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Folklore of Austro-Asiatic Tribes of Central India: A Sociological Reading

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Abstract

This paper analyses the folklores of the Munda family of tribes from a sociological perspective. The word 'Munda' has been used here in a generic sense for the Austro-Asiatic tribes living mostly in Jharkhand and parts of Odisha and West Bengal. The group had a large number of folklores. While some of the folklores have been collected by scholars and are thus preserved most of them have been lost. In this paper some of folklores have been kept in original Munda verses in order to give to the readers a feel of them, while for others, especially the lengthy ones, English translation has been presented, maintaining the soul of the folklores. The Mundas have folklores for every occasion—be it of joy or sorrow—that not only unfolds their worldview, social values and ethics but also gives meaning to life and existence. In the folklores resided their world, and in them the Mundas lived. At a time when the folklores have nearly disappeared from the society, and interpretation of the folklores of the Mundas is yet to be taken up by scholars in a comprehensive way, this paper analyses their significance in Munda society and culture.

Introduction

In the decades following Independence, social-intercourse of the non-tribal community with tribal communities has increased manifold, particularly after the internet era practically converted the world into a Global Village. But few know that tribes are natural story-tellers and that their societies abound in folklores. Much of these folklores have been in oral tradition, though quite a few have now been collected and converted into written words, thanks to some scholars.

There is a very popular adage about the Mundas: '*Sen gi susun, kaji gi durang*'—which when translated, roughly means 'Their walking is like dancing; and talking is singing'. The Munda family of tribes—Kompats, Hos, Santhals, Kharias, Bhumij and others like Birhors, Chero and Asurs (Kumar 2002:1), whom anthropologists call Austro-Asiatic, have a story to tell or a folktale to narrate or a lore to sing, at every occasion. In fact, every occasion is an important occasion for them, whether they are ploughing the field or transplanting paddy in monsoon. For every season of the year, there is a different rhythm in which they will narrate the folklore, sing songs, or dance or play the musical instruments like *tuila, kendra, mandar* or *nagara*. Just as the folklore, dance and music too follow the age-old rhythm of that particular season. This rhythm is thus centred on nature and the changes the latter goes through round the year.

With the onset of modern education among the Mundas, various folklores that were sort of general knowledge for every other Munda child started disappearing. Thanks to some scholars who managed to collect them and write them down that some folklore has been preserved. Jagdish Trigunayat (1970) author of two important books on Mundas—*Munda Lokkathayen* and *Basuri Bajrahi hai* -quoting Verrier Elwin's letter to Archer, writes

There is not a single analysis of folklores in old poems. I have turned thousands of pages of huge sociological books of Thornton, Risley, Ananthkrishna Aiyer, Russel and Hiralal; they are dark books of *Krishna paksha*. These books do not express the *chhand* (verse) and *lay* (rhythm) of the folklores. (Trigunayat 1970:3)

Until the 1950s, tribes were considered creatures of a 'strange world', whose 'legs are up and heads are down' and hence their folklores not worthy of study (Trigunayat 1970:4). But efforts of people like Elwin, Archer and Shamrao Hiwale, who worked among tribes in Central Indian

region managed to bring about some changes in perception. When it comes to Austro-Asiatic Munda group of tribes, scholars like S.C. Roy, J.B. Hoffman, P. Ponnet earlier, and more recently Ram Dayal Munda, Rose Kerketta, Asoka Kumar Sen, Aditya Prasad Sinha, Joakim Dunddung and a few others have done some commendable works in their own ways. Some of the folklores I have with me about Austro-Asiatic Munda tribes are taken from the books authored by these scholars, though a good number of them have come to me straight from the society by way of my association with the Munda community as a member.

Munda World in their Folklores

The paper analyses the Folklores of the Mundas sociologically under four different heads: i) Symbiotic relationship of the Mundas with Flora and Fauna; ii) Mundas' world in Agriculture and Farming; iii) Marriage and other Social Functions, and iv) Gender Equality.

