



Socio-Economic Condition And Issues Faced By The ' Munda' Tribe Of Arpara, West Bengal- An Observation

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ABSTRACT

In India, Munda tribes are considered a major tribe group. Through this work, I attempted to portray the present socio-cultural condition of the Munda people in Arpara, West Bengal. Unfortunately, since freedom, their condition has not changed much. The central and West Bengal governments have taken loads of steps for their welfare. It looks like they could not adopt the modern age even if they are losing their rich cultural tradition. Present study was conducted in Arpara in Nadia District, West Bengal. Agriculture is the most common economic activity of the 'Munda' tribes, especially those residing in Arpara, West Bengal, but as with the march of time the pressure of land has increased day by day and immigration takes place. They have lagged behind the mainstream even today.

Keywords- Munda, West Bengal, Tradition.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Adivasi' is used commonly to the collective scheduled Tribe population also this is popular among the Mundas. On the account of definition of tribe once D.N Majumder said that - ' Tribes, castes, sects and classes are the various categories of social stratification found in India. A tribe is a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations'. (Majumder, 1944.p107)

The Munda community' s tradition and culture are very rich. Many foreign and Indian anthropologists, linguistics, and historians have done very significant work in this regard. Among them Sarat Chandra Roy for his 'Mundas and their Country', Rev. John Hoffmann and Rev. Arthur Van for their Encyclopaedia Mundarica, 1950, Robert Parkin for his ' The Munda of Central India- An Account of Their Social Organization', H.H Risley for his ' The Tribes And Castes Of Bengal, 1892' G.A Grierson for his 'Linguistic Survey Of India', D.N Majumder for his Races and Cultures of India (1944) are remarkable.

In the march of time ' Many tribal groups have been detribalised or have been scattered all over the country so that many of these have lost their territorial affiliation.' (Majumder, 1944.p108). In India Mundas are no exception. They are considered a major tribe group. The community is also known as ' Buno' , ' Bonua' by the local Bengali people and outsiders (Non Tribal people) referred to as 'Bangal' here by the Mundas. Sarat Chandra Roy says on account of the early history of the Mundas –

“ A thick curtain of mystery hangs over the antiquities of this prehistoric tribes. Of their real origin and their primitive abode, we are in utter darkness; of their successive migrations in ancient times through different parts of India, we have no written records to enlighten us....The historian of India generally dismisses the consideration of these and other aboriginal tribes as " an unclaimed ignoble horde who occupy the background of Indian History as the jungle once covered the land to prepare the soil for better forms of life. (Roy, 1912, p1-2)

Also on the account of their origin S.C Roy said ' Thus we have grounds for interfering that The Mundas and other kolarian tribes originally lived in the hilly regions among the Aravally and Vindhyan ranges and gradually spread further to the north and occupied the valleys of the mighty rivers of Northern India, (Roy, 1912 p26) The Mundas are actually inhabitants of Chotanagpur, Jharkhand. Due to colonial forest act, alienation of land, as tree garden labourer and for cheap Railway labor, the colonial rulers brought them here in West Bengal. After that they were scattered in near about all the districts of West Bengal. Nadia district is just one of them. Munda word means village headmen. 'The name 'Munda' has been given to these people by their Hindu neighbors and it is exclusively used by all but the 'Munda' themselves also' (Hoffmann, 1928). Ethnically they are proto Australoids and speak in the Mundari dialect, but in addition to their original dialect here in Arpara, West Bengal, they speak 'Sadri' or 'Sadari'.

On the account of Mundas economic activity, Sarat Chandra Roy said in his ' Mundas and their Country' that - ' As for the pursuits of the Mundas in those early days, agriculture soon appears to have become their chief occupation. Besides this, iron smelting, as their as their ancient legends tell us, was unknown to people. (Roy, 1912, p121) Here in Arpara the main economic activity is agriculture like what Mr. Roy said in his book about Mundas. Although their primary economic activity is agriculture but beside that a large number of Munda raise cows (for milk and cow dung), goats, sheeps,pigs, hens, ducks etc. This bird and animals not only helps them in their agriculture but also provide them the side income for their living.On an average a typical Munda family of Arpara has three huts within their compound. One for the sleeping purpose, number two for making food and eating purpose, number three for their livestock. The wall of those huts are usually of mud sometime split bamboos and the roofs are either thatched (Sometimes metal sheet ' Tin').

As per the 2011 Census, the total population of west Bengal has been 91276115. Out of this 5296953 people are Adivasis And out of the 5296953 Munda people are 341542. Which is 7.8% of the total scheduled tribe population of West Bengal. To prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, and sex, the Constitution of India provides Article 15, Article 16, Article 235, Article 244, Article 164, Article 330, Article 332, Article 334, Article 335, Article 338, Article 339, FRA 2006, and many other laws.

The village in which conducted field work is named Arpara and is located in Santipur block, Nadia district of West Bengal. Total area of Arpara is 238.13 Hectares. The village has a population of 2127 of which 462 are Scheduled tribes (21.32%).It has an only one primary school (Arpara Adibasi Prathamik Vidyalaya) And one seconday school (Arpara Purna Chandra Barajiakur High school).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. In this article, the first objective was to collect data on the socio-economic features of the Munda people in Arpara, West Bengal.
- ii. To collect data on socio-economic difficulties usually faced by the Munda people in Arpara, West Bengal.

