

The sword is worshipped with utmost respect and sanctity by the Rajputs all over India and its lively description is found in different books. In Odisha too, the Khandayats are found worshipping the sword. But one is astonished to hear about the custom of sword-worship among the primitive tribes and it is true that the Patakhanda festival of Bonda tribe is a rare instance of the sword-worship which affirms the self-respect of the Bondas and also establishes their relationship with the tradition of Rajputs or Kshatriyas of ancient times.

Mudulipada at a height of 3500 ft. from the sea level in the district of Malkangiri is a much discussed village of Barajangar state of Bonda

efforts with which this festival is celebrated that the Bondas have a heroic mindset similar to that of the Rajputs and the Khandayats. Today also this sword is the symbol of the presiding deity of the locality known as Lord Patakhanda.

Lord Patakhanda of the Bondas is the moving god of twelve Bonda villages or Barajangar state. Sometimes the Lord vanishes from the hollow of the tree at Mudulipada and goes on a tour to regions like Godavari, Bastar, Nandapur, etc. And then epidemic diseases break out in Barajangara area. The legends corroborate this statement. There are a lot of legends and historic allusions to the origin of Patakhanda and matters related to it, but they are still uncertain. It

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## Lord Patakhanda of the Bonda Tribes

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tribes. There is a huge banyan tree on the summit of the green mountains, and in the hollow of the tree lies hidden a very ancient sword since long which is taken out and worshipped once in a year on the last Monday of Magha (January – February). This double edged weapon of iron of 3 ft. length and 6" wide must be a royal sword; hence it is called 'Patakhanda' (the best/excellent sword). 'Patakhanda festival' celebrates the custom of worshipping the sword. A similar kind of Patakhanda festival is also celebrated during Dussehra by the Nandapur royal family, and hence lies the importance of Bonda's Patakhanda from a psychological point of view. It is clearly understood from the persistent and laudable

accounts for its mysterious and enigmatic nature. As per a Bonda myth, the five Pandavas of the *Mahabharata* during their exile in the forest had come to this region of Dandakaranya and before they had left for an exile incognito, they had hidden a lot of arms and ammunitions in the hollow of this tree. After the expiry of their term of exile incognito, they had taken away all their arms and ammunitions from the hollow of the tree and left this sword by mistake, which miraculously came to the notice of the Bondas, and they accepted the sword as Lord Patakhanda.

Barring the mythology-based folktales there are so many folktales based on history about Patakhanda. May be partly true, it is clearly

evident from a study of the rock inscriptions of Barasur (1060AD) and Kurashapali (1074AD). According to the rock inscriptions, after the assassination of king Jagdev Bhusan of the kingdom of Chakrakota by his army- chief Madhurantak, the latter became the king of Chakrakota. Consequently, the queen Gundi Dei along with her son Someswar absconded to the Bonda region and established her relationship with them. She changed her name from Gundi Dei to Bundi Dei and won the confidence and co-operation of the Bondas during her stay with them. With their help and services she conquered and regained the kingdom of Chakrakota; and at the time of leaving for her own kingdom, she presented a royal sword to the chief of the Bondas which has been worshipped as Patakhanda long since. But some argue that the king of Jeypore, being pleased with their loyalty and devotion presented this sword to the Bonda chief as a royal acclamation. But whatever may be the underlying story, Patakhanda is not simply an ordinary sword; it is worshipped as the symbol of the Lord and this shows the immense and invincible faith of the Bondas.

One day when the first Bonda man Ramo was spending the night with his wife Gorvei under the azure sky on the summit of the hill in Barajangara, he came to know about Lord Patakhanda. At midnight Gorvei was frightened to see a dazzling light appearing on the top of the banyan tree and she reported it to her husband. While they looked at the light in fear, it turned into a lustrous man and then vanished into the tree. That was the full moon day of Magha (January – February). In the early dawn, the Bonda man came to know about Patakhanda in his dreams and received the direction to worship him near the banyan tree. The Lord assured him that his married life would be of peace and prosperity if he worshipped him. From that day onwards the celebration of Patakhanda festival has become

an integral part of Bonda rites. Seventy years ago, while carrying his research on the Bonda tribes, the anthropologist Verier Elwin had come across a folktale regarding the origin of Patakhanda. With this it is believed that Lord Patakhanda hailed from Nandapur area where he lived with his sister. One day after the Lord went out for hunting, his sister felt terribly restless with the scorching heat and took off all her clothes and carried on the household chores, completely naked. When the Lord returned from hunting, he was embarrassed to see from a distance his sister winnowing the husks from the grains in bare body. He first shot an arrow which fell at a little distance from her and then shot an arrow with thorns that fell just before her. Devi realized that her brother had already arrived from the forest. She went underground out of fear and shame. Beside her were there a broomstick and a 'sila' (two pieces of stones, one flat and the other cylindrical used for grinding). The Lord hurried towards that place and pulled her up holding her hairs. The hairs were uprooted; he threw them on the ground which later on grew as a long grass in the Bonda area, used to make broomsticks. Devi walked in the underground and reached near the stream 'Kingu Bodaka' (Seeta Kunda) and then further moved towards Gumma mountains. As the people came nearby, she turned into a stone in shame. This stone is still there on the bank of the stream which flows from Mudulipada to Gumma. On both the sides of the stream are a different kind of shrubs (from which broomsticks are made) and the rocks.