Mundas and the natural world

For the Mundas, flora and fauna are part of their world. Traditionally, they did not see flora and fauna as just as mere commodities to be used for self-aggrandisement. They used forest as much as their needs demanded of forest; but they were not supposed to use forest to promote their wealth. This approach applies to land too. Even a hill or river had an existence of its own, and it could not be destroyed at will. Wild animals were regarded as creatures with equal rights to have their own habitat and life. Therefore, unmindful killing of wild animals had always been prohibited traditionally.

However, in recent decades, most of these traditional sociological values of the Mundas with regard to flora and fauna have eroded completely. With the coming of modern education and with it the new set of values based on consumerism, traditional Munda values vis-à-vis flora and fauna have disappeared.

Agriculture and Farming

Though hunting and food gathering had been their ancient occupation, Mundas today are basically a farming community. There are several folklores in the community which throw light on the agricultural life of the Mundas.

Marriage and Other social functions

Marriage is a compulsory act that every Munda boy and girl has to go through in life, according to Munda ethos. Folklore even talks of how marriage as an institution was instituted by God himself.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is distinctive feature of the Munda tribes. Women enjoy as much social importance as the men do, though certain social functions are male affairs. But almost all walks of life, the women are thought to be equal partner to the men. Even in decision-making women play important roles, both inside the house as well as outside. In the subsequent sections we will elaborate upon these markers of Munda society from a perspective which emerges from their folklores and define their customs and traditions.

Symbiotic Relationship with Flora and Fauna: Defining the Munda society

The very character of less complex society is that the human agent's level of resource exploitation is so low that the provider natural ambience as a habitat sinews itself so calmly that the human society within it becomes a natural part of the entire ecological existence. Munda society's symbiosis with its ambience thus creates a sustainable coexistence which not only shapes its socio-economical presence but also various traits of their cultural expression. Folktales often express this inherent symbiotic side of Munda society.

A long time ago, there was a Munda couple that lived in the Munda *dishum* (country). When the only son of the Munda couple became an adult, the father found a beautiful young woman and got her married to the son. They were allotted a separate room in the house. The father-in-law had huge tracts of land, an equally large livestock and a large black dog *Kalu*. The dog would sleep near the door of the house and sincerely keep vigil during night.

One night, *Kalu* barked hard and the father woke up abruptly. He thought some stray cattle might have turned up in the courtyard and was making a noise, to which *Kalu* barked. He kept lying down on his bed, but with a vigilant ear to the sounds. After a while, *Kalu* stopped barking. But on the following night at the

same hour, Kalu barked again. The father, however, thought that Kalu might again be barking habitually at some stray animal. On successive nights too, Kalu kept repeating his barks at the same hour of the night.

One night Kalu barked too hard and the old man decided to get up from his bed and see for himself. He slowly came out of his room and tip-toed to the main door of his house. To his horror he saw a sight that frightened him to the core. He thought he had seen some bad dream. Or it was probably a hallucination. He went back to his bed and lay down trying to quieten his mind. The sight of that night would not go from the old man's mind and would keep coming back again and again even during the day. But he decided not to discuss it with anyone. Night came and at the same hour Kalu barked hard again. The old man gathered courage and walked to the door of the house. To his horror again, he saw the same sight. A woman had taken the form of a huge animal with her nose too long and legs like logs. Her ears had grown too big and they dangled in the air. She slowly turned herself into her original self and when she had completed changing form, the old man now clearly saw that she was his daughter-in-law. 'So, it's my daughter-in-law!' he told himself in complete disbelief. 'She converted herself into an animal and went out at night to roam about; and Kalu barked at her when she came back home to change her form again!' the old man had not doubt now. 'Stop there,' he ordered in a trembling voice. And when she stood in front of him, he said with a voice more stern, "You have deceived me. Adopt the form of the same animal and go away from my house. No longer shall I keep you in my house". The old man then called out his son who slept in the room snoring in complete ignorance of what was happening outside, and said, "Son, you have not bothered to keep knowledge of what your wife does. You too must leave my house at once and go with her".

From that night onwards, the daughter-in-law and the son left the house of the Munda. The daughter-in-law converted herself into that same animal and then converted her own husband too, and left for the forest. They became elephants and lived in the forest.