SOURCE OF DATA

- I. One hundred Munda households of Arpara village, P.O- Barajiakur, P.S- Santipur, Dist- Nadia, West Bengal.
- II. Books
- iii. Journals.
- iv. Data collected through discussions, and interviews.

The information for this article was collected during September 2022. Data on literacy, economy, and religious beliefs were collected from household surveys and took consent of the informants in this regard.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this article following research questions are taken into consideration,

- I. What are the social backgrounds of the Munda people who live in Arpara, West Bengal?
- ii. Are Mundas socially and economically backward in comparison with others?
- iii. If so, what are the reasons behind it?
- iv. Why are the Mundas the deprived section of society?
- v. Is there any assimilation problem?

PROBLEMS OF MUNDA PEOPLE IN WEST BENGAL

During the fieldwork, we found some issues, they are

- i. As they were living in their tribal society for a long time, now when they had to move to a Hindu society the assimilation problem began.
- ii. Some Munda people received higher education, and training and also got government services and for better living, migrated to the bigger city, but their clan's people did not get the benefit of enlightenment from them.
- iii. At the beginning of this article I told that agriculture is the most common economic activity in West Bengal's Munda people, but there is a problem with that. With the march of time as the family gets nuclear, the pressure on the family's land increased day by day, and for that reason, the family got poorer.

In Arpara most Munda people are very small and marginal farmers, only one or two of them are middle-class farmers. A big number of Mundas are agricultural laborers who only have one or half bighas of agricultural land. A new generation of Munda boys engaged in construction laborer and hotel jobs in Gujrat, Mumbai, Kerala, etc nowadays.

- iv. In West Bengal Sadri is a common language among the Mundas. When a Munda boy or girl goes to school they face language problems. As Bengali is not their mother language, they can't understand the classroom and hesitate to contact others. Imagine a kid who speaks and hears only Sadri but due to lack of communication, can't understand Mathematics, History and Geography etc.
- v. 'Their love of drink appears to have been almost an inborn propensity with the tribe...Then and now, The Munda, after a hard day's labour, knew no better occupation than drinking, dancing, and singing up to a late hour of the night' (Roy, 1912 P 121-122) The scenario is not changed not much even today. Boozing alcohol, Palm Wine (Tadi), and excessive drinking of homemade rice beer (Hadia) is a severe problem for the Munda community.
- vi. New generation of the Munda community is not so much interested in their own rich culture. Unlike Manasa Puja, Narayan Puja and New Year they are not much interested in their own Sohrai, Gohal and Karam puja.
- vii. The tendency to exploit the privileges of the tribals by showing fake tribal documents has increased to a great extent, which is also a major reason for the backwardness of the Munda or tribal society.
- viii. As at present by law non-tribals cannot buy tribal lands, a class of unscrupulous people are now taking tribal lands on leases of 50 or 60 years, which after a long period become impossible for the Mundas to get back. Mr. Himjal Munda, a Munda resident of Arpara confirms that.
- ix. Excessive politicization of tribal issues.
- x. Arpara village belongs to Arbandi-2 Gram Panchayat, and falls under Santipur block. The village is located at a distance of four kilometers from the nearest railway station Shantipur. The earthen road connecting Shantipur and Arpara has been neglected for at least the past forty years, with only once the road being paved by bricks.
- xi. Not only those who are from Arpara but a large number of West Bengal Munda community are not aware of their constitutional privilege and rights. Even in the initiative taken by the government there is not any memorable participation of this community.
- xii. With the march of time and contact with the non-tribal society, the Munda people have lost some of their typical tribal characteristics and behavior. As a result, we saw that some people detached themselves from the original Munda community.
- xiii. As Mr. Abhijit Munda (A Munda resident of Arpara) stated in an interview, besides the previous reasons, drop out from school, and marriage at an early age for this reason that the Munda community of Arpara, is lagging behind from the mainstream of society.
- xiv. Singing along with dancing in the group at the time of Karam Puja is a must to do a thing. They express their gratitude by dancing and singing to the Karam Raja. This festival usually celebrated either in the Bengali month of Bhadra/ Bhadra or in the month of Aaswin during the bengalis Durga Puja. This year Karam puja was not celebrated here in Arpara, although other Hindu festivals were celebrated accordingly by them. This shows the severe impact of Hinduism.
- xv. We did not find any 'Pahan'(Munda Priest) in Arpara. There is a 'Morolbari' in Arpara. 'Morol' means here a village headman. He is welcomed in each and every Munda households of Arpara and his opinion is carries a good amount of weightage among the Mundas, even today but their earlier glorious presence has decreased today.
- xvi. 'A tribe forbids its members to marry outside the tribe, the same in the case with caste. Inter-Cast marriages are also known, the Oraon-Munda, the Kharia-Munda of the Ranchi district providing such example....A member of a tribe must not marry within the clan he belongs to, but must marry in another clan belonging to the tribe' .(Majumder, 1944, p109) These rules regarding marriage are still followed by the Mundas today, but the earlier restrictions on marriage between Mundas and non-tribals are not so strictly observed.



Average Munda House of Arpara



Holy Karam Leaves

Due to these issues today the sole identity left with the Munda is their increasing poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and depeasantization. Although after seeing all these the observation is, the standard of living of an average Munda of Arpara are not satisfactory. Still the Mundas fail to cope up with their present condition. In Arpara out of the one hundred Munda households only four people working in the government sector. Only six people working as Anganwadi workers and there are only two people who are graduate. Today, they become more marginalized. It is the constitutional safeguard, only who saves the present Munda community of Arpara of West Bengal.

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