

Munda

A. Name ,Identity , Origin History

1. Name of the Community, other name, name referred by other communities, meaning associated with the name.

The name of the Community is "Munda". "Munda" means 'chief' or 'Headman'. According to Munda language, "Munda" means – "Horoko" (men) and their race "Horo" (man). The name "Munda" appears to have been given to this people by their ancient Hindu neighbours. The Munda community had no objection in calling them Munda by their neighbours and by the British rulers after their annexation.¹

They claimed to be called Kolarians, Pre-Aryans, Pre-Dravidians, Austric, Protoustroloids, Austria-Asiatic and Austronesia.²

2. Name mentioned above is considered derogatory in any manner.

Recently BJP called them Banabasis and Assamese people call them tea workers and tea tribes.

3. Traditional demography.

4. History of origin of your community.

Munda tribe belongs to the Austro- Austric family. It probably had its origin in South China. The Mundas belonged to the five agglutinative language groups. Regarding their migration to India, there are many theories.³ According to W. Schmidt's migration theory, Mundas probably reached India along a South-Eastern route because the traces of their race language can still be found all along that route. According to Stephen Fuchs, Mundas followed the route, by the north, over the Himalayas, which led them into India through the Himalayas passes to Himachal Pradesh and Nepal. This theory is more acceptable because according to the linguistic research the dialects of the Himachal Pradesh and Nepal contain significant Munda grammatical characteristic.⁴

After arriving in India they lived a wandering life and finally settled in Chotanagpur .We do not know the exact date when they began to settle in Chotanagpur plateau. All the same some scholars put it as early as the 6th century B.C. What is historically certain is that they were already settled in Chotanagpur before the Moguls invaded India in the 15th century. The

¹ Tintus Bhengra, *The Mundas of Assam*, (Dibrugarh: 2008). 3

² Tintus Bhengra,. 3

³ Emmanuel Barla, *Political Socialization of Mundas*, (Ranchi: Satya Bharati Publications, 2000) 9.

⁴ P.Ponette, "The Evolution the Munda Tribe" in *Sevartham*, Vol.7, (Ranchi: St Albert's College,1982) 3.

historians also agree that when the Aryans came to India in 2500 B.C. the Mundas were already there in Indian soil.⁵

The Munda tribe migrated to different places from Chotanagpur, seeking employment and the same came into Assam when Assam was occupied in 1826 by the British.⁶

5. Myth and Legends, if any, associated with the origin and migration of your community.

The most valuable of Mundari mythical legends opens with the creation of the earth and runs as follows:

In the beginning of time, the face of the earth was covered with water. Sing bonga, the sun God, brooded over the waters and the first beings that were born were a kachua or tortoise, a karakom or crab, and a lendad or leech. Sing bonga commanded these firstborn of all animals to bring him a lump of clay (hasa) from out of the depths of the primeval ocean. The tortoise and the crab by turns tried their skill, but in vain. The persistent leech, however met with better success. It succeeded in fishing out a bit of clay from underneath the deep. And with this clay, Sing bonga made this Ote-Disum, this beautiful earth of ours. And, at his bidding, the Earth brought forth trees and plants, herbs and creepers, of manifold varieties. Sing bonga next filled the earth with birds and beasts of all sorts and sizes. And now happened the most memorable incident of all. The bird Hur or swan laid an egg. And out of this egg came forth a boy and a girl the first human beings. These were the progenitors of the Horo Honko ... the sons of men, as the Mundas still style themselves.⁷

This first human pair, however, were innocent of the relation of the sexes. So, Sing bonga pointed out to them certain vegetable roots and taught them the secret of making ili or rice beer therewith. And the first pair since remembered as Tot Haram and Tora Buri (the naked male ancestor and the naked female ancestor) brewed ili as directed, and drank their fill. And the ili tasted very sweet and it inflamed their passions. And in due course they were blessed with offspring. Three sons were born to them, one after another. And these were named respectively Munda, Nanka, and Rora. All this happened at a place named Ajam- farh. On their parent's death, the sons wandered about over the face of the earth ... over hills and dales, through forests untrodden by the feet of man and over fields unworn by the plough.⁸

6. Any Information

⁵ Tintus Bhengra, 2.