The young Munda couple, who were now elephant couple, roamed about at night in the forests and forest-villages in search of food and water. On occasional instances, they went to the agriculture field of their father and ate, to their heart's content, paddy and other agricultural produces. The old Munda allowed them to have as much as they needed for their sustenance, but did not welcome them back home. All the elephants are now the descendants of this same young Munda couple. Their mother tongue is Mundari and they continue to converse among themselves in the same tongue. Whenever, they hear this tongue speak, they understand all the spoken words and obey what is being told to them.¹

The above folktale has been collected from the Kompat Munda and Kheria (Kharia) clans of the Munda family of tribes residing in Simdega-Sundergarh region of Jharkhand-Odisha borders. Elephant herds reside in good number in the forests of this region and the tribesmen there happily co-exist with the elephants, though the herds regularly visit their agricultural fields in the evenings and eat up their foodgrains. The villagers there believe that elephants are the extended clans of their own tribal group. They believe that elephants too are Munda in origin, though they look different from them. They believe that the elephants understand Mundari language and when they say '*dola hra hora te*' (go on your path), the later follow their instructions and leave their agricultural fields after eating stomach-full without harming them. If at all any harm comes, it does from tuskers who is not in the herd and lives alone. Therefore, lone tusker is dangerous, the Mundas claim. The animal world, thus for the Mundas, is an extended world of the Munda world.

The Mundas have lived with flora and fauna since centuries and a bulk of their folklores talk of their co-existence with the Nature and animals. In recent days, the shrinking of habitat of wild animals has brought many instances of man-animal conflicts. However, the Mundas have always considered animals as part of their world, though sociological phenomena like *Bisu Sendra*—annual hunting ritual, is present in the Munda society. Hunter and food gatherer society that the Munda group has been, Sendra allows killing for food in limited sense of the term and killing of big animals like elephants, tigers, lions, bears etc are understandably prohibited. In fact, in recent years, this ritual of annual hunting is completely self-restricted by the tribes themselves.

There is another folklore usually found in the Kompat Munda group who reside in Tamar-Bundu area of Ranchi region which tells how cows came to be domesticated. According to this, a man one day brings home a herd of cows and calves after they agree to live with him. They help him in agriculture; and as per mutual understanding, a portion of the man's harvest belonged to the cows. However, after a few years the man grew greedy and he stopped giving the cows their share of the harvest. The cows complained this to Singbonga, the Munda God; and they started leaving the house of the man. The man pleaded with Singbonga to play the role of a mediator and Singbonga did. But Singbonga strictly directed the man not to break the mutual agreement and give the cows' share of the harvest. He even instituted a festival—which today is celebrated as Sohrai, when the Munda householder honours the cattle and feeds them with good food.

Not just with cows, there are folklores about dogs and cats. These beings are the extended family members of the Munda household. Horses, however, are alien to the Mundas.

There are folktales that talk of different trees and their flowers; there are folktales about hills and dales of particular regions. Sometimes, folklores tell how a particular festival originated and came to be celebrated.

Mother, what kind of mahua is this that bloomed before its time,

Mother, what kind of sakhua (*shorea robusta*) is this that blossomed before its time;

Son, this is Fagun mahua, therefore it bloomed before time,

Son, it is Chait sakhua, therefore it blossomed before time!" (Faisal and Vasavi 2008: 37).

Sarhul is a popular festival of the Munda tribes celebrated in the month of *Fagun*—in March-April. The Ho clan of the Munda group calls this festival *Baha porob* (festival of flowers). This festival is believed to mark the pregnancy of the Earth with greenery all around after her marriage with the Sun. The Munda tribes start using the new leaves, flowers and fruits only after they offer prayers to the Earth for her bounty on the occasion of Sarhul or Baha.

Trees and herbs hold special significance in the world of the Munda tribes. They have well-developed herbal treatment system and they depend much less on other medical systems for their

health and well-being. There are established rules as to how to collect herbs for medicinal use from the forest. The herbal practitioner has to move into the forest early in the morning before breakfast and collect only a portion of the herb, without uprooting the plant so that the plant continues to live and care the needy patients. Healthcare for them has to be easily accessible irrespective of the rich and poor. They are deadly against commercialization of herbs and herbal knowledge.