The Lord was observing all these from the top of a big banyan tree on the Mudulipada ghats. When he saw his sister turning into a stone, he himself turned into a sword. But it is really surprising that this folktale is buried in the sands of time and does no more exist. Because during my visit to different places of the Bonda region in the last ten years i.e. from 1999 to 2009 I had

never heard this folktale. But we have to accept that the custom of worshipping Patakhanda has prevailed on the basis of legends and beliefs.

Every year on Monday just preceding 'Magha purnima' (full moon day of Magha) the Patakhanda festival is celebrated in Mudulipada with much pomp and pleasure. The circumference of the huge banyan tree in whose hollow lies the Patakhanda (the sword) with utmost secrecy is more than fifty metres. Its boughs and leaves spread over an area of minimum two thousand square feet. At the foot of the banyan tree are laid a lot of stones (big and small) arranged in a holy design. The arrangement looks like a big platform. The area under the leafy boughs is shady and very cool. It is believed that no tree adjacent to this sacred place ever dies or dries up in the scorching heat.

The chief priest of Lord Patakhanda is Sisa. As he carries the 'mana' (a small bamboo container with paddy or any other grain believed to be goddess Lakshmi or Bhudevi) in the puja, he is also called Manadora (Manadhara). In addition to the chief of Mudulipada, the chiefs of other eleven villages accompanied by their followers also attend the function in the presence of the Manadora. They come with gifts. They discuss how their posts and positions will be safe and secure in the days to come. The notable thing about the festival is that here before Lord Patakhanda are decided the persons and the posts they are going to hold in the coming year.

Though the custom has a little bit changed with the advent of modernity, some Bonda men attend the festival with a bandage around their cropped head. The girls wear new 'ringas'. They bring with them different kinds of flowers and sacrificial things. At the beginning of the puja, the Sisa sanctifies the 'Sila', 'Silapua', 'Chaki' (the grinding stones) with the oil and then they are bathed with the water of Seeta Kunda (Kingu

Bodak) fetched in a gourd container. Then the priest prepares the 'Charu anna' (the rice prepared out of the oblation fire) for the puja. After keeping the rice, turmeric, dried fish, chilly, salt and water into a bamboo pipe, its opening is closed tightly and is put in the fire. After sometime the above mixed rice called 'Charu anna' is taken out of the bamboo pipe and is offered to the Lord. 'Jhoti' (a rangoli) of three colours is drawn before the Lord; the water mixed with turmeric and the 'charu anna' is sprinkled over the animals like goat, hen, lamb and duck brought for sacrifice. Then various kinds of crops and seeds procured from different villages are placed before the tree. Sisa pays his obeisance to the banyan tree and then climbs up on it to bring the hidden sword lying at a height of about forty feet in the hollow of the tree and gets down with the sword in the right hand. Then it is sanctified with the water of 'Seeta Kunda'.

After the chief priest (Sisa) sacrifices a duck at first, the other priests offer the goats, lambs, hens as sacrifice. The sacrificial blood is smeared on the sword. The villagers rush in to smear the same blood on their head. The chief priest chants the *mantras* for the Lord Patakhanda in the second phase.

*Ayi Mapru! Sata Ye na  
Barjangara, Barmutana  
Patakhanda, Pata Bhairav  
Mudulipadya devta  
Deng Dingnal, misang kukusag  
Misang gimesham, sunar sine  
Sunar inang, naagam bunabarat  
Demse bireb, kuruthaba  
Sumu sarai, pakna gaja Demta!  
Maprunan satare manek  
Na duiman denata.*

(O, Lord! If you are really the benevolent god Patakhanda of Barajangara, Barmutha, Mudulipada, cultivate the vast rocky field with a

tiger on one end of the yoke and a bear on the other and tied to the golden ploughshare with a cobra and sow the seeds on it. The seeds may fall on a creeper, on a rock or on a pole, but it will certainly sprout. With your blessings and grace a paddy of one 'mana' ( a unit of measurement of grains) will be of two 'manas' i.e. the produce will be doubled. The procured seeds are distributed amongst all after performing the puja with the above mantra. It is clear from the ritualities that Patakhanda festival is purely an agriculture- based festival celebrated for initiating the process of sowing the seeds. With our minute observation of each and every step of the celebration we came to the last phase of the festival.