⁶ Tintus Bhengra, 15.

⁷ Sarat Chandra Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, (Ranchi: Crown Publications, 2004) 315- 316.

⁸ Sarat Chandra Roy, 316.

B. Habitation Pattern

1. Type of Village

The Mundas, like other tribal communities live in self-contained villages. Traditional structures regulate their family life, marriage, use of common land, water resources and many other aspects of life. Most of the Munda villages are situated within the vicinity of the tea gardens. The villages are formed by acquiring the tea garden lands. The Munda people are given land by their proprietors, thinking that the settled Mundas of the villages could offer services whenever they required. Generally, the dwelling houses of the Munda people are arranged into two having a footpath in the middle. Each Munda has a common graveyard fenced by the bamboo posts. Each house comprises two rooms and one kitchen. The front room serves as the sitting room and the second room is used as bedroom, which is attached to the Kitchen. The munda villages are surrounded by paddy fields and jungles. The number of houses in a village may vary from 50 to 100 houses. Each village has its Puja house' where the Mundas offer their pujas at the time of their difficulties. In the Munda village a common house is maintained known as dormitory, where the village young men sleep, which is prevalent till date.⁹

Today a considerable change in respect of the traditional village structure, has taken place. At present the head of the villages have been considerably reduced due to the introduction of the 'panchayat' system and still the part played by the village headman cannot be under estimated. The Mundas of Assam have adopted the local tradition like any one visiting the Munda houses are supplied with betel nut and this practice has become a regular feature of the Munda people. The tea garden Mundas are provided with quarters by the tea management. The Mundas of the tea garden live in the lines which are named according to their tribe's name. The Munda people wherever they live, live together. This living together has been facilitated by the garden managements. The Mundas maintain their bond of unity and brotherly feelings by living together either in the villages or in the tea gardens. In the garden there is colonization of tribe, far back from the time of British days and it still exists in the present day.¹⁰

a. Village organization among the Mundas.

The Mundas consider village as a political unit. It had a head and an organization to deal with other villages. The head of the Munda village was called the *Pahan*(the priest). He obtained this title by virtue of being the original founder of a new community or the oldest representative of the original founder. His duty was to offer sacrifice at festivals mainly for three reasons: **i.** to preserve the village against the ravages of wild animals, **ii.** To obtain satisfactory harvest; **iii.** To ensure successful hunts.

⁹ Tintus Bhengra, 21-22.

¹⁰ Tintus Bhengra, 22.

The chief functions of the Pahan were: (i). to preside over the Panchayat; (ii). To punish those who violated established customs; (iii). To collect the contributions of the village and hand them over to the proper authority. The Pahan began to exercise the above functions with the introduction of the Raja into the Munda political system. Later on he was assisted by a Munda in the execution of his duties. These two offices were solely for service without any remuneration or special grant of land attached to it. The two officials were highly respected.¹¹

b. Confederation of villages

The Confederation of villages was made up of ten or twelve villages. It was called a Patti. The chief of the *patti* was called the Manki. He was the political organizer of the Mundas. His duties were: (i). to settle disputes concerning land and other matters; (ii). To settle questions of exceptional tribal interest within a village; (iii). To settle peace between different villages with the help of a council of elders; (iv). To collect *chanda* or rent and hand over it to the Raja.¹²

2. Whether mixed with other communities/religious groups etc.
3. Neighbourhood Pattern
4. Dwelling Unit. Ground plan of the dwelling unit i.e. rectangular/square/oval/circular/any other.

