



Socio-Economic Structure & Sustainable Development of Indigenous Society: A Study on the Munda Community

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Abstract

There are 50 indigenous or minority ethnic groups scattered across different regions of Bangladesh, of which the Mandas are a community. The Munda community has been living in the areas adjacent to the Sundarbans of Khulna and Satkhira districts for hundreds of years. Originally, their forefathers were the ones who cut down the forest and made the land suitable for cultivation without caring about the roar of the tiger and the snake. The ancestors of the Munda's played a major role in cutting down the forests in the area surrounding the present Sundarbans and making them suitable for human settlement. The number of Munda's scattered in the Sundarbans and its surrounding areas is decreasing day by day due to various types of adverse environment. On the other hand, the Munda's own culture is also under threat due to the influence of Bengali culture. The main aim of this research is how to develop sustainable development of the Munda community from their current socio-economic structure in view of the current condition of the Munda community. The study is mainly quantitative in nature. Koira and Dumuria upazila of Khulna district and Shyamnagar, Debhata and Tala upazila of Satkhira district were selected through convenient sampling technique for the purpose of collecting primary data, because a large part of Munda community lives in these areas. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 250 respondents from five preselected areas. The respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique. Data was analyzed in terms of statistical indicators of frequency and percentage. The results of the study show that social indicators, Economic indicators and Cultural factors are very weak among the Munda community. Among the social indicators, Munda women and men have very little interest in following hygiene rules (Sanitation, Birth Control). Economic indicators show Income Source, Jobs Opportunity Munda community is facing many challenges recently. Many educated boys and girls of the Munda community spend their days in agony due to lack of suitable jobs which has a negative impact on everyone in the community. Cultural factor shows that the Munda community, which is plagued by poverty, can celebrate its cultural events in a grand manner, so that other communities or ethnic groups do not get any idea about their culture. This research will be of great help to those who work with the indigenous communities of Bangladesh, especially the various ministries of the government, NGOs, policy makers, government and private research organizations will be benefited.

Keywords: Socio-economic; Sustainable Development; Munda Community; Indigenous Society

Introduction

Bangladesh is a country of language, culture, religion and ethnic diversity. There are Padma-Meghna-Yamuna-Surma Rivers, and Sangu-Maini-Someswari-Seemsang-Chengi rivers. Since time immemorial there have been people of various races including Garo, Hajong, Santal, Khasia, Manipuri, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Munda, Koch, Lusai. The total population of a country cannot be imagined or fulfilled excluding the indigenous tribes and small ethnic groups [1,2]. This means that every country in the world has indigenous, tribal and minority groups in its population. If tribe is defined in book language, then it is said to be- "socially, economically and culturally different from the main population of a country who are governed in whole or in part by their traditions, customs and laws". There are 50 tribal communities [3] living across the country, which is 1.0% (16,50,160) of the total population. Most of them live in hill tracts areas, especially in Chittagong hill tracts (Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachari), Sylhet, Khulna, Satkhira, Mymensingh, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi, etc [4]. The Munda's are considered to be one of the largest tribes in South Asia. Their original abode in Jharkhand and Rachi areas of India but their religion and culture are Indian (Indian mirror). They live in Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh states, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal. Besides, they live in many regions of Bangladesh. The Munda community has a total population of 60,191 which is 3.65% of the total population of tribal communities [3]. The Munda community is more present in various areas of Khulna and Satkhira districts close to Sundarbans of Bangladesh. Also, people of this community live in Rajshahi, Naogaon, Dinajpur, and Sylhet districts. One such is the Munda or Sharna community living in the Sundarbans and its surrounding areas. Originally, it was their forefathers who cleared the forests and made the land suitable for cultivation, ignoring the Royal Bengal Tiger, deadly snakes and crocodiles.

It is known those two hundred years ago, the indigenous Munda's from various places including Ranchi in India cut down the forests of the Sundarbans and settled. Since then, the life of the Munda's became centered on the Sundarbans [5]. Although they have occupied these lands as their own from the earliest times, they not yet got the ownership of their land. As a result, they cannot sell these lands to even. No one can buy it.

So far 7 groups of Munda's have been mentioned in Bangladesh. They are: Kompat Munda, Khangar Munda, Kharia Munda, Pathar Munda, Derge Munda, Sanka Munda and Manki Munda. The number of Munda's scattered in the Sundarbans and its surrounding areas is decreasing day by day due to various types of adverse environment. On the other hand, the Munda's own culture is also under threat due

to the influence of Bengali culture.

Objective of the Study

The Munda community is one of the indigenous groups living in Bangladesh. Implementation of Vision 2021-2041 (Bangladesh) is not possible without sustainable development of their socio-economic and culture [1,2]. Taking into consideration the recent position of Munda community in terms of social, economic and culture, the objectives of this study are mentioned below:

- To identify problems of the social, economic and cultural indicators of the Munda's community.
- To identify the present socio-economic scenario of the Munda's community.
- To determine the challenges of the Munda's community.

Research Methodology

Nature of the Study

The study is mainly quantitative in nature. In the first phase, research will be conducted to identify the socio-economic indicators of the Munda community. Then, a descriptive study was conducted through which the socio-economic and cultural indicators of the people of the Munda community were depicted.

Population Size

According to the 2022 census, the population of the tribal community in Bangladesh is 16, 50, 160, of which the Munda community has a population of 60,191, which is 3.65% (percent) of the total tribal community. The district cities of Bangladesh where the Munda community is found to live are Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachari, Khulna, Satkhira Sylhet, Mymensingh, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Rajshahi.