Much of their songs and dances are based on the forest and its rhythms. The Kompat clan of the Mundas sings this lore—

“In the hills, under the flowers,
On the bank of the river, under a *kadam* tree,
Who is playing the flute in the forest?
The tune of the flute is calling me!

On the soil or up above the sky,
Flute emanates music!
It sounds like twin trumpet,
The tune of the flute is calling me there!

All flora and fauna are enjoying the music,
Who is playing the flute I do not know!
Is it God or who! Who is playing?

The tune of the flute is calling me there! (Faisal and Vasavi 2008: 37)

A Munda child waits for his time to be eligible to join the boys and girls who go to herd the cows for grazing in the hills and dales. Taking the cows to the forest for grazing is not a work, but a fun. It is here in the lap of the Nature that he learnt how to sing, how to dance, how to play the flute and how to shoot arrows. In the evenings, when the villagers gathered in the *akhara* for singing and dancing, the child tested his musical learning. It is while herding the cows that the elders in the group taught him to recognize different trees and herbs and their medicinal values. He learnt to recognize which mushroom is edible and which is not; which snake is poisonous and which is not; which fruit is to be collected and which is to be left in the tree, and so on. In a way, cow herding was a sort of schooling for him. He learnt how to tame the oxen and how to cajole a cow. He learnt how to fish in the rivulet and how to get potable drinking water in the forest. And when the monsoon showers came when he was still in the forest with his cows, how to weave an umbrella out of leaves to protect himself from the rains. Learning was sheer fun.

Agriculture and Farming land

In many states of Central India, particularly in Jharkhand, Mundas takes pride to have cleared the forests and prepared farm lands, and settled in the region before others came there. Till over four decades ago, clearing the forest and preparing new agricultural land had been a traditional activity of a Munda. This and other agricultural activities generated several folklores like the one below,

Singituro hora re

Singi bong sitam dudugartan,

Chandu mulo hora re

Chandu bong khartan koa sitana

Singituro hora re,

Singi bong si tan, dudugartan

Chandu mulo hora re

Chandu bong khartan koa sitan

Roughly translated into English, the folklore says,

Who ploughs on the path of the sunrise, due to which dust flies here and there;

Who is making farm land on the path of moonrise, as a result of which there is mist everywhere!

(Faisal and Vasavi 2008: 7)

There is yet another very popular folktale about clearing the forest and preparation of farm land. It goes like this—

After a while, the Almighty came to the Man and the Woman and took them to a vast field.

‘Look there. This is the vast field. Out of it you have to prepare land on which you will grow vegetables and food grains for your living.’

The Man set out with spades to prepare agricultural lands out of the vast field. He dug and dug in the field and prepared a piece of land for farming. Then, he dug again, and prepared another one and then yet another.

The Almighty had not visited the Man quite a while and thought he will see him and find out how he was doing. He saw the Man busy digging the field, with his tongue out long, sweat all over the body.

‘Grandson, when did you prepare this land?’ the Almighty pointed to the first piece of land and asked.

‘Today,’ said the Man.

‘And that one?’

‘Today,’ said the Man.

‘And *that* one?’

‘*Today*,’ said the Man.

The Almighty realized that the Man had been digging ever since he was asked to dig the field and prepare a field for farming.

‘If the Man goes on working like this, he will soon die,’ the Inner-Self told the Almighty. ‘Set a time for his rest. Make the Day and the Night’. The Almighty nodded. He asked the Sun to go down and hide itself.

When the Sun hid itself, the Man went back home to the Woman. As he was very tired, he soon fell asleep.

The Man had regained his energy after a good rest. The Almighty directed the Sun to appear again. Thus, the Almighty divided the time into Day and Night so that when it is Day, the Man would work and when the Night came, the Man would go back home to his woman and rest with her.

