

The Mundas an Ethnic Community in the South-West Coastal Region of Bangladesh

Shaiful Huda*

Department of Sociology, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology, Basherhat, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

The Munda's are an ethnic community of the Kingdom of Royal Bengal Tiger of the Sundarbans. They are called 'Sarna/Buno/Kuli/Horoko and indigenous People. During the British period, they travelled to Bangladesh from Ranchi, and have been here ever since. They practice religion and culture. They are excellent in singing, dancing, drinking, and working. They believe in ghosts and spirits- both good and bad and call on them to either help someone who is sick or to do damage to another person. Their cemetery is called 'Masna'. They dedicate Hen for the rituals celebration for their God (Sing Bonga-The Sun). They believe that, after death the soul come back at their home and save them danger. They follow their forefather's direction. During the festivals, they serve rice wine (Haria/Tari). They are addicted Rat's meat, Snails etc. They speak in 'Mundari/Nagri/Sadri'. Their greeting word is 'Johar'.

Keywords: Mundas; Aboriginal (Adibashi); Ethnic Community; Buno; Kuli; Sarna; Horoko; Neglected Tribe

INTRODUCTION

The Mundas are aboriginal tribes; a social and national development depends on all class people. There are many tribes in Bangladesh; the Mundas are one of them. Bangladesh is developing day by day, but there are no development basic needs of the Munda's. They are also struggling in the natural disaster like cyclones (Sidar, Aila, Mohasen, Comen, Foni, Bulbul, Amphan, floods, salinity intrusion, famine, heat waves etc) and the COVID-19 (Corona) pandemic [1]. The present practice then certifies resilience with a special focus on the human subsistence of the profane the Munda habitation. The Munda live also in the coastal areas of South West Bangladesh in the district of Khulna and Satkhira.

Most of the Bangladeshi and world people know absolutely nothing about the Mundas who have been able to preserve their ethnic identity in spite of many obstacles. Those who have a little bit of knowledge about the Munda call them 'Buno' which means, 'people of the forest;' that is uncivilized and savage people and therefore considered unfit for human association. The Mundas of the South West coastal region of Bangladesh are really the last, the last, the lowest and the lost among the poor people living in this part of the country [2].

Human settlements occurred at various times in history and for different reasons in this area. There were those who had been living here originally from pre-historic times. Later at various times

different communities emigrated from their original homelands to escape either from conflict or famine or other calamities and sought refuge in the vastness of the Sundarbans forest [3]. Then, there are those people from over populated regions who were attracted by this region by its high productivity.

Lastly, during the nineteenth century, the Zamindar (land lord), who received allotments of forest land from the British East India Company, imported aboriginal tribal people from India to clear the forest.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Bangladesh is one of the most populated countries in the world. There are many castes in our country. The Munda is one of them. The COVID-19 (Corona) and natural disaster (such as: torrid cyclones, floods, salinity trespass, hunger and heat ripple) took away livelihoods. Bangladesh will not go to vision 2021 and 2041 without the Munda people [4]. Specific goals are to know about life style of Munda people to contribute the Digital Bangladesh for good governs middle income country by 2021 and development country by 2041.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Study area and Duration: The Munda's of South-west Bangladesh are dispersed in 43 small villages situated in four different Upazilas

*Correspondence to: Shaiful Huda Department of Sociology, Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology, Basherhat, Bangladesh, Tel: 01917513731; E-mail: shaifulhuda176@gmail.com

