

# Historical Evolution and Cultural Resilience of the Munda Tribe in Jharkhand

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## ABSTRACT

Many indigenous peoples have made Jharkhand, "the land of forests and tribal heritage," their home and developed complex social, economic, and cultural systems that have persisted for generations. This study examines the Munda people of Jharkhand through the lens of their cultural resilience, historical context, and the difficulties they face today. The research follows these communities from prehistoric times all the way through colonial and post-independence periods, illuminating their ongoing fight for recognition, equality, and stable economic opportunities. Using women as focal points and socio-capital as a measure of community cohesiveness, the study delves into their traditional practices, family dynamics, and socio-cultural values. Additionally, it highlights how indigenous knowledge systems and non-wood forest products (NWFPs) are crucial to tribal communities' ability to survive and thrive in the face of industrialization and urbanization. The study's overarching goal is to promote socioeconomic empowerment via inclusive development that honors and protects tribal heritage through the use of a multidisciplinary approach that seeks to shed light on the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity.

**Keywords:** Tribal Communities, Munda, Cultural, Traditional, Indigenous

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## INTRODUCTION

One of India's most notable indigenous groups, the Munda, live mostly in the eastern and central regions of the country, including Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Assam. The Mundas are a distinct cultural and social entity on the Indian subcontinent, and they are among the most important Adivasi (tribal) people in history. Their language, Mundari, is a member of the Austroasiatic language family's Munda sub-family, and they are linguistically classed as members of the Austroasiatic group. The Munda people have managed to maintain their unique social structure and cultural identity through all the political, economic, and religious upheavals that have befallen them over the years. One of the main points of their historical development story is how resilient they are. Archaeological and linguistic evidence points to the Munda people's existence on the Indian subcontinent long before Indo-Aryan and Dravidian groups arrived, proving that their heritage extends back thousands of years. The Mundas were a people that lived and worked in harmony with the natural world; they were known for their shifting agriculture and long history of living in and around forests. The stories, oral traditions, rituals, and religious beliefs of these people show how the spiritual and the natural are closely related. Many Munda people have converted to Christianity in the post-colonial period, especially in the wake of the nineteenth-century missionary campaigns, although animism, totemism, and ancestor worship remain important parts of Munda cosmology.

The colonial era had a profound impact on the Mundas' historical trajectory. Land revenue settlements and the zamindari system were two British colonial programs that upended traditional tribal land ownership and economic autonomy. Discontent and relocation were common outcomes of the forced labor system and the exploitation of indigenous resources. In response, a notable rebellion was staged by the Munda tribe in the late 19th century, spearheaded by the renowned independence warrior Birsa Munda. The Ulgulan, sometimes called the "Great Tumult" (1899–1900), was an uprising that sought to create Munda Raj while also fighting against feudal tyranny and British colonial rule. Birsa Munda is a renowned hero in Jharkhand and a symbol of tribal resistance and assertion; the movement, while repressed in the end, left an indelible impression on tribal consciousness and Indian history. The Mundas' fight for freedom took new shapes after their independence. The Munda people have endured social and economic marginalization, underdevelopment, and threats despite constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Tribes and the Fifth Schedule. By carving apart Jharkhand from Bihar in 2000, the distinct culture and long-standing aspirations of the indigenous people, particularly the Mundas, were partially acknowledged. Nonetheless, the community is still dealing with problems including land exploitation, insufficient political representation, and relocation from mining and industrial enterprises, and dangers to traditional ways of life.