The dwelling unit of the Mundas is known as 'Orah' in Munda dialect, which is synonymous to house. It is constructed in their agricultural fields. It is a sort of a shelter at heavy showers during the day or evening hours when it becomes difficult for one to reach home. For the construction of this Orah, things like - wood, bamboo, stones, mud etc. are used. The roof of the house is made out of thatch, as it is locally available. Also, some use tin roofs on their houses. Regarding the selection of the site the Mundas, however maintain some secrecy. A Munda man constructing a house should always approach the village eldest man with some bottle of 'Bodeh' the indigenous liquor and the village's eldest man will fix some date for selection of site, which will always be done after nightfall. On the following night the Munda eldest along with the skilled Munda person would demarcate points for fixing the pillars and the skilled Munda man puts the foundation stones on the points demarcated by the Munda eldest man. The secrecy is maintained till that time.¹³

In case of those in the tea gardens, they need not construct house as they are provided with quarters by the garden management. Some construct small house if they have enough space for the construction. They follow their system as those of the village of Mundas. A man constructing a house may seek the help of other man of the village by a system of community help extended towards a person constructing a new house. They help the man

¹¹ Prakash Dhanwar, *Munda Ethics*, (Shillong: Oriens Theological College, 2011) 7.

¹² Prakash Dhanwar, 7-8.

¹³ Tintus Bhengra, 22-23.

right from felling trees for timber to that moment till the house is completed in all respects. For all these days the host is only to provide them with a square meal a day along with barrels of bodeh.¹⁴

The Orah's of the Mundas are rectangular in shape with convex split bamboo roofs. The corners of the roofs are tied to the walls with long cane strings just to prevent the roofs from being blown away by strong winds. The walls of the bamboos, which can be removed and fixed when required. Every house has a small verandah at its entrance, which is often used as low shed, where they keep a number of things such as chicken, goats, cows, plough etc.¹⁵

5. Any other information.

The Mundas also have a system called Dormitory System, the Sarna, The Akhra and the Sansan.

Dormitory System: Among the Mundas, there is a traditional practice of dormitory system for the young boys. It is a common house in the village, where all the young boys who have reached the age of maturity are to come and sleep at night. This common house is called in Munda, 'Giti' Orah. Similarly, all the unmarried girls of the village sleep together in the night in a house belonging to some childless old Munda couple or to some lone elderly Munda widow. The owner of the house exercises a general superintendence over the morals of the girls. These 'Giti-Orahs' for boys as well as girls are, in their own humble way, seminaries for moral and intellectual training. When the young bachelors and young maidens are assembled in their respective 'Giti-Orahs' after their evening –meals, riddles(nutum-kahani) are propounded and solved, folk-tales (kaji-kahani), traditions and fables are narrated and memorized, and songs are sung and learnt, until bed-time.¹⁶

The Sarna: It is the portion of the original forest, which is retained while clearing the forest. It is preserved with only a small clump of ancient trees now represents the original forest and serves as a Sarna, which means the Sacred Groves. These villages sarnas are the only temples the Mundas know. Here, the village-gods reside and are periodically worshipped and propitiated with sacrifices.¹⁷

The Akhra: It is the dancing ground, which is usually located almost in the middle of the Village-basti, and consists of an open space under some old wide-spreading tree. Here, public-meetings are held, the panchayat hold their sittings, offender against social rules as well as suspected witches and sorcerers are brought to justice and young folk of the village

¹⁴ Tintus Bhengra, 23.

¹⁵ Tintus Bhengra, 24.

¹⁶ Sarat Chandra Roy, 209-210.

¹⁷ Sarat Chandra Roy, 210.

assemble on moon-lit nights and on festive occasions to dance and sing. A number of large stone-slabs placed underneath the tree serve as seats for actors and spectators.¹⁸

The Sasan: It is a village burial ground of the Mundas, which adjoins the village-basti and consists of a number of big stoneslabs lying flat on the ground, or propped up on a small chips of stone at the corners, under one or more of these stone-slabs lie buried the bones of the deceased members of each family of Khuntkattidars of the village. The bones of a Munda, dying away from his Khuntkatti or Bhuinhari Village, will if possible be conveyed by his relatives, as a pious duty to his ancestral village, he is brought and buried ceremonially buried under the family Sasan-diri or sepulchral stone-slabs in the Sasan of the Kili. No outsiders, not even resident Mundaris of the village who do not belong to the original village family will be allowed to use the village –sasan. The Mundas consider these sepulchral stones or Sasan-airis as the title-deeds of the Khuntkattidars and Bhuinhars of each village.¹⁹