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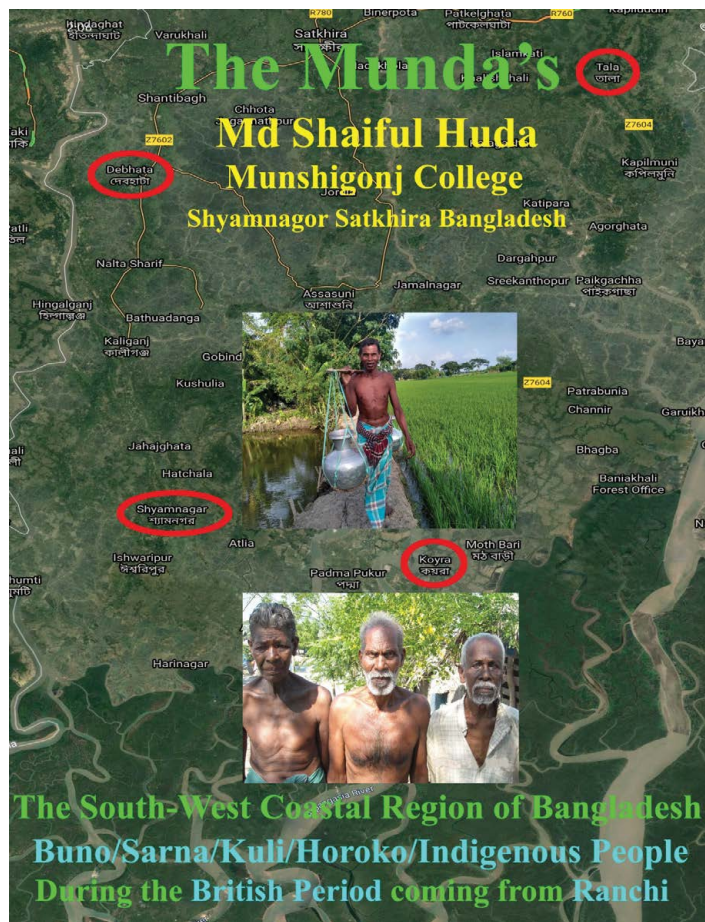


Figure 1: The South-West Coastal Region of Bangladesh Buno/ Sarna/ Kuli/ Horoko/ Indigenous people during the British period coming from Ranchi.

in the two District of Khulna and Satkhira that have been chosen purposively. This study was completed for a period of about 2 years from 2019 to 2021.

Sampling Framework: Before gathering ultimate data a preparative base line observation was driven a total number of 330 household leaders, about 1850 people were filed. In the practice, about 40% of the total (N=330) households as well as 1850 people were approved through namely Koyra Upazila in the District of Khulna, Tala, Debhata and Shyamnagar Upazila in the District of Satkhira [5] (Table 1).

Both person to person and household leaders were considered as the unit of analysis of the study. In achieving the objective, blending of several participatory Rural Appraisal and other methods such as scheduled interview, informal meeting, group discussion, observation and literature review were The Mundas.

The investigation work is quantitative in nature. The 43 villages of Shyamnagar, Tala, Debhata and Koyra Upazila is the belt of this practice. The arguments behind choosing these areas are many aboriginal communities living permanently. The four Upazilas of Bangladesh has selected purposively where most people live below the poverty line [6]. For this investigation work, both primary and secondary data has been collected. Primary data collected from field investigation and secondary data was collected from different papers, books, Articles, NGO- Sundarban Adibasi Munda Sangastha (SAMS), media and other documents [7]. For primary data, interview and observation techniques have been used. Moreover interview schedule has observed in which both open-ended and close ended questions included for data collection

Table 1: Study area, sample size and the data collection methods.

District	Upazila	Munda's Villages	Sample Size	Case studies	Data collection methods
Satkhira	Shyamnagar	23	150	1	Questionnaire
	Tala	6	42	1	Interviews, scheduled interview, informal meeting, group discussion, observation and literature review
	Debhata	1	8	1	
Khulna	Koyra	13	130	1	
2	4	43	330	4	

through face to face interviews also executed. The collected data has processed after essential checking, re-checking and editing data was analyzed using the Ms Office Word -2007. Ethical standards were maintained in every stage of the practice [8].

Finding of the Study: (Table 2 - 12).

Table 2: Age of the household leaders and community leaders (Matbor/ Pahan (Priest)/ Sardar).

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-40	20	6.06
41-60	180	54.55
61-100	130	39.39
Total	N-330	100

Table 3: Occupation of the household leaders and community leaders (Matbor/ Pahan (Priest)/ Sardar).

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farmer	45	13.64
Day Labor	128	38.79
Seasonal Labor	108	32.73
Carpenter	18	5.45
Other	31	9.39
Total	N-330	100

DISCUSSION

The Munda people travelled to Bangladesh about 220 years ago from Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand and have been here ever since. They are found in Koyra, Debhata, Tala, mainly near the Sundarbans in the Shyamnagar Upazila. It lies around 350 kilometers away from Dhaka. They Mundas are originating in the states of Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgar and Arunacal Prodesh of India. Ranchi is more or less the epicenter of this area called 'Chatanagpur'. It includes part of Odissa, Madhya Pradesh and west Bengal [9]. To Muslim Historians, Chotanagpur was known as "Jharkhand." The Mundas (Adibashi) are one of the strongest groups among tribal people.