Thus, the Day and the Night came into being and ever since they have been coming and going.(Munda 2009:14)

In commemoration of the creation story, the Mundas in Bombolkera village of Simdega district of Jharkhand hold a week-long celebration called *Khuntkatti Mela* beginning from December 26 every year to revere and worship the Earth. During this week, everyone is to respect and love Mother Earth. No one is allowed to do anything that may pain the Earth, because from the Earth Human is created, and to it the Human goes back. Villagers are prohibited to spit, to plough, to cut trees and break stones and hills. On the first day of the week-long celebrations, the tribal *pahan* (priest) keeps fast and offers prayers to the Earth, following which songs and dances in thankfulness of the Earth are held to mark the occasion. *Earth is holy and so are the Humans*, their song goes.²

There had been a tradition of *madait* (shared labour) in the Munda society. This tradition was used mainly in ploughing the farm land, sowing seeds or paddy transplantation. Agriculture activities in the Munda society had been always a community activity. All the households of the village community would join hands with a family and perform activities like ploughing the field, sowing seeds and transplanting paddy. They will then take turn to do the same with all the

other households of the community. In recent days, with the onset of so-called civilization, this fine tradition of living together has given rise to ‘individualism’ in the Munda society today.

Most interesting thing was that whenever the village community came together to perform agricultural activities, they would collectively sing the folklores—which used to be different for different occasions. The folklores were the ‘life’ of such agricultural activities and they gave a sense of ‘tradition’ and ‘continuity’ of this tradition of farming that begun thousands of years ago with their forefathers.

I remember during the paddy plantation, young boys would do wrestling in the paddy field after the field has been readied for saplings to be planted. The women folk of the village would do the plantation of the saplings in one corner of the field as they sang the folklores joined by the elderly men of the village, while a few young boys would take turn to wrestle with one another on the other corner of the field. Agricultural work used to be sheer fun and everyone in the village looked forward to the arrival of the season every year. In the evening again when all of them came back from the paddy field, they would gather in the house of the individual who had invited them all to perform the agricultural task in his field, and have the community meal and drinks. Here again the women folk would sing the folklores of the season, joined by men, some of whom would play the musical instruments too.

In recent days however, this tradition of community farming has given way to individualism. In many villages ploughing is being done by tractors and transplantation of paddy saplings is being done by agricultural labourers hired on wage. The tradition has completely disappeared and with this has disappeared the folklores.

Marriage of a daughter

With regard to how marriage begun on the earth, there is a very popular folklore that the Munda tribes—Kompat and Kharia in particular narrate. The folklore goes like this—

The Almighty (Singbonga) created a boy and a girl and gave them the earth with full of trees, herbs and such other greeneries. The trees bore the sweetest of fruits while the herbs were of medicinal value. But the boy and the girl would not know anything intimate about one another.

The boy called the girl “sister” and she called him “brother” and they lived together like brother and sister. God waited for them to copulate so that the human race could multiply. But they simply won’t. When they slept, they placed a log in between.

God got anxious. “If they continued to live like brother and sister, how would the human race multiply?” he asked to himself.

One evening, he set out looking for the two and arrived at their home. He inquired their wellbeing. The two were happy having him in their house.

“Where are the children gone?” the Almighty asked the boy.

“Who? Children! There are no children in the house, only the two of us,” replied the boy.

The concerned Almighty called the girl and asked her to cook rice in a mud pot.

“Now cool it on a mat. When it gets cool enough, mix these herbs in it and put them all in another mud pot,” the Almighty said, handing over some herbs that he had brought along from the forest.

“I will come to your house again after a week,” he said and went away.

The girl did as the Almighty had advised her.

A week later, the Almighty returned to the house.

“Where is the mud pot?” he asked the girl.

“I have kept it in a corner of the house. Do you want to take a look at it?”

“Oh yes. Bring it,” the Almighty said.

The girl placed the mud pot before him. The Almighty peeped into the pot and his nose was filled with the aroma. He looked at the girl and said: “Now take out the rice and mix it with some water.”

The girl did so, and a liquid drink was ready out of the stuff.

The Almighty then divided the liquid into three in three vessels. He drank from one vessel and asked the boy and the girl to do so from their own. This was rice beer.

When the boy and the girl had drunk the rice beer, the Almighty got up from his seat and took leave of them.

The boy and the girl then went to bed. Every night they slept on the same bed with a log placed as a barrier between them. But tonight they were restless, feeling the effects of the liquor.

