

Rural Cultural Communication: Mundari Folk and Reflection of Daily Struggle

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Abstract

The Munda tribe, primarily residing in Jharkhand and surrounding regions, is an Austroasiatic ethnic group known for its distinct folk art, culture and language. Their traditional art, including vibrant folk songs and dances, reflects a deep connection to their environment and way of life. The tribe's name "Munda" is derived from Sanskrit, meaning "headman," indicating an honorific label rather than a native term.

The Mundas live in remote, forested areas, relying on agriculture, fishing, hunting and animal husbandry for their livelihood. Their spiritual practices center around Singbonga, the supreme deity of wisdom and agriculture and their festivals like Sarhul celebrate the harvest and nature's bounty with communal festivities.

Munda folk art serves as a mode of cultural communication, bridging gaps and reinforcing community bonds. Their songs and dances celebrate unity, resilience and the acceptance of life's cyclical nature. The Munda community emphasizes collective strength and the joy found in music and dance, using these cultural practices to cope with adversity and express their unique worldview. Through their art, they articulate their struggles, joy and philosophy, highlighting their adaptability and enduring spirit amidst external pressures.

Keywords: Munda Tribe, Folk Art, Cultural Communication, Singbonga, Community Unity

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Introduction

The Mundari folk art form is associated with the Munda tribe dominant in Jharkhand. The Munda people are an Austroasiatic speaking ethnic group of India. They predominantly speak the Mundari language as their native language, which belongs to the Munda subgroup of Austroasiatic languages. They are mainly found in Chotanagpur Plateau region and it comes under most of the Jharkhand. Apart from Jharkhand they also reside in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal.

Robert Parkin notes that the term "Munda" did not belong to the Austroasiatic lexis and is of Sanskrit origin. According to R. R. Prasad, the name "Munda" is a Sanskrit word means "headman". It is an honorific name given by Hindus and hence became a tribal name.

They live in a remote area and hilly mountains, always surrounded with trees and forests. Currently in Jharkhand they share many culture traits with other Jharkhand tribals. Mostly their source of Income is based on farming and agriculture. They also do fishing, hunting and animal husbandry apart from agriculture for their survival and economic growth. Their rituals and gods are usually different from Hindu families reside in India. Their supreme god of wisdom is "Singbonga". The Deity mainly worship for agriculture and hunting operations. They also worship their nature for giving everything they want in their life. One of the main festivals of Munda Tribe is "Sarhul". It is celebrated in the month of March-April to make the farming fruitful. They take rice beer and dance for the whole night. There is an important saying about Munda tribes that they are like a bunch of bamboo sticks, if they are together no one can divide them but if any one of them leaves the group, then the whole group would break without a second thought.

Munda Folk songs and day to day struggle

Munda community find their life and fun living in the group. They always want to live in a group and that is the one Munda tribe accepted this life and death as they are. That's why their life is full of happiness and culture. There is a saying: reason that they have been surviving for a very long time because of this unity. They get inspire from each other to work harder. When there is a birth, there must be a death, then only the circle will remain alive and it keeps going. No one can escape this. There is a saying in Munda Tribe:

बोरोय रेओ मिसा गेम गोजोः,
का बोरोय रेओ बरसा काम गोजोः

It means if we are scared from death, we are going to die, if we are not scared from death, then also we will die. In both the cases we are going to die anyways. So, it's better to accept the truth as much earlier as possible and that's why Munda tribe leads calm and peaceful life full of music and culture. They enjoy each moment.

ने जोनोम बरसीड , डुङरे सलई बुगीन
दुरङ तेदो नीकुआ , पूजिएकना, गतिङ टोरेपे
कंसा पीतल पोवाह जनरे, हेना नमोह हेना बदलाओः
एन लेका अबू जोनोमाकन गतिङ रे
कुम्बर चटू पोवाह जनरे , कुम्बरताः ते कागे रुअड़ा
एन लेका आबू जोनोम दो गतिङ कागे रुअड़ा

It means this life is just for few days. Sing beautiful songs, songs are the only capital you earn in your life. Requesting everyone to sing more and more. Potter makes a vessel and sale it, but it never returns to him in one piece and life is all the same. So, sing more and more and enjoy the life. This spirit of Munda tribe shows love for music and their culture. Based on this truth they started living their life with so much of love and affection.

Daily life of Munda tribe starts with hard work and labour not with worship. They are very simple yet very advance in their own thoughts. They move around the forests and do labour. When they come home in the evening, the group (Akhra) welcome them with full of high spirit and warmth and this explains how labour and happiness both are deeply connected with each other.