In the last phase Sisa, praying for the welfare of all, supplicated before Lord Patakhanda, "O Nandapur Lord, O Patakhanda Bikram, O Nandapur Budha Bhairava, O Dular Dei, O Siri Maoli! Your presence is everywhere and at every moment, may be the night of Nandapur or the day of Barajangara. I offer you *bel* leaf, dhupa (incense), turmeric and ragi. We offer you the sacrifices of black cocks, black goats. May our family and children be safe and sound! May there be peace and happiness in the country and in the world! May there be a good harvest! Let the trees be laden with flowers and fruits! Let there be no problem, or danger. O Lord Patakhanda! May good prevail over the province, country and the world!" After finishing the 'mantra', Sisa with the sword in the right hand climbed up the banyan tree and put it back in the secret place. Mudulipada resonated with the beating of 'Madala', trumpet and drums. Bondas were almost mad in excitement and began to dance to the rhythmic beat of the 'madala' and then started the other programmes of the festival. However, the festival of Patakhanda came to an end within two hours but the sound of the 'madala' never stops in Mudulipada and lingers on even to the next day in anticipation of another festival.

The Patakhanda festival of yesterday (Monday) was really a memorable occasion in the religious and cultural life of the Bondas. And today is Tuesday- the festival of Damaldei at the sacred place of Damaldei in Khairaput. The Bonda man descends down to this place from the mountain-top. He believes that this Damaldei happens to be the energy of Lord Patakhanda. Some people say that Damaldei is his sister. The fire and fervour of this festival reverberate with the beat of 'madala' and play of trumpet, the earth is soaked with the sacrificial blood. Again the Bonda man returns to the same place from where he came out.

Except in the Patakhanda festival of Mudulipada, this Patakhanda is also worshipped by Nandapur royal dynasty (now in Jeypore) in Dussehra. But Patakhanda is not taken there from Mudulipada because the handle of the sword has been there being worshipped long since. But there is an interesting legend as regards how this handle had gone to Nandapur, after having been separated from the body of Patakhanda.

Long ago a certain king of Nandapur had gone to Balimela region for hunting (the ancient state of Kambudri); when the Bondas came to know of it, they blocked all the roads of the region in fear. In addition to this they built a stone barrier at the main entrance. After the king returned, his desire unfulfilled, the Bondas hoisted the flag in joy on this barrier wall which is famous as 'Banapacheri'. When this news reached the king, he ordered his army to wage a war against the Bondas and add their territory to their kingdom. The army laid their tent at a place (now called Patraput) on the basin of the river Machhakund. On this side the Bondas also prepared for war. They camped in a bamboo jungle at a distance and started cooking before the day- break. After preparing the ragi, when they cooked fish, dry fish and bamboo mushroom, they marked that the fishes were jumping out of the cooking pot

and moving towards the river. In fact this miraculous event happened only because the bamboo parasitical plant was ground with bamboo mushroom. It still prevails in the people's belief even though it is beyond imagination from a rational point of view. All are plausible in the folktales.

When the soldiers of Nandapur marked this secretly, they formed the idea that all this happened because of the power of the Bonda gods. So they tried to steal Lord Patakhanda and take him to Nandapur at the king's order. After a lot of struggles and efforts the hilt of the sword came out and the hiltless sword was left behind in the hollow of the tree. At a later period the king of Nandapur was instructed in dreams, and accordingly he paid his obeisance to the hilt and worshipped it in Dussehra. This tradition has been prevalent since long.

That this incident belongs to seventeenth century is quite acceptable. Because the king of Nandapur, Raja Bikram Dev (1641-1669) shifted his capital to Jeypore, a few years after the beginning of his reign. So this is an earlier incident. Moreover, Bikram Dev annexed several 'dangara' areas to his kingdom during his reign. Hence the custom of worshipping the hilt of Lord Patakhanda in Dussehra must have started during his reign. Because in the last *mantra* of this god it is addressed as Patakhanda. In the opinion of the chief priest, the hilt that is there in Nandapur is made of bronze but not of iron.

During this puja at Nandapur, a lot of Bondas along with their chief priest attend the function. They take the turmeric mixed rice and a cloth made of keranga thread from the original sacred seat of Patakhanda to Nandapur, and after they are offered, sacrifices in the name of Lord Patakhanda are made. The Bondas return to Mudulipada after the puja is over. On that day all the Bondas of Barajangara wash their heads, clean and cleanse their traditional weapons and

then offer sacrifices in the name of Patakhanda. This is known as 'Mundadhowni' festival. Besides this, *pujas* are performed in every Bonda house in the name of Lord Patakhanda on other festival days also like Tanku festival, Pousha festival, Chaiti festival but Lord Patakhanda is not brought down from the hollow of the banyan tree on these occasions.

We took farewell from Mudulipada after a collection of a lot of facts and findings about Lord Patakhanda. Patakhanda appeared to be a mysterious god to our imagination. Whatever may be the basis, the same Patakhanda might belong to the period of the *Mahabharat* (5000 years ago), or to the time of Gundi Dei (1000 years ago) or the time of the king of Nandapur (400 years before). Whatever may be the truth, that the same Lord is so integrally a part of Bonda life and culture has to be accepted. But the only truth here is that Patakhanda is not merely a Bonda god but their past, present and future.

Mudulipada fell behind. The beating sound of '*madala*' was gradually receding from us. On our way back we thought when the *madala* would be struck again in Mudulipada and the Bonda man would be picking up the mystery of the festival, looking at the fourteenth day moon (one day before the full moon) in the sky.

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