C. Food and Drink

1. Type of Utensils used for preparing and serving food and drinks.

The household utensils used by the Mundas in cooking food is the earthen –ware pots (chatu) made by the Kumhars or potters, and mudhearths (Chulhas) made by his won woman-folk. The munda's service of plate consists of a few bell-metal cups (dubris) and bell-metal dishes of three sizes called 'tharis', 'duvas' and 'chipnis' respectively in the descending order of size. Stone plates (pathra) and cups (pathri) are sometimes used. Wooden bowls called 'katlas' are sometimes made and used to hold curries. Wooden spoons (daru lundi) and iron ladles(karchul) are used to turn rice and curries in the cooking-pot. A large earthen jar to hold water is called sorol. Those who cannot afford to buy brass 'lotas' use earthen chukas' for holding water to wash their hands and faces with. Munda women in carrying water from the well, tank, or spring (dari) generally place the earthen jars on a small straw-pad (binda) over the head.²⁰

2. Staple Food.

The staple food for the Munda is boiled rice. It is consumed with some boiled green herb known as 'sag' (green leaves). But, for the well-to-do mundas use boiled dal or pulse. As a partial substitute for rice, the poorer Mundas use 'gondli'(panicum miliare) and 'marua' (eleusing crocana) for a few months after those millets are harvested. Traditionally, the Mundas used to take boiled Vegetable, meat etc., but with the passage of time and due to the change of place they do not take boiled vegetable curry but use oil in their cooking the meat and the vegetables. The oil used in cooking is extracted either from mustard or from niger oil-seed (surguja). At each meal, the Munda, like the orthodox Hindu, will drop a few

¹⁸ Sarat Chandra Roy, 210.

¹⁹ Sarat Chandra Roy, -211.

²⁰ Sarat Chandra Roy, 204.

grains of rice on the ground in the names of his deceased ancestors. The right hand is used in eating and the use of knives and forks at his meals is unknown to the Munda.²¹

3. Food Items.

The other food items of the Mundas are maize or makai and other food items. They rear fowls and goat for food, but are eaten chiefly at festivals and sacrifices. Among the vegetables – onions, brinjals, radishes, tomatoes, pumpkins and gourds, lady's fingers, beans, varieties of arum etc. Oil, which is extracted from mustard or niger oil-seed is used in cooking. For condiments, turmeric or haldi (Mundari, sasang) and chillies are used. In every curry of the Munda people is accompanied by green chillies. Sometimes in the family there is no curry then the Munda people take rice with onion, rosun or garlic grounded with salt and chillies that is taken as 'chutney.' It has also been observed that some children of the Munda tribe take meal with a piece of chilly and nothing else. The Mundas also rear fowls and goats for food, but are killed and eaten chiefly at festivals and sacrifices. They also use beef, pork and buffalo-meat as their food. The varieties of pulses ordinarily eaten by the Mundas are – Urid (phaseolus Mungo), Kurthi (Dolichos Biflorus), Bodi (Vigna Catiang), Barai (Phaseolus Mungo) and Rahar (Cunjanus Sativa). Besides green herbs or sags, the more well to do Munda occasionally uses vegetables grown in his own lands. Among these vegetables are – onions, brinjals, radishes, tomatoes, pumpkins and gourds, dherases or lady's fingers (hibiscus Esculestus), beans, varieties of arum such as the 'saru' and pechki, and the vegetable roots such as the sweet potato (Ipomea batktus). The Corolla of the flowers of the madkam or mohua (bassia Latifolia).²²

4. Drinks and types of drinks.

The favourite drink of the munda is rice-beer or ili. Each family its own ili. It is made of boiled rice which is fermented and mixed with certain kinds of vegetable roots (ili-ranu). This liquor is stored in earthen jars and becomes ready for use in about five days. Ili is taken at night almost everyday. Therefore, Mundas have become addicted to the drink and cannot resist when offered.²³

5. How many meals take everyday.

Earlier, the mundas had two square meal a day, but now they have three square meals a day. The 'loari' or morning meal, the 'tikin mandi' or mid-day meal, and the 'ayub mandi' or the evening meal. They also take tea in the morning and also in the evening because they have their dinner. The Mundas who are in the tea gardens also take three meals a day. Besides that they take tea without sugar and that too a very strong one.²⁴

6. Any other information.

²¹ Sarat Chandra Roy, 206 – 207.

