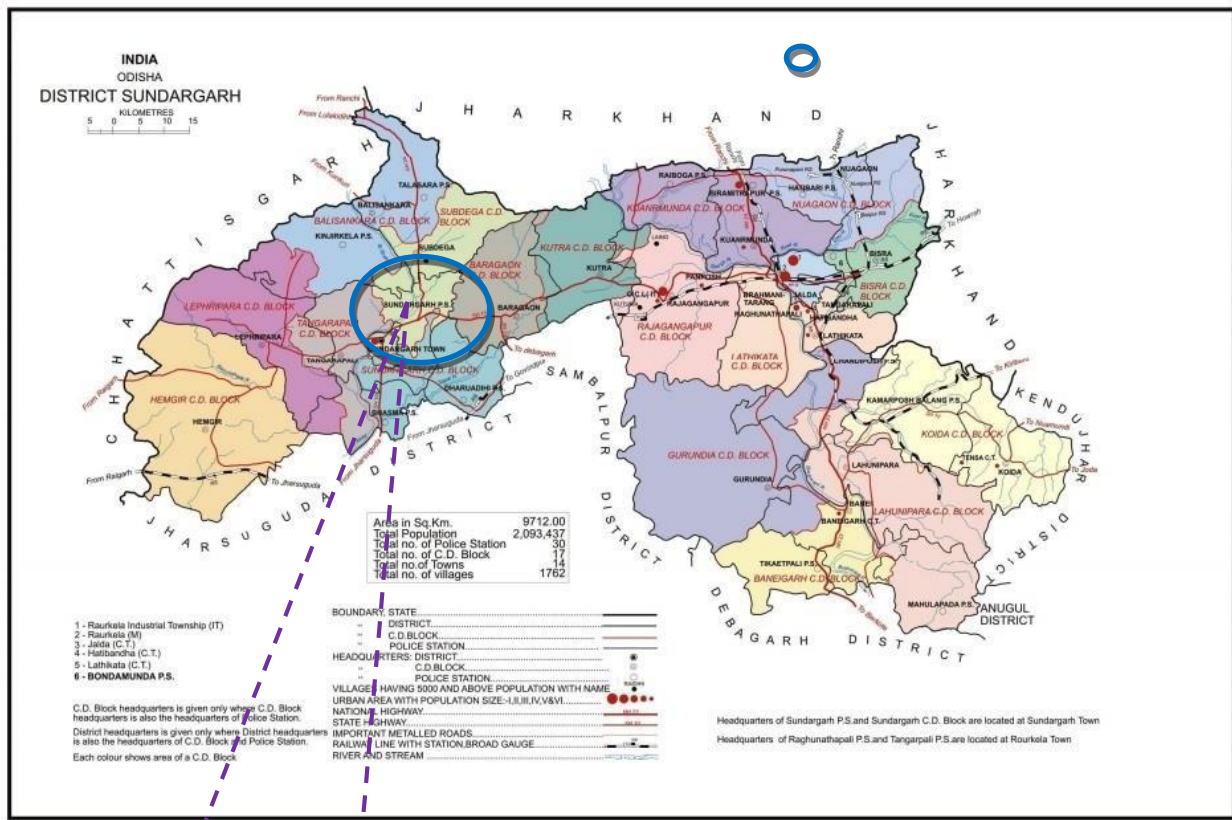
Major seasonal shifts in the past few years led to a reduction in crop production and crop failure in a few cases. Moreover, owing to the fall in the prices for Ragi, the Government of Odisha, under the Odisha Millets Mission, started promoting the production of Jowar. However, Jowar, Paddy, and Ragi all grow in the same season, leading the farmers to decide which crop to produce. Jowar is a water-resistant crop that requires slope cultivation to prevent water stagnation around roots, the complete opposite of the rainfed crops Ragi and Paddy. As a part of government initiatives, new markets were being opened up for the Jowar crop to boost its production. The government was also distributing free samples of Jowar crops.

The Road Ahead

As Khatu and Emrencia Bada finally got up after their meal to wash their hands, their frowns were replaced by a smile. The Bada family was the only family in the village that had both a grocery shop and practiced agriculture for their livelihood. The Bada Family had alternative means of livelihood opportunities to sustain their family and consequently were particularly well-off compared to other residents in the village. On the other hand, the other residents in the village either depended only on agriculture for their livelihood or owned a grocery shop or migrated to the cities to look for daily wage jobs. Both Khatu and Emrencia knew that their dream of getting their daughters to complete their graduation would be fulfilled. However, they had to decide whether they would continue with Ragi or shift to Jowar or grow Ragi and Jowar both. This could wait as thanks to their diversification of livelihood, they had a safety cushion to protect their income.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1: Map of the Area



Map of Sundargarh District



Map of Kutra Block



Map of Gangajal Village

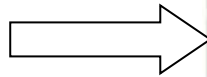


Exhibit 1: Kitchen Garden at Bada Family's house



Exhibit 2 : Khatu Bada doing his daily routine



Exhibit 3 : Grocery Shop of the family



Exhibit 4 : *Farmlands in Gangajal Village*



Exhibit 5 : *Livestock owned by the Bada Family*