At midnight, the Almighty asked a bird to visit the house of the boy and the girl and sing her sweetest song. The bird flew in, perched on the log and started singing: '*chapu...chapu...chapu, chapu.*'

The brother and sister woke up when they heard the bird's song. After a while when they tried to doze off, the bird started singing again.

"The bird is asking me to touch you," said the boy.

Yah. I think so," said the girl.

"But, how can I? There is a log in between!"

"Simple. Cross over the log," said the girl.

The boy crossed over and came closer to the girl. He touched her and started caressing her. The girl felt nice and asked him to do the same all over her body. Starting from her head, the boy slowly moved down. Then, the girl grabbed his hand, stopping him from moving any further.

Nine months later, a child was born. Thus the brother and sister had become man and woman and their breed multiplied.³

At every marriage, Mundas recall this folklore and one of them even narrates it at the assembly in the marriage function as others share rice beer in cups prepared of *Saal* leaves. Marriage, particularly of a daughter, is a very special occasion for the Mundas. There have been severak folklores describing the charm and beauty of a girl.

Horate ukoh kudi senkad,

Pi-pi gode pol saditan;

Horate chiekoda hojorkad,

Jam jam god tuila saditan? (Faisal and Vasavi 2008:9)

This roughly translates into,

Which girl is walking on the path,

Her toes are creating music;

Which boy is walking on the path,

His tuila is creating music?

Mundas have different types of marriages. Most accepted of them, however, is the arranged marriage. When a daughter grows up and attains the age of marriage, an ‘*agua*’ (lead-man) arrives in the family of the girl’s father with the kin (usually an uncle) of the boy, and upon arriving sings folklore. He says that he has seen a cute bird sitting on the branch of a tree in this house and he wants to take that bird to the house of the boy. The folklore is symbolic to asking the hand of the girl for the boy. The girl’s kin, after listening to the folklore, understand that a marriage proposal has come, and welcomes the ‘*agua*’ (mediator) and his troupe into the house. If the girl’s kin like the proposal, they fix a date to visit the house of the boy. When the kin of the girl visits the boy’s house, a similar folklore is sung by them upon reaching their future son-in-law’s house. The function thus progresses with many more folklores. On the day of the marriage too, the groom’s men and women sing folklores, to which the bride’s men and women too respond with folklore.

This is what the mother and aunts sing to the daughter when she is ready to leave her father’s hamlet and go to her future husband’s village—

Oh my daughter, this is a beautiful hamlet,

Oh my daughter, you are leaving this hamlet;

Oh my daughter, this is green land,

Oh my daughter, you are leaving this land!

My daughter, just with one drop of vermilion,

My daughter, you are leaving this hamlet;

Oh my daughter, just with a leaf cup of turmeric,

Oh my daughter, you are leaving this country! (Faisal and Vasavi 2008: 15)

Gender Equality

Gender equality is an essential characteristic of the Munda tribes. Its origin can be noticed in the folklores present in the community. There are many folklores surrounding gender equality in the Munda society, but a very popular folklore is narrated by the Santals as the following—

In the beginning there was only water and underneath, the soil. First of all, *Thakur jiu* (Supreme God), created fishes, tortoise, crocodile, earthworms, sun, moon and all kinds of living creatures of water, and finally human beings.

Out of the clay, *Thakur jiu* made forms of a human couple—Man and Woman and when He was ready to inject soul or breath (life force) into them, the Sing Sadom (Sun-Horse) came down from above and trampled them into pieces. *Thakur jiu* was awfully pained. *Thakur jiu*, however, did not give up His plan of creating Man and Woman. Then he made the physical form of male and female birds instead of the forms of man and woman out of the damp clay and immediately imparted life breath into them from the inner part of His bosom. He named the birds ‘Has’ and ‘Hasil’ (meaning Goose and Gander). He would keep the birds on his hands and talk to them and play with them. When the birds needed a place to live, *Thakur jiu* formed the earth. The birds made a nest in a clump of thatching grass where female bird (Hasil) laid two eggs. From those two eggs two human beings—Male and Female, were hatched. They were called ‘Pilchu Hadam’ and ‘Pilchu Buri’. Man and Woman grew up in ‘Hisri Pipri’. They were taken care of by Has and Hasil—their parents, as advised by *Thakur jiu*. When the birds faced difficulty in feeding the humans, they urged *Thakur jiu* to arrange food for the two humans. *Thakur jiu* then created the

fruit-bearing trees and grains. Thus, the earth and other creations on it have been created out of necessity of humans.