सिंगी दोबु सीयुः , कमिया

अयूब नपड़ दुमग दनगोड़ी

It means we will work in the morning and dance on the beats of Maandal (a Percussion Instrument) whole night. It also indicates that they do not believe in rituals and discipline. They believe that discipline and rituals make the life uncomfortable. Normally in Hindu tradition if we will look close into it, the festivals we celebrate, bind us in a situation where we must do some rituals at some time which also stop us enjoying that moment freely but in Munda tribe scenario is totally different. They do the quiet opposite; they do the ritual to just invite their ancestors to make them part of the festival. Even they invite their god and ancestors to drink “Handiya” (local alcoholic drink).

सिरमा रेन सिंगबोंगा, आते रेन देवे कुंवारी

ने बाहा पोरोब रे, ने बुगीन हुलंग रे

मीद पुडुह डियंग, मीद पुडुह मंडी

आले लो: आले पांति रेह, नु लेम जोम ले

In this we can see that Munda doesn't want to make God happy or fully dedicate themselves to the god. Rather they feel happier when they invite their ancestor to come and get drunk with them. They think more of enjoying together rather than doing the rituals whole day and make the God happy. After the worship, they all come into “Akhra” and dance on the beats of Maandal whole night and the next day. The happiness and sorrow are the two expressions. Everyone feels that but to tackle the sorrow Munda tribe has made a system which does not affect them. They know about pain and sorrow but at the same time, they know how to manage it.

ने हेतु तला रे जोनोमअ कनाबू रे

दुकू सुकु सोबोन मेनअ बिधि ए ओलअ कदा रे

देला तोरे सोब धोन मिसाइड लेल लेमा रे अलो धोनिम हियाटीदा नेका संसार गे

It is a conversation between husband and wife. He is saying that the world is like this only and we have each other and that is enough. We don't need something else. If there will be sorrow, we would face it together, if there is happiness we share it together. Munda tribe spend their whole life in the current moment. They do not think about what good or bad would happen. In "NatyaShashtra", Bharatmuni has written that drama is a way of forgetting sorrow. It makes you live in the current moment, where you don't have to think about all the things happening in life whether it is for good or for bad. Singing and Dancing does the same for Munda Tribe. After daily hustle of life, they come to home and go to Akhra, start singing and dancing and forget about everything else. It is also because there is no audience. If there is an audience, then of course you will get conscious but here in Akhra everyone is artist and everyone is audience. There is no one to tell or teach you if this is right or wrong. They all are there just because they want to live and enjoy that moment. Jagdish Trigunayat has said in his study that, although singing and dancing helps them a lot to forget whatever bad things happening to them but there is a limit for that too. Those who can't sleep in the night, they can only express it through singing. One can see poverty, cold, hunger, etc. in Munda tribe folk songs. They happily drink all the poison and sorrow which normal society gives them and still they put smile and say nothing.

Munda tribe eloped so many times that now they don't even know where they belong. The study I am doing shows the area of Chotanagpur in Jharkhand where they came after a very long time.

हे तीतर जंगल जल रहा है

जंगल दहक रहा है तीतर

हे असकल पहाड़ जल रहा है

पहाड़ धु-धु कर जल रहा है असकल

हे तीतर जंगल तो जल रहा है

हम कहाँ दाना चुगने जाएंगे

हे असकल पहाड़ तो जल रहा है

हम कहाँ चरने जाएंगे
हे तीतर आधे जंगल में आग लगी है
हम आधे भाग में दाना चुगने जाएंगे
हे असकल आधे पहाड़ में आग लगी है
हम आधे भाग में चरने जाएंगे

When a forest catches fire, it just doesn't burn the trees, even it burns the homes of millions of animals, birds, insects and many more. It is not about burning the forest; it describes that how Munda tribe always look for other opportunity when the forest catches fire instead of crying and asking for any help. It says they go in other half of the forest where there is no fire. This also shows the positivity of looking forward despite being affected. This song is a synonym of Sad and happiness. This is an indicator of the struggling history of Mundari life in which he is constantly attacked by external forces and driven from his motherland.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Mundari folk art and cultural practices of the Munda tribe provide valuable lessons for the broader community. Their expressive folk songs and dances not only reflect their deep connection to their environment and way of life but also offer universal insights into managing adversity and celebrating life's moments. The Munda tribe's emphasis on unity, resilience and living in the moment can inspire individuals to embrace challenges with optimism and to find joy in their daily lives.

The Munda's approach to life—highlighted by their ability to adapt and seek opportunities amidst difficulties—serves as a powerful reminder of the strength found in community solidarity and personal resilience. By integrating these practices into our own lives, common people can learn to navigate their struggles more effectively and appreciate the value of cultural expression as a means of coping and connecting with others. Furthermore, their practices of joyfully engaging with traditions, rather than being bound by rigid rituals, can encourage a more flexible and positive

outlook on life's challenges. Overall, the Munda tribe's cultural practices offer valuable strategies for fostering happiness, community and resilience in everyday life.

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