ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 8| August 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES FACED BY THE MUNDA- TRIBE OF WEST BENGAL - AN OBSERVATION

Biswajit Munda
Assistant Professor, Department of History, Balagarh Bijoy Krishna Mahavidyalaya West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

In India, Tribal people have always been misinterpreted in the area of History. Only a few researchers showed the courage to portray their present condition. In this article a study has been done on various districts of West Bengal where Munda population is comparatively high. It is a statistical and analytical study; data are taken from books, documents, articles, and census records, written by various researchers and scholars. This paper mainly tries to portray the current challenges of the Munda tribe people of West Bengal.

KEYWORDS- *Munda, Socio-economy, West Bengal, History.*

INTRODUCTION

India is the homeland of a large number of various ethnic groups and cultures. The term 'tribe' is a British legacy. It is also a racist term. The term 'tribe' was given by the British rulers to those local people found in Australia, America, Africa, and Asia who were far away from the civilized world (Pandey, 2022 p.1)[I]. They are known by their non-tribal neighbors in various names, they are Janajati, Adivasi, Buno etc. According to D.N Majumder -' 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 observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations'.(Majumder, 1944.p107)[II] .On the other hand, according to George Peter Murdock, a tribe is a social group that has several clans, wandering bands, villages and subgroups. This group has a common dialect, common residence, common culture and common political organization. [III](Pandey, 2022 p3)

As per census 2011, India's tribal population was 10,42,82,034. It was 8.6% of the country's total population. Out of them, the Santals are the largest tribe in the country. In West Bengal that was 52,96,963 and the percentage was 5.8 The tribal population of West Bengal was about 5.08% of the total tribal population in the whole of India.[IV]

The Munda people are the fifth largest tribal group in this country. In this article, I will try to find the socio-economic difficulties usually faced by the Munda people residing in West Bengal.

Many Historian, Linguistics, British civil servants, and Christian missionaries did some remarkable job by writing articles in journals, books, an encyclopedia about Mundas, among them D.N Majumder for 'Races and Cultures of India' (1944), Sarat Chandra Roy for 'Mundas and their Country ', G.A Grierson for his 'Linguistic Survey Of India', 1950, Robert Parkin for ' The Munda of Central India- An Account of Their Social Organization', H.H Risley for ' The Tribes And Castes Of Bengal, 1892 Rev. John Hoffmann and Rev. Arthur Van for 'Encyclopaedia Mundarica', is remarkable.

Sarat Chandra 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, [V](Roy, 1912 p26). Today Mundas of West Bengal are inhabitants of Chotanagpur, Bihar (now Jharkhand). Due to colonial forest acts and, alienation of land, Munda peoples are bought as tree garden labourers, colliery labourers and cheap Railway labourers. Due to these reasons, they were scattered all over West Bengal. Today Jalpaiguri, Dakshin Dinajpur, Nadia, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas and Paschim Medinipur are the districts with the highest concentration of Munda tribe population.

The word Munda means village headmen. 'The name 'Munda' has been given to these people by their Hindu neighbours and it is exclusively used by all but the 'Munda' themselves also (Hoffmann, 1928). Ethnically they are proto Australoids. In West Bengal, they speak in 'Sadri' which is a mixture of old Mundari, Bengali and Hindi.

Indian constitution has provided many constitutional remedies to the tribal people of India as well as the Munda people. They are, Article 14, no any kind of discrimination against Scheduled Tribes before Law, Article 15(4), special protection to scheduled tribes, Article 16, equal opportunity of employment in state government jobs. Article 14(4) A, reservation to Scheduled tribe people in promotion, Article 338, for national SC & ST commission for monitoring provisions, Article 342, forinclusion of tribes as Scheduled tribes.[VI](Pandey ,2022, pp.470-471)

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 8| August 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

Objectives of the study

To collect data on socio-economic conditions of the Munda people of West Bengal.

Sources of data

i. 140 Munda households of different districts of West Bengal.
ii. Books
iii. Journals.
iv. Data collected through private interviews.

Research Questions

In this article following research questions are taken into consideration,

i. What are the present social conditions of the Munda people of West Bengal?
ii. The reasons behind the social and economic backwardness of the Munda people?

Challenges faced by the Munda People

i. Though both the State and Central government of India took loads of schemes to increase the literacy rate among them, such as Pre and Post Matric Scholarship for ST students, Hostels, Model Schools, Vocational training for them,

Reservation of seats from U.G to Ph.D level in higher educational institutions as well as Medical and Engineering institutions.

Relaxation of age in Higher Education

To increase their job capability coaching for them, such as NET/SET coaching, Civil service examination coaching etc.