The Mundas are also called 'Sarna' people. Sarna refers to a grove of 'Sal' trees where the Mundas used to venerate their God and their spirit [10]. The word 'Sarna' is used to designate the ancestral religion of the Mundas. By extension the term 'Sarna tribe' is applied to the Mundas of Ranchi in Bangladesh (the Sundarbans Area) which they have migrated. The word Munda is thought to have come from a Sanskrit word, meaning the chief of the village. The word 'Munda' basically means the head of the community. The Mundas also believe that they were born from the head of Mahadev (God) and that is why they are known as Munda or Muriyari.

The Mundas call themselves Horoko, which means 'men.' They are also proud to call themselves 'hero-co' which means people. But they are also proud to be addressed as Mundas. Ironically, the word

Table 4: Munda people living in the sundarbans areas.

Serial No	Upazila	Village	Pahan/priest	Family	Male	Female	Total Members
1	Shyamnagor	23	38	407	870	841	1711
2	Koyra	13	14	358	834	641	1475
3	Tala	06	10	120	279	261	540
4	Debhata	01	02	07	21	11	32
Total	04	43	72	892	2004	1754	3758

Source census made by SAMS (Sundarban Adibasi Munda Sangastha) 2020.

Table 5: Problems faced by the mundas.

Types of Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Education	210	63.64
Water	330	100.00
Housing	305	92.42
Health care	310	93.94
Social Discrimination	320	96.97
Writing own Method	330	100.00
Entertainment/Cultural Practice	325	98.48
Religious Institution	330	100.00
Digital Bangladesh	315	95.45

Table 6: Social water problem.

Upazila	Frequency	Percentage
Shyamnagor	150	45.50
Koyra	130	39.40
Tala	42	12.70
Debhata	08	2.40
Total -330		100.00

Table 7: Education problem.

Range of Education	Frequency	Percentage (N=330)
Higher Education	09	2.73
Secondary Education	41	12.42
Primary Education	81	24.55
Signature Knowledge	91	27.57
Illiterate/ Tip	108	32.73
Total	N-330	100

Table 8: Housing problem.

House	Frequency	Percentage
Mud House	202	61.21
The hut/Slum	103	31.21
Made of Brick house	25	7.58
Total	N-330	100

Table 9: Health care.

Treatment System	Frequency	Percentage
Kabiraj (Scrub)	255	77.27
Quack	55	16.67
Health Institution	20	6.06
Total	N-330	100

“Munda” means a man of prestige and wealth. It is nagging that their Hindu neighbors gave the name to them [11]. Every Mundas village has a traditional leader (montri or minister), the Mattbar

Table 10: Social situation.

Social Layer	Frequency	Percentage
Low	330	100
Middle	0	0
High	0	0
Total	N-330	100

Table 11: No knowledge about digital Bangladesh.

Digital Bangladesh	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	4.55
No	122	36.97
No Comment	193	58.48
Total	N-330	100

Table-12: Opinion for improving the Munda's problems.

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
To Increase basic needs	45	13.60
To Supply Drinking water	55	16.70
To Increase Government help	18	5.50
No Comment	200	60.60
Other	12	3.60
Total	N-330	100

or Sardar, the person that goes to community if some problems appear in the Mundas community. He resolves conflicts among the community.

The mundas have not available historical record about the arrival of these people to south-west Bangladesh. According to oral tradition the arrival of the Mundas to these Southern regions can be divided into four situations:

1. They were employed as ‘Lathials’ or ‘guards’ in the Royall household in British period.
2. When Indigo plantation was started in this part of the country the planters brought them for working in their fields.
3. When at the closing of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century the Jamidari system was introduced and landlords got leases of large lots of land in the Sundarbans forest the Mundas were brought to clear the jungle and establish agriculture in those cleared lands.
4. Due to ‘Poverty.’

The Mundas were agricultural labor but brave, stronger and clearing jungle specialist in throwing obeisance. The physical ability and diverse experience pay attention to the British Government [12]. And so, they displaced the Sundarbans. The Munda living near the Sundarban forest are the descendants of those the Mundas who

arrive to clean the jungle and obtain cultivable land out of it.