²² Sarat Chandra Roy, 206-207.

²³ Sarat Chandra Roy, 207.

²⁴ Sarat Chandra Roy, 206.

D. Dress and Ornaments

1. The dress of the Munda male folk comprises of a head cap with several round of the cloth on the head, which is half a meter in breath and five meter in length. On the body a jacket type webbed with simple cotton threads, covering form neck to the knee of the body. Besides that there is another cloth for covering the essential part of the body by means of a long piece of cloth tied around the waist covering the most private portion of the human body. They also make shawls for winter seasons and the Munda people wear the shawls. So it is important to note that the Munda people wherever they are, are distinguished form other people by means of their dress. The females of the Munda community wear the cloths, which are made by them.

Now the modern girls of the Munda community wear saris, and other materials, which are commonly found available in the market. The Munda females also wear the modern dresses. This is changing from traditional practice to the modernity. The change is so fast that some of the dresses are not seen and not worn today.²⁵

2. Uniqueness of the dress pattern.

3. Type of dress worn during festivals/ special occasion etc.

4. Type of dress used by the Priest, Headman and Medicine man.

5. The Munda people have some very beautiful silver ornaments, however the Munda female folk now- a- days continue to use the ornaments as before. Even the men folk too use the ornaments. But now-a-days the elderly people do not wear them but then young boys wear them as fashion and some others for fun. The ornaments are all of silver. The Munda female use ear- ring made of solver. Necklace as well as bangles is also made out of silver. The ear ring is also worn by the boys as well as y the girls. In the same way the finger rings too used by both male and female. Men folk are found to wear single pieces of beads tied round their neck with a piece of string. Both men a d women love the ornaments. Today not only silver is used but other ornaments are also used by those who are capable of possessing them.²⁶

E. Family, Clan and other Analogous Division

1. Type of household

Munda understanding of family is different from that of modern understanding of family. The family of the munda was patriarchal and a joint family. The father was not only the head of the family, but also the priest. In case one of the members of his household got sick, it

²⁵ Tintus Bhengra, 25.

²⁶ Tintus Bhengra, 26.

was his duty to offer sacrifice to appease the domestic and the other Bongas. Besides, once a year he had to offer sacrifice in honour of his deceased ancestors.²⁷

2. Where a couple does usually reside after the marriage

As long as the father was alive sons stayed with the father even after marriage. This created a great unity and deep bond of relationship between the brothers and their families. This enabled them to stand together in the time of sorrows and happiness. They shared the common property, common worship and common Sasan (burial ground). In course of time due to increase of population families could not reside in the same house, separated and built their own houses and later on due to increase in families, the village could not contain all families within the village, so some of the sons went to clear the forest nearby and to start villages. All these villages acknowledged the common ancestor and were linked to one another in their clan organization.²⁸

3. Traditional practice of descent.

The basis of the social organization of the Munda was the clan. Munda society was made up of separate clans called 'killis', many deriving their name from some animals, plants or material objects. Since, descent was recognized through the father, the children belong to the paternal 'killis.' Thus all those with same 'killi' descended from one ancestor and the member of the clan regarded themselves as one large family. It is found that whether they were living in the same village or were scattered into different villages, they were linked to one another in the social organization.²⁹

4. Role of family members.

5. Sub caste/sub tribes

6. Etymological significance of name of each sub castes/sub tribes

7. Myth and legends associated with sub castes/sub tribes

8. Traditional occupation of sub castes/sub tribes

9. Clan/Gotra of the community

10. How clan regulates marriage

11. Any other information

F. Economics activities

1. Traditional Occupation, main occupation pursued now a days and other occupation.

2. Main Crops produced.

²⁷ Prakash Dhanwar, 7.