Relaxation of age in Government Jobs

i. Despite these measures Munda people of West Bengal have still to march long forward and the outcome has been quite dissatisfactory. Education has been a costly luxury to most of the Munda people who could not afford it even in the present day in 21st-century India.
ii. The Munda people as well as another Tribal group of Wet Bengal are facing continuous attacks on their homeland, and resources. Once upon a time, these were their cultural identity, but nowadays these are encroached on by other non-tribal, sometimes by the political parties. A long time back Missionaries had attacked their cultural history and they became converted.
iii. In major districts of West Bengal, the Mundari language is about to be abolished. Because today Munda youth does not speak in Mundari. They feel comfortable in the Bengali language over Sadri, which users are decreasing day by day.
iv. Previous forest, agriculture-based economy has been changed a long time ago. Due to the increase of pressure on family's small piece of land, Munda youth are migrating for work. They go to Mumbai, and Pune for hotel jobs, and jewellery- related work sometime to Gujarat or Uttar Pradesh to do construction-related work.
v. The previous collective nature of festivals is now endangered today. Munda youth lost their interest in Sarhul, Sohrai, Karam etc. They are more comfortable with Durga Puja, 25th December, 31st December, 1st January etc.
vi. The tendency to exploit the privileges of the tribals by using fake tribal documents (Caste certificates) has increased a lot. In West Bengal, it is a very big reason for the backwardness of the Mundas as well as other Scheduled Tribe groups. A lot of dishonest people are doing this and the actual tribal people are deprived of their rights.
vii. The assimilation problem is a major problem for the Munda people of West Bengal.
viii. Some tribal languages (like Santali) were included in the 8th schedule. But the majority of tribal languages such as Mundari, and Sadri are kept as dialects, although they have their scripts.
ix. In census data, and other governmental forms and documents there are religious columns such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, and Buddhism for their followers but there are no places for Sarna, which is most of the tribal group's religion.
x. Conversion is a big challenge faced by the Munda people in West Bengal. In some districts, till today missionaries are making tribals Christian. Of this tribals are divided into groups, converted and non-converted tribals, which is very dangerous.
xi. Illegal purchase/long-term lease of tribal lands to the non-tribals is increasing day by day. In both two districts, Nadia and Purba Bardhaman of West Bengal, this trend is acute. Mr. Manu Mundari, a Munda resident of Natun para, Burdwan district confirms that.[VII]
xii. As per Mr. Subhajit Munda (A Munda resident of Santipur), drop out from school, and marriage at an early age for this reason that the Munda community of Santipur, Nadia, is lagging behind the mainstream of society[VIII].
xiii. A tribe forbids its members to marry outside the tribe; the same is the case with caste. Inter-cast marriages are also known, as the Oraon-Munda, and the Kharia- Munda of the Ranchi district providing such examples...A member of a tribe must not marry within the clan he belongs to, but must marry in another clan belonging to the tribe'.[IX](Majumder, 1944, p109) These rules regarding marriage are more relaxed by the Mundas of West Bengal today, but the earlier restrictions on marriage between Mundas and non-tribals are not so strictly observed. As a result, a lot of Munda youth are marrying outside their tribe community, thus their unique tribal identity is getting lost.
xiv. Drinking alcohol is a severe problem among the Mundas of West Bengal. Earlier elder Munda people used to drink Palm wine, which is called 'Tadi' in their language, but nowadays excessive and too much drinking of alcohol is a bigger challenge to Munda people residing in West Bengal.
xv. Due to poverty, average Munda children are often forced to contribute to household income through labour, leaving little time for their education. By this, Munda literacy faces obstacles.
xvi. Nowadays, caste-based politics started gradually in the country. Some political parties play politics with tribal and

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 8| August 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

other backward people for their interests. As a result, Munda people have remained backward, and the problem has worsened as the days go by, Health, economy, rich culture and education have been neglected.

xvii. xvii.As most of the Munda people of West Bengal reside in remote villages, which are far from the city, the schools (both primary and secondary) are located far away, the children have to face daily transportation problems, especially the cost of transportation every day. Even the schools do not have proper infrastructure like electricity service, drinking water supply, urinals or toilets for children.

xviii. Language plays very important role in the Munda tribe's literacy rate. In their home they usually speak in Sadri, but when he/she comes to the govt. The school where the teachers usually taught in Bengali which is lesser known by the Munda people, scared, hesitated. Out of this hesitation, and discomfort the tribe child became less interested in getting educated and by the march of time he/she dropped out of school.

xix. Munda villages are usually situated in remote regions where infrastructure like roads and public transport is lacking. This makes it difficult for them to access markets, local shops health centres, hospitals etc.

xx. Munda who have come in contact with the Hindus and have adopted their religious rites and ceremonies feel themselves superior to those who have remained isolated. The so-called Hinduised Munda regards it as derogatory to dive with the conservative Munda. Sometimes the former do not accept water even at the hands of the latter.[X] (Oraon,2002, p 128)

CONCLUSION

So the study shows the Munda people of West Bengal are constantly facing various challenges. They still couldn't stand up, and they are lagging in leading an average life with hatred, deprivation, negligence and poverty even today. Due to the above stated reasons today the Munda people of West Bengal is drowning in poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and depeasantization even after so many years of Independence. Better political representation from the Munda community in state and national assemblies is the need of the hour. Even in 2025, the standard of living, and life of the average Munda people of West Bengal is worse. Day by day, they become more and more marginalized than before. Both the government and society have to take a vital role so that the Munda people can lead a life of dignity, with equal access to resources, opportunities, and cultural preservation.

REFERENCES

[I] *Pandey, G., Indian Tribal Culture, Development and Change.New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company,2022*
[II] *Majumder.D.N. , Races and Cultures of India. Allahabad, Kitabistan,1944*
[III] *Pandey, G., Indian Tribal Culture, Development and Change, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company,2022*
[IV] *https://adibasikalyan.gov.in/scheduled-tribes-of-west-bengal ,19.08.2025*
[V] *Roy. S., The Mundas and their Country.Asia Publishing House, 1912*
[VI] *Pandey, G., Indian Tribal Culture, Development and Change.New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 2022*
[VII] *M. Mundari, Personal communication, March 6.2020*
[VIII] *S. Munda, Personal Communication, April 24.2023*
[IX] *Majumder.D.N., Races and Cultures of India. Allahabad, Kitabistan,1944*
[X] *Oraon.K., Dimension of Religion, Magic and Festivals of Indian Tribe The Munda.New Delhi. Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 2002*