The Munda people have shown remarkable cultural endurance in the face of these hardships. Traditions such as their language, festivals (such as Mage Parab, Sarhul, and Karam), social structure based on clans, customary laws, and music and dance styles (like the world-renowned Munda dance) are all preserved and handed down over the years. Additionally, the community has shown flexibility by actively participating in contemporary educational systems, governmental processes, and development projects, all the while working to maintain its unique character. Through centuries of change—colonialism, state creation, and globalization—this study of the historical history and cultural resilience of the Munda tribe in Jharkhand seeks to understand how the group has managed to preserve the core of its cultural legacy. Appreciating the tribal variety in India and developing inclusive development strategies that honor indigenous knowledge systems and rights both need an understanding of the Munda experience.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Dutta, Pallabi & Rahman, Md. (2022). There are many other tribal tribes in Bangladesh, but the Munda are unique among them in their religion, culture, language, and body of knowledge, all of which have developed over many centuries. They live in the country's wooded regions. Originally from India, the Munda people have lived in Bangladesh for almost 300 years. Though they have a rich cultural heritage and a long history of achievement, the Mundas are one of Bangladesh's most despised populations. The Munda people, who reside in the Sundarbans ecological zone, namely in the village of Kalinchi, face significant dangers from salinity intrusion, tropical cyclones, storm surges, and other natural catastrophes. There are few places in the country as vulnerable as this. In order to assist the Munda people are more resilient, this project will study their ancestral way of life, traditional subsistence skills, and housing pattern. A preliminary anthropological study sought to identify their indigenous ancestry, cultural practices, and the historical events that forcibly removed them from their homeland. They then used architectural interventions to achieve self-sufficiency while preserving the original traits. In addition to highlighting their original past to the world community, this may also help preserve their ethnic identity. The overarching objective of the framework is to address the issue of climate change while simultaneously lowering the cost of construction materials.

Roy, sajal. (2018). The Munda people of Bangladesh have been particularly hard hit by natural disasters like tropical cyclones, floods, salinity intrusion, starvation, and heat waves, which have had lasting impacts on their way of life in the village of Kalinchi in the Shyamnagar upazilla (subdistrict), Satkhira. Kalinchi lies close to the Sundarbans Forest and the banks of the Dhojkhali River. For many coastal peoples in the southwestern region of Bangladesh, this world-renowned mangrove forest is an essential source of income. Traditional methods of subsistence for the Adivasi Munda people of Kalinchi include gathering honey, fishing and crab hunting in the river and channel forests, and tree and wood cutting in the Sundarbans Forest. On May 9, 2009, the devastating Cyclone Aila threatened to disrupt livelihoods. The main focus of this chapter is on the ecological and economic effects of Aila on the traditional ways of life in the Sundarbans in the long run. The present research then examines resiliency via the eyes of the untouchable Adivasi Munda people who live in close proximity to the Sundarbans Forest in Bangladesh. The researchers in this study used an autoethnographic method that combined focus groups with in-person interviews to gather participants' personal stories.

Siddiq, Abu et al., (2018) as one of the biggest tribes on the Indian subcontinent, the Munda have a distinct cultural identity. They are culturally and religiously separate, and they have a long history of living in their own language. Currently, they are residing in various geographical locations around Bangladesh. For the Munda people, subsistence hunting and gathering has deep historical roots. Some Mundas continue to live in harmony with nature, even though their traditional way of life has been mostly eradicated in the area due to various governmental shifts and technological developments. The Munda tribe's hunting and gathering habits are the subject of this research, which aims to compile information on these behaviors and the ways in which the Munda tribe achieves its sustenance needs in harmony with nature. The Munda people of Palkichara hamlet in northeastern Bangladesh have been the subjects of anthropological investigation with this goal in mind. To gather information on subsistence patterns and socio-cultural systems, researchers have used exploratory case studies, participant and non-participant observations, and individual, household, and group interviews. This research provides strong factual and anthropological evidence that the Munda people of Palkichara hamlet continue to practice their traditional way of life in spite of the socioeconomic pressures they face. Hunting and gathering are fundamental to their way of life, as this clearly shows. Furthermore, this study implies that the Mundas in Palkichara may showcase the subsistence tactics of ancient hunter-gatherers, since they are intimately connected to nature and almost uncontacted by the outside world.