²⁸ Prakash Dhanwar, 6.

²⁹ Tintus Bhengra, 28.

3. Months of the following activities i.e. Ploughing, sowing, weeding Y & harvesting.
4. Activities usually performed by adult male, adult female, male child, female child.
5. Magico-religious ceremonies performed during ploughing, sowing & harvesting.
6. Implements used for ploughing, sowing & harvesting.
7. Any other information.

Fishing & Hunting

1. Where & How do you fish and how?

Hunting and fishing is the unique activities of the Munda Peole. They really love hunting and fishing. In Munda family both male and female go for fishing. It is observed that in the Munda family females are allowed to go for hunting which is uncommon in other societies of Assam. For fishing the Mundas go to any river, ponds, paddy fields, marshy lands, large drains of the tea-gardens, where fish is available. It is summer season that fishing is done in a great extent, though there is no exception in the winter season. But, in summer season, level of water increases and spreads everywhere in the land too and so fish is found every where. Fishing is done in various ways as – a. they first throw the water out of the place, which may be river, pond, large drain etc, and catch the fish, which are left in the wet mud. b. Use bamboo made instruments and put them in the river, pond or large drain in the evening and collect them in the morning. The fish go inside these instruments during the night for rest as believed by the Mundas. But, in the morning the owner of the instruments go and collect them and finds lots of fish inside. c. they use fishing hooks and nets to catch fish in the rivers and ponds and brooks.³⁰

2. Implements used for fishing & hunting

The Mundas use fishing hooks, nets, bamboo made instruments as – *Chepa, Khoka*, etc. for fishing.

The Mundas go for hunting in the jungle with *Katapult* (rubber and wooden made instrument used to shoot animals and birds, where bullets made of mud is used or marble is used), bows and arrows. They are also accompanied by dogs, which help them to chase and catch their prey. It is a regular phenomenon among the men folk to go for hunting. They usually go at least once a month. Even children are allowed to accompany them to the jungle for hunting. One of the important things found in their hunting is that whatever they kill in the forest is brought to the field of gathering and collectively they burn the prey and share the same among themselves.³¹

3. Any other information

G. Life Style

³⁰ Tintus Bhengra, 29-30.

³¹ Tintus Bhengra, 30.

1. Beliefs associated with conception. Barrenness, prolong delivery, delivery of dead child & maternity death.
2. Restriction imposed on mother during pregnancy on – Diet, work, visiting any place.
3. Who provides assistance during delivery?
4. What type of instruments in used to sever umbilical cord?
5. How placenta is disposed off.
6. Duration of confinement of mother after delivery.
7. Any other information.

Marriage

1. Age of marriage

Marriage is a very important event in the life of the Munda people. It is indispensable for the continuation of the clan and the tribe. Every normal and healthy person is expected to get married. The traditional marriage customs, rites and values of the Munda tribe are so good that the Church has respected it and most of the tribal customs are allowed to be observed by the Christians and some customs are being incorporated in the marriage rites as well. The marriage among the Mundas take place between two adults, which are in a way arranged by the parents. It is the parents who decide when their sons or daughters should be given into marriage. Therefore, in the Munda society people get married after one has reached the age of maturity, when one has given sufficient proofs of ones working skills and handling ones respective household affairs and when one is ready to shoulder the responsibility of the family life. Therefore, there is no fixed age for a Munda boy or girl to enter into marital union. It is left to the parents to make the decision. But, the usual trend we find is that boys enter into marital union from the age group ranging from eighteen to twenty five.³²