The first man and women lived in joy and happiness under the loving care and protection of God. They talked with Him and had fellowship with Him and knew nothing of illness and death. They did not work hard, they did not have to, because food was available everywhere and all that they did was just to collect it.

“Lita” (Chief Evil Spirit, Devil or Satan)—Santal legend does not say about Lita’s origin—was unhappy when he saw the first man and woman happy and joyful. One day he visited them and introduced himself as their grandfather. Having found them in a state of innocence, he told them that they had not tasted the real joy of life. He taught them how to prepare beer and told them: “Now both of you drink this after having poured some on the ground in the name of Lita”. He then left them and when he returned, he chuckled to see the change in their appearance. They had become drunken. In that condition they lost their innocence and Pride and Covetousness replaced innocence in them. Lita then taught them to make love.

Pilchu Hadam and Pilchu Budhi got children—seven sons and seven daughters. They got them paired and coupled, and the human race multiplied.⁴

Upon analysis of this folklore, we find that man and woman were born from two eggs, that too simultaneously. In the Abrahamic tradition, it is the Man who is made first and when he feels lonely, God make him go into deep sleep and takes out a rib-bone from him and makes the woman. The woman thus comes after the Man, and she comes as a matter of necessity for the Man. Similarly, the Vedic tradition too, the Purusha feels himself into two and begets his female part.

This gender equality in the Munda society makes the woman eligible to play an equal role as that of the man in all socio-economic matters. However, Munda community is equally chauvinistic with regard to religious activities. The post of *pahanship* (priesthood) belongs only to the first male descendant. Here, the concept of gender equality appears to go for a toss. In matters of property inheritance too, the Mundas are found male-centric. This arrangement is attributed to tradition, which restricts land ownership to kinship (*'killi'*--totem), which is not possible if land ownership is shared with the ‘sisters’ who usually has to get married with a man

of another *killi* under the practice of exogamy. But when the girl gets married, she enjoys gender equality with his husband in the village community of her husband.

Conclusion

The Mundas have a folklore for nearly everything or every occasion, be it birth, death, marriage, agriculture, hunting, visit to the in-laws house, cattle, pets, plough, ploughshare, paddy, tree, bird, snake, hill, river, stone etc. Folklores for the Mundas are not just folklores. These folklores point to a civilization that the Mundas lived through generations. The Munda world, values, ethics, beliefs, meaning of life and death, meaning of living together etc are embedded in the folklores. However, modern education and advent of new civilization has rendered these folklores in the annals of time. They have been lost completely, to the dark tunnel of modernity. Folklores are no longer heard in marriages, mad noise of modern music has replaced them in marriage functions. The new generation who went to schools and colleges do have not heard them, except a probably a few like the author here. But with every passing day, this civilization and its folklores are dying a slow death. Scholars in the fields too show scant interest to come up with an exhaustive sociological study of the folklores. It is only a matter of another few years and these folklores would never be heard in the villages again.

Notes

¹ Kiro, S.K. (*Tribal Philosophy*, forthcoming)

² As told by Dr Sumit Kerketta, principal of Gossner Theological College, Ranchi, who hails from Koronjo village near Bombolkera in Simdega.

³ As narrated to the author by Deonis Soreng, M.A. B.Ed, a retired high school principal of Sundergarh, Odisha.

⁴ Rev. Stephe Murmu, a professor of Christian Theology and Ethics at Santal Theological College, Benagaria, in his paper 'Understanding the Concept of God in Santal Tradition Myth', published in *Indian Journal of Theology*, 75, published by Bishops College, Kolkata—year not available, quoted in George E. Somerse's *The Dynamics of Santal Tradition in Peasant Society*, 38.

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