Alam, Shamsheer & Kumari, Meena. (2017). This study makes an effort to provide an anthropological perspective on cultural heritage and its preservation. After illuminating the similarities and differences between anthropological and non-anthropological perspectives on culture, it explores the origins and development of human civilization. With a focus on the indigenous and tribal people of Jharkhand, India, the writers also argue for the value of preserving cultural artifacts and highlight the anthropological aspects of this field. The essay primarily focuses on potential actions that

might be taken to preserve the tribal culture of Jharkhand and other tribal areas whose traditions are in danger of extinction.

Kumari, Laxmi & Rahman, Md. (2021). The current research aims to illustrate how indigenous groups see sustainable development. The study's overarching goal is to provide light on the self-awareness that these indigenous groups have maintained from their earliest days. Since the Munda people of Jharkhand are numerous, we may readily gauge their perspective on the significance of forest preservation and livelihood development if we conduct our research among them. The research focused on the tribe's cultural knowledge and socio-capital in relation to their way of life. It stressed that women are crucial to improving people's standard of living. It demonstrated the commercial and industrial uses of NWFP that do not deplete natural resources, which contributes to sustainable development. The research went on to explain how the tribe's sustainable livelihoods boosted state coffers and provided a hand to the economically disadvantaged in the society.

### **Tribals In Jharkhand**

The hilly and forested state of Jharkhand is home to a diverse tribal population with a history that spans generations. Jharkhand is a state in eastern India known for its many indigenous tribes, each of which has its own distinct history, customs, and way of life. The tale of these indigenous peoples is one of perseverance in the face of adversity and change, a testament to their unbreakable connection with the land and their strength of character. Village life is the norm for 91.7% of indigenous people, as shown in the 2001 census. Jharkhand is home to 32 distinct tribal tribes, which are categorized as follows: 1. People who hunt and collect food - Birhor, Korwa, highland Kharia. 2. Agriculture in transition - Sauria, Paharia... 3. Uncomplicated Craftspeople - Mahli, Lohra, Karmali, Chik Baraik. 7. Santhal, Munda, Oraon, ho, and Bhumij are settled farmers. The following ways in which the historical path of tribal people may be described:

### **Ancient Roots**

There is evidence that the tribal people of Jharkhand have lived in the area from ancient periods, and their history goes all the way back to that time. The early social and cultural activities of these indigenous communities have been somewhat illuminated by artifacts and cave paintings discovered during archaeological digs that date back thousands of years. Traditional subsistence for these long-gone communities came from hunting and gathering, with an emphasis on the region's rich natural resources.

### **Impact of urban and more advanced communities**

The contact between tribal groups of Jharkhand and more developed urban populations was a watershed moment in their history. Over time, the agricultural methods and hierarchical social structure of the more developed societies began to permeate the territories occupied by the indigenous peoples. As a result, there were territorial and resource disputes, and some indigenous tribes were forced to assimilate into the more developed ones.

### **Colonial Era**

Additional chaos for Jharkhand's indigenous communities came during the colonial era. The indigenous people of the area were marginalized and exploited by policies enacted by the British East India Company, which sought to exploit the region's abundant natural riches and arable land. In order to create room for mining, plantations, and infrastructure developments, indigenous communities were forcefully removed from their traditional territories. During this time, several indigenous groups rose up in rebellion against British control, fighting for the preservation of their culture and independence.

### **Struggle for Identity and Rights**

The tribal groups of Jharkhand still had a hard time claiming their rights and expressing their identity after India gained independence in 1947. Rapid industry and urbanization followed independence, further displacing indigenous people and encroaching on tribal territories. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), a grassroots organization that fought for tribal rights and self-determination, was formed in the 1970s as a result.

### **Statehood and Empowerment**

After decades of fighting, the state of Jharkhand was finally established on November 15, 2000. The creation of the new state was a watershed moment for the indigenous tribes, giving them more freedom and a voice to defend their historical, social, and political rights. Affirmative action programs, reserve rules, and tribal welfare programs were all put in place to help underprivileged communities and rectify past wrongs.