2. Type of Marriage (elopement, capture, service etc.)

The Mundas are monogamous. In their local language they say, "*Baria Kurikin, do ka baiua*" (It will not do to keep two wives). They also say, *Mid' ora' tani', raja* (The husband of one wife is her king) and *Barora' tani', eta'mia seta* (The husband of two is a strange dog). It is remarkable fact, that the Mundas, a numerically so insignificant minority, should have stuck to monogamy, when the teaming millions of Hindus and Muslims surrounding them on all sides, lapsed into polygamy, notwithstanding their higher mental and material culture. This fact appears all the more remarkable when we consider that although Hindu religious teachers from whom they accepted some religious practices here and there, told them that

³² John Lakra, *Tribal Culture*, (Ranchi: Catholic Press, Ranchi, 2007) 112.

polygamy was allowed, the Mundas preferred to abide by the traditions of their ancestors, who held that monogamy is better. Except few cases, the Mundas up to this time has kept up the practice of monogamous marriage system. Polygamy till now remains a matter of reprobation and contempt for the Mundas. They believed that monogamy was desired by *Singbonga*, the tribal God.³³

3. Whether following practices are prevalent- Child marriage, widow marriage, widower marriage, remarriage, polyandry, polygyny, levirate, surrogate and divorce.

Marriage among the Mundas is monogamous and it is patriarchal and partilocal except for the *gharjia* marriage, in which the man has to go and live in the house of the wife. Marriage is held when the boy or girl has reached the age of maturity and when he/she is ready to shoulder the responsibility of family life, so there is no question of child marriage among the Mundas. There exists no polygamy, polyandry and dowry system. There is no ban on widow remarriage; both the widow and widower are allowed to remarry if they desire to do so. Widowhood is never considered a curse.³⁴

Divorce is not approved as a normal practice but is tolerated in very special cases, i.e, no issue, witchcraft etc. Divorce is permitted with approval of the panches. The panchayat permitted divorce only on some exceptional cases. The exceptional cases were: a. When a young wife refused to live with her husband, b. if there was conflict between husband and wife and between the wife and the family she has been married to; c. if the wife is barren, disabled and lazy; d. if any one of the partner was not faithful regarding their commitment and indulged in adulterous activities.³⁵ Divorce was performed in a ceremony, where the elders of the village were present. This ceremony is called Sakam-Chari. In this ceremony a sarjom (name of a tree) or sal leaf with a bamboo pin in the middle was to be torn up and a lota (container with water) is kicked off by the couple to signify the breaking of their bond. At the end both of them go around greeting the whole assembly just as they had greeted all on the day of their marriage.³⁶

4. Custom practices associated with marriage.
5. Dowry and Bride price.
6. Any other information.

Death

³³ Prakash Dhanwar, 25.

³⁴ John Lakra, 112.

³⁵ Prakash Dhanwar, 25.

³⁶ John Lakra, 126.

1. Beliefs associated with death.

According to the good or bad life led by a man during his present life, he will be sent back to the world by Sing Bonga either as a man or as a beast, as a bird or as an insect. On death, the 'roa' or soul is carried away by the 'Jom Raja' (the devouring king), the god of death to his abode in the south (kata- jambar). Such is the Munda's idea of re-birth which is yet in a rudimentary stage, and not half so elaborately worked out as by his neighbours.³⁷

2. Rituals performed and ritual objects used at the time of disposal of the dead body.
3. Place where dead body is disposed off.
4. Manner in which dead body is disposed off- Cremation, infant, accident death.
5. Who prepares the site for cremation?
6. How the dead body is placed in the grave/pyre.
7. What are the offering made to the deceased.
8. Rituals performed at the time of disposed off.
9. Duration of pollution period.
10. Restriction observed during pollution period.
11. Who officiates in performing death rites?
12. Any other information.

H. Religion

The Mundas are sometimes represented as worshippers of malevolent deities whose business it is to bring drought, disease, and death. And the sole object of Munda worship is generally believed to be to avert disasters with which their deities delight in afflicting mankind. A careful inquiry will prove such views to be erroneous. The designation of 'Animism' now commonly applied to their religion appears to us to be inaccurate, if not actually a misnomer.³⁸

1. Supreme deity.

A careful study of their religious beliefs and ceremonies will show that the Mundas believe in a Supreme Deity whom they call Sing Bonga

2. How supreme deity is associated with the life of the people.

³⁷ Sarat Chandra Roy, 260.