At present, the Mundas living as they do on the western coast of Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, their survival depends on wages. They earn working to collect fish, honey and crab in the Sundarbans forest surrounding rivers and channels, cutting wood and *nypa fruticans* (Goal pata), in shrimp and crab farms, in paddy fields, share cropping or in brick kilns. Sometimes local businessmen use the Munda people as labor in collecting of natural resources from the Sundarbans. Working they must, without working, they will have no money and no food. Today, the COVID-19 had not hit the Munda community in 43 villages [13]. While the lockdown in Bangladesh begun around mid-March in 2020, the prohibition on fishing in the sea (two months every year). Very little public and private aid reaches the Mundas. In order to survive, they have taken a loan. The Mundas are also socially late. Barely anyone is literate.

The Mundas have their own distinct language, history, social structure and religion. The Mundas speak in 'Munday/Nagri/Sadri' language among them. They teach this language to their children. This language similarity with the Hindi language, through Bangle and Persian words are in the Munda language [14]. The Mundas greet 'Johar' (Good Morning/ Assalamualaikum/ Namaskar) with raising both hands, and they reply 'Johar Johar' twice. Ethnically they belong to the broad group of Proto-Australoid and speak the Munday dialect of the Austro-Asiatic family. Mentionable those, the Mundas use bangle language with the neighboring people but it is totally unapproved in their ritual and celebration but there is no written method.

There are three large groups of the Mundas:

1. The Compact
2. The Kharia
3. The Mankin

The groups living in the Sundarbans region of Bangladesh belong to the Compact tribe and are grouped in various chains. The dominion to a claim is dispatched through a patrilineal system/patrilineal system. The Munda people inherited bloc names from their forefathers from India as they narrated us and these are dispatched from generation to generation like water flows in a river [15]. Members of the same clan cannot marry each other because they are considered relatives. But the Mundas can marry people belonging to any other claims without any variety or hierarchy. People of different clans live together in the same village. No marriage is agreed among people belonging to several tribes.

The Mundas are an endogamy tribe. They usually do not marry outside the tribal community because to them the tribe is sacred. Their most of the family systems are nuclear type consisting of father, mother and unmarried children. Usually, after marriage the couple set up their independent family [16]. But in the observing areas, the Mundas live mainly extended families. Women go to their husband's house after the wedding and live with his parents and brothers. The wedding is arranged by the parents consulting horoscope. However, the family ties are very highly valued in the Munda.

The Mundas have an own flag and there are three colors (1) White (the symbol of Shing Bonga/the Sun), (2) Red (the symbol of Buru Bonga/the Hill), (3) Green (the symbol of Ikir Bonga/the Ganga). The Mundas love community celebrations [17]. They

are very community oriented. Their life is punctuated with social, agrarian and religious, which bring them together for communal celebrations where drinking of rice beer and singing and dancing, have a very important place. It is said of the Mundas that a child learns to dance as soon as he can walk and learns to sing as soon as he can talk.

Economic system of the Mundas both men and women are involved in various activities; they have a reputation as stronger, hard worker, brave and loyal [18]. Usually, they are exploited a fair wage. The careers of the Mundas male members household are day and seasonal labor. The Mundas women, a part from housework. They are also engaged as day labors in agriculture or shrimp farming, and generally do not have the opportunity to work as maids in houses of Bengali people because they are considered as low-caste and unholy.

The religious exercise of the Mundas is separate from other ethnic group. 'Sing Bonga' is the God of the Munda. 'Sing Bonga' tonal translation is the Sun-Spirit, The moon and the stars which are considered living witness of their cult and special piety is devoted to the 'Karam tree' (which protected their progenitors hiding them while they were fleeing from the opposition) [19]. They also worship some Hindu deities and as the entire Sundarbans roomer, they also believe in and pray to 'Bon Bibi' the deity of the forest. The Mundas prayer the souls of their progenitors. They pray to and call them especially during the lifecycle rituals and they have specially celebrations dedicated to the progenitors. In every stage of rituals of passage (child birth, adolescence, marriage and death) of the Mundas have different them from normal life of the community [20]. They traditionally practice many other rituals (Puja) such as Mage Puja, Karam Puja, Shoshi Puja, Sharul Puja, Gohil Puja, Pahari Puja, Valua Puja, Kali Puja (they arrange used by the conventional Hindu Kali Puja), Hari Puja, Durga Puja, Murgi Puja, Natun Khay Puja, Marriage Puja, Shama Puja, Shaol Puja. Purahit (religious leader/Pahan) of own community leads the Puja (ritual). Besides, the Mundas remember Gazi Peer, Banbib, Gazi Kalu, Champaboti and Dhakhina Ray [21]. In the many rituals and festivals, they only practice a few number of rituals and festivals such as Sarul Puja, Pahari/Dangri Kharam Puja, Karam Puja, Sohrai Puja, Gram Sara Puja/Gram, Natun Khaoa Puja, Valua/Velva Puja.