### **Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities**

The tribal groups of Jharkhand still confront a lot of problems, even though they have made a lot of progress recently. Tribal communities continue to face significant challenges, including economic inequality, inadequate healthcare and

education, and environmental deterioration. Worldwide, indigenous communities are facing challenges to their cultural practices and way of life as a result of urbanization and globalization.

### **Living Conditions And Family Life Of Munda Tribe People**

Rural regions have long been home to the Munda people. They rely on organic resources to construct their dwellings. Common materials utilized in these traditional buildings include thatched roofs, mud, and bamboo. These buildings fit in with their surroundings because they are sturdy and simple. Houses in the neighborhood represent the way people live, which is closely tied to nature. Traditional Munda houses are still the standard in most communities, while some have opted for concrete housing as a consequence of industrialization.

In order to combat the heat weather, their home's layout is intentionally open and functional. As a means of fostering solidarity and camaraderie, the Mundas often build modest communal huts to host religious and social events.

The Munda way of life revolves on their family. The family structure is patriarchal because it is based on the idea that the eldest man in the household should serve as a symbol. The "Sagai" is the location of the engagement ceremony and the "Bidai" is the departure of the bride from her parents' home to that of her husband. These are the initiation rituals. Women are highly esteemed in Munda households and perform vital roles in agriculture and housework.

Women do not handle the family's money matters; males do. Marriage in the Munda tribe is a joyous ceremony that is celebrated with traditional music, dancing, and feasting. Cultural rites that have been handed down over many generations are abundant in these weddings. When it comes to marriage and family life, the elders have a great deal of sway on the younger generations. The bonds of family extend well beyond the traditional nuclear family. Most family members remain nearby, so there is always someone to lean on in times of need. The fundamental purpose of the Munda people's reverence for elders and the idea of familial unity are to maintain social order within the tribe.

### **Situation of Munda Tribe In Jharkhand**

The Kol were the most common adjectives used to describe the most archaic of the Austro-Asiatic speaking tribes, including the Santhal, Munda, Ho, Bhumji, Kharia, Kharwar, Korwa, and Oraon. Their languages were grouped along with others in the Mundari or Austro-Asiatic language family. Oh, and by the way, this unique language family is quite similar to the one that the indigenous Australians use. During the time when the British were colonizing India, the word Kol became associated with evil. Slaves, militants, aggressive people, and those who work in low-status occupations were all characterized by their use.

When you think of the great Kol race, you probably see Munda. People from the Munda tribe live in Southeast Asia. Their appearance is characterized by a low face angle, a large nose, thick lips, a sparse beard, a small stature, and robust limbs. Their skin is a dark brown nearly black color. Their heads are longer than the normal Dravidian's.

The districts of Ranchi, Pashchimi Singhbhum, Palamu, Purbi Singhbhum, and Gumla had the majority of this tribe's members in the 2001 census. Santhal, Munda, and Ho all share a symbolic system that places a high importance on the forest, which is symbolized in the community by the holy grove. In 2013, Berger and Heidemann published Tribal people don't practice Hinduism, but it doesn't stop them from pursuing wild things. The tribal territory of Jharkhand has taken a beating from modern technology and industry, yet the integrity of the tribal values has remained unchanged. The indigenous people of Jharkhand have always been and continue to be deeply committed to communal subsistence farming, and their egalitarian worldview leaves little room for classical thinking or ideals. The indigenous people of Jharkhand cherish the hill, river, and forest as sacred places. Their rescue is within their reach. As it is, the Munda people of modern India are feeling the effects of forest reservation and non-tribal intrusion. Due to urbanization and industrialization, many other indigenous communities are also experiencing the issue of relocation. Members of a tribe often shed their tribal identity when they relocate to cities. Tragically, corporations and Naxals both take advantage of the abundant natural riches found in tribal areas for profit.