³⁸ Sarat Chandra Roy, 258.

The believers of Sing Bonga invoke the blessings before every important religious ceremony. Besides Sing Bonga, the Mundas ordinarily worship the spirits of his deceased ancestors and the presiding deities of his village.

3. When this deity is propitiated?

Sing Bonga or the Supreme Deity has indeed no specific worship, but is reverentially remembered by the Mundas when, before every meal, he puts down on the ground a few grains of rice from his plate. In serious calamities, however, Sing Bonga is specially invoked and a white fowl is sacrificed to Him.

4. Village deity.

The second class of gods is the presiding deities of the village – the 'Hatu Bongako' (village – gods such as the Desauli Bonga, the Jaher Buri, and the Chandi Bonga. These gods aid the Mundas in their agricultural operations and hunting excursions, and guide them in every concern of life, and order every human event. They are worshipped by the Pahan or village priest at stated times in the sacred groves of each village.³⁹

5. Clan deity.

6. Malevolent Spirits.

The two classes of deities –the village –gods and the house- gods are the manating Bongas of the Mundas – the gods who have to be worshipped. The idea that the Mundas are worshippers of malevolent spirits appears to have arisen from confounding these two classes of deities who are the 'Manita Bongas' or gods to be worshipped with a third class of spirits known as the 'Banita Bongas' or spirits who require to be appease or propitiated. This latter class is indeed no gods at all, nor are they believed by the Mundas to be such. These malevolent entities –among who may be mentioned the Churins, the Muas, the Apsans, the Hanka Bongas and the Basan Bongas- are believed to be the earth- bound spirits of persons who died a violent or unnatural death. The propitiation of this class of spirits is the duty – not of the Munda householder nor of the Munda village –priest or Pahan, but of the ghost –finders – the Najos, Matis, and Deoras who are not infrequently non- Mundaris by race.

7. Ancestor worship.

The third class of gods is the gods of the household- the Ora Bongako (house- gods) who are the spirits of the deceased ancestors of each Munda family. The head of every Munda family worships these household deities in the 'ading' or sacred tabernacle of his house. Their blessings are invoked at every social ceremony and religious festival.

³⁹ Sarat Chandra Roy, 258

There is still a **fourth** class of spiritual entities recognized by the Mundas. These are the elements spirits or nature gods, such, example, as the Buru Bonga the Ikir Bonga, and the Bage Era. These stand midway between the benedict deities (the 'Manita Bongas) and the malevolent spirits (the Banita Bongas) and are powerful for good and fore evil alike. Their ordinary function, indeed, is to do good, bur when an individual Munda or a family or a village offend them, these spirits are roused to mischievous activity, and have then to be propitiated by a Najo or Deonra and sometimes by the village Pahan (priest).⁴⁰

Nor should we omit to mention a **fifth** class or Mundari deities, whose function again is one of beneficence. These are protecting deities- the guardian angels of particular families and classes. Such is the Achrael Bonga, who presides over the interests of married women; but should any such woman surreptitiously carry away any article from the house of her parents, the Achrael Bonga would mark his displeasure by bringing sickness to the house where the stolen goods are taken. Such, then, are the various classes of inferior Bongas the Mundas. As there are good angels and bad Bongas in the other religions so are there good Bongas and bad Bongas in the Munda's Theology. Over these various classes of inferior deities and spirits rules the great sing-Bonga, the ever beneficent God of gods, by Whose appointment the inferior deities hold their places and perform their functions, and Who is, in fact, the Author of the whole universe including the whole host of there Bongas themselves.⁴¹

I. Traditional System of social control

1. Traditionally recognized agency/traditional / political organization (eg. Customary Law, Panchayat, etc.) If yes, are there any permanent set of office bearers.
2. Functions of traditional/ political recognized agencies.
3. Any other information.

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⁴⁰ Sarat Chandra Roy ,259.

⁴¹ Sarat Chandra Roy, 260.