The cultural exercise of the Mundas is also separate from other ethnic group. The Mundas also believe in ghosts (Bhut) and spirits-both good and bad and call on them to either help someone who is sick or to do damage to another person. The Munda community also dedicate some Hens for the rituals celebration like as White hen, Red hen, Black Hen, Brown Hen and Mixed Hen for their God (Sing Bonga-The Sun) and spirituals power [22]. They believe that, after death the soul come back at their home and save them from different types of dangers.

The Mundas show a varied universe of festivals and cult, Pujas, which dispose of specific, sang and dances. The place of buries here is called 'Masna' in Sadri language. This 'Masna' is steel used by the Mundas. The cycle of ritual traditions traditionally repeats the yearly recited social-economic actions and is concerned the moon calendar. Cult is accomplished by the single families, the tribe or the whole community in order to get benefit, welfare, enrichment and protection from disasters [23]. The cult are an important occasion of social connection among the Mundas, restarting the communitarian ties among the people living in the same village and fastening the link between the current generation and the

progenitors of the tribe before starting the ritual of the pujas held at the village level all the adults (man and women) have a meeting with the village leader in order to discuss the ultimate social and related problems existing among the families and solve it before courtesy the ritual. Once the entire possible disputes have been solved the celebration can begin. If anyone refused the community rules, he will be ostracized from the own society.

The foods of the Mundas are all eater. Different types of fish were on their diet. As a separate tribe, the Mundas are fond of Rat meat (they call mete horin), Snails (they call ghonga), Crabs, Pigs, wild Cats and Civet and dead animals due to injuries (like Hen) etc. At one time they did not know how to cook and eat these things well. The Mundas do not eat beef because of their religious tradition. But it has economic significance for their family subsistence. Tari/Haria (local wine made by the community) for the drinking adult members together is necessary for any festivals [24]. The Mundas are not satisfied if they do not drink Haria in entertaining guests and worshiping. They remain unhappy. So, they want to beat them in all the work. There is no substitute for Haria Wine [25]. The Mundas suffer from social discrimination due to this food intake. The Mundas boys and girls at school cannot mix with their classmates.

RECOMMENDATION

The novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic along with the Cyclone Foni in 2019 and Cyclone Amphan in 2020 that hit the Sundarbans have broken the back of the Mundas community which has been forced to take loans from private parties at hefty interest rates to feed their hungry stomach. Tragically, the deprived lives of the Mundas in South Western Bangladesh have not changed for centuries. While globalization and the speed at which current changes are transpiring capture the attention of leading thinkers worldwide, the Mundas sit and wonder why nothing changes for the better in their community. At least, this is a beginning for them! At least, they are beginning to question why changes for the better have not happened within their groups. When a few of the elders were questioned about what changes have they seen for the better in their villages, sadly, they could not think of one improvement. Their wants for the future are very basic. They only desire what others consider to be basic necessities.

The Mundas could be greatly helped through the following these areas:

1. Drinking Water
2. Education
3. Health Care
4. Human Rights
5. Financial Development
6. Preservation of Cultural Identity: (Matbor/ Pahan (Priest)/ Sardar)
7. Housing
8. Voice in the Government
9. Social Status
10. Religious Institution
11. Entertainment

Eventually, the Mundas should be given position of leadership at least at the local Government level. Until the Mundas are able to develop leaders from within their own groups, non Munda leaders need to become more aware of the Mundas plight and what services the Mundas are entitled.

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 (Corona) pandemics with natural disaster have left the Mundas staring at hunger and starvation. Improvement of the Munda situation is dual: change must come from within and change must come from outside. The Mundas themselves need to start to decide what changes they wish to bring about in their villages and how they are going to assist in the process of improving their lives. The greater Bengali society, the government and the world must take some responsibility for not maintaining these painful conditions to continue and help work as cooperative partners with the Mundas to help uplift the situation. Any governmental and nongovernmental intervention should come forward to helping this indigenous people in a sustainable way.

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