### **Socio-Capital And Cultural Development Among Munda Tribe**

Social ties and casual contact between people are the focus of socio-capital. In a socio-capital society, people are more likely to trust one another, have similar traits, work together, and support one another because they have a shared sense of character. Factors such as the character of internal and external connections, correspondence, trust, and reciprocal attributes and norms are integral to the communications that give rise to the concept of socio-capital growth. By "social capital," we mean not just the value of people but also the value of the relationships between them.

As it grows from subtle social linkages and processes that underpin system creation, socio-capital is an invisible kind of capital. Within the tribal group, women play a crucial role. How the members of the network divide up tasks affects their ability to make a living. The social and cultural norms that a society adopts are shaped by the expectations placed on its male and female members. The term "gender roles" refers to the ways of thinking, behaving, and believing that a



society has come to define as typical of a person's biological gender. Gender roles in the workplace are concrete manifestations of the ways in which different societies assign and expect men and women to carry out certain types of labor.

It is not uncommon to observe indigenous women working in the field, either planting seeds or gathering produce. As a general rule, it governs how people act in a certain social setting, particularly when interacting with other people of the same gender. Asset assembly and the board are often responsibilities that fall on females, according to division of labor. Feminine responsibilities include gathering water, firewood, and other natural resources. The kind of activities that family members participate in enhances their family's ability to get government support and be actively involved. In the past, people's physical characteristics dictated their gender roles, which contributed to a system of shared labor among families and communities. Gender equality has ensured that women have the same legal protections as men in all public spheres. With men's help, the development program can provide women the same opportunities as men.

#### **Non-Wood Forest Product (NWFP) And Sustainable Livelihood For Munda Tribe**

Other than wood: By "forest product," we mean anything made from wood. Industrial and commercial products that do not rely on wood or other direct forest products but instead make use of biomass or other resources obtained from forest ecosystems are known as this. Living in harmony with nature, the Munda people have long recognized the value of forests and the role they play in ensuring a nation's long-term prosperity. Because they are well-versed in the functions of forests and the raw commodities derived from them, such as trees and wood, they are steadfast in their opposition to industrialization, which threatens forest land. Not only is the forest an important source of revenue for them, but they are also very protective of it. These woodland grounds are quite delicate for them. Through a variety of small-scale enterprises, the Munda Tribal group has been able to secure a sustainable life from these forests. The state government now receives a substantial amount of cash from the commercial usage of tendu leaves in the production of local bidis.

Its fruit is consumed and traded for profit as well. Native Americans traditionally utilized the bark as a remedy for smallpox by burning it. Additionally, the leaves find usage in packing and shipping. Porcelain plates may also be crafted from tendu leaves. Because to the high population density of this tribe on Jharkhand's Chotanagpur plateau, it provides a significant amount of revenue.

Tribal herbal medicine is another sustainable means of subsistence for them. Historically, indigenous communities have depended on traditional healing practices for both common and serious health issues. A new approach to integrating indigenous inborn medicine with other therapeutic systems is necessary. It is important to document this traditional ancestral knowledge of medicinal and homegrown plants, standardize it, and keep it in memory as a type of free medicine. You may rely on the local tribal community, especially its traditional healers, to treat you for a price, etc. Their revenue is also generated from animal husbandry, poultry, and fishing. These tasks are often carried out on a smaller scale and from the comfort of their own homes.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Native peoples of Jharkhand and the Munda people in particular, have a long history of cultural practices that are strongly related to the environment, family, and community. These communities have shown incredible resiliency in maintaining their traditions and way of life in the face of centuries of marginalization and the disruptive forces of industrialization and urban growth. This research has shed light on the intricate relationship between their traditional practices and the socioeconomic issues they confront today. Clearly, development strategies should take into account the environmental, social, and cultural factors that shape tribal lives in addition to economic ones. Achieving their rightful place in mainstream development requires empowering these communities via democratic government, protecting land rights, and promoting indigenous knowledge systems. Policies that honor the tribal people of Jharkhand, listen to their concerns, and work to save their traditions and knowledge are crucial to the state's tribal population's long-term viability and social justice.

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