Sample Area Determination

Khulna and Satkhira were selected by the researcher for data collection in this study. Five upazilas/sub-divisions (Koirā, Dumuria Shyamnagar, Debhata and Tala upazila) were selected from these two districts (SAMS,2016) [1,2]. District and Upazila/sub-divisions were selected using convenient sampling technique. Analyzing the data, it has been found that Munda people live in these areas more than other areas, that is why the researcher has selected these areas for data collection.

Sample Size

The researcher collected data from 250 Munda community people from the above upazila/sub-divisions.

Data was collected from these 250 respondents using simple random sampling technique (Table 1).

Sampling Unit	Sample Size
Dumuria	6
Koira	74
Shyamnagar	110
Debhata	15
Tala	45
Total	250

Table 1: Sample Size Allocation.

Sampling Technique

A convenient sampling was used to select two divisions and five upazila's/sub-divisions. The data was collected from 250 people from five upazila's/sub-divisions, all the respondents were selected using simple random sampling.

Data collection

The study adopted interview method to collect information from five upazila's/sub-divisions. A structured questionnaire was developed to accurately obtain the required data from five preselected areas in the study. Categorical questions, open-ended questions, five-point Likert scale questions were developed by the researcher in line with this study. Before the interview started, a brief explanation about the study was given to the respondent to elicit accurate information. The questionnaire was designed very simply so that the respondents could easily understand the questionnaire. Respondents were given the opportunity to give their opinions and suggestions freely (Table 2).

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	187	74.80%
No	63	25.20%
Total	250	100.00%

Table 2: Do you think the social issue is Responsible for your current situation?.

Data Analysis Tools

The collected primary data have been statistically processed, classified and tabulated by using appropriate methods. Since the sample size is not large (N=250), tables, diagrams and statistical (frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation) results was derived with the help of the computer software called SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences).

Anthropological Identity of Munda Community

The Munda community has many similarities with the Australoid tribes. Most of them have dark complexion and short and curly hair. They are of medium build, very hardy, and quite industrious. Anthropologically they are considered to be part of the larger tribal sub-group of Chhota Nagpur, whose outward appearance resembles that of the Santals. The language spoken by the Munda people is called Mundari. It belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language group [6].

Rituals of the Munda's

The Munda's have their own language and culture, though with the passage of time most of them are not remain. Most of the Munda tribals follow Sanatan religion. Their worship has its own style and characteristics. Munda's have their own religious rituals. The Munda tribals celebrate various pujas according to the lunar calendar observed by their forefathers [7]. The main festival of the Munda's who follow the 'Mundari' religion is 'Karam Puja'. This festival is celebrated on the Ekadashi tithi of Bengali Bhadra month. Also, Munda's perform Sharul Puja and Mansa Puja in their temples. During these religious festivals they wear a dhoti, a towel and a thread. They meet the expenses of all these events by the collective contribution of the head of the family.

Results and Findings

Socio-economic Status of Munda's Community

The age wise picture of the Munda community in the area under study, 54.0% of the respondents collected in this survey are between 15 to 25 years of age, these youth will lead the Munda community in the future (See Appendix, Table 01). Also, the respondents in other age groups were: below 15 years (1.6%), 25 to 35 (24.0%), 35 to 45 (11.2%), 45 to 55 (4.8%) and above 55 years (4.4%).

The gender wise participation figure of the respondents is male 60.0% and female 40.0%. This study shows that boys are slightly ahead in education compared to Munda girls. On the other hand, girls are married earlier than boys. There is a trend of early marriage among the Munda community. Many have pointed to financial chaos, social security as the cause of this problem.

This study gives a grim picture of the educational scenario of the Munda community, according to the data obtained from this study, 18.8% people are illiterate and 20.0% people only have Signature Knowledge. Besides, the attendance rate of Munda community in other levels of education is respectively primary education (19.2%), secondary education (17.2%),

college level (17.2%), graduate level (7.2%), and post graduate level (0.4%). The presence of Munda educated youth represented at the university level is very low. In the survey, 86.6% of the respondents felt that Munda youths are more interested in education in recent times than in the past.

As the reason behind this, 54.8% think that, the steps taken by the Bangladesh government in recent times have played an important role in the expansion of education. In this regard, the role of NGOs (17.6%) and local educated youth (27.6%) is also commendable (See Appendix, Tables 3 & 4).

Category	Frequency	Percent
Lack of Awareness of Sanitation	24	12.80%
Lack of Awareness of Child Marriage	34	18.20%
Lack of Awareness of Birth Control	12	6.40%
Lack of adequate Education Facility	44	23.50%
Lack of Proper Health Care Facility	40	21.40%
Social Inequality	26	13.90%
Erosion of Identity	7	3.70%
Total	187	100.00%

Table 3: Which of the following do you think is a Social Barrier?.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	227	90.8
No	23	9.2
Total	250	100

Table 4: Do you think the Economic issue is Responsible for your current situation?.

Before the Munda's, agriculture was the main occupation, but due to various reasons, most of them work as day labor and seasonal labor in order to earn a living. The data obtained

shows that 31.6% are seasonal labor, 20.4% are day labor, 17.2% are farmers, 6.0% are carpenters, 2.8% are barbers and 14.4% are other professionals See Appendix, Table 2.

Table 5 See Appendix shows the percentage distribution of drinking water sources in the study area of Munda community. According to the data collected from the survey, 50.0% use ponds/rivers/canals/lakes (surface water), 26% tube wells (deep/shallow) and 24% rainwater as sources of drinking water. As Satkhira region is close to the sea, the salinity of deep tube well water is high, so they use rainwater and pond water as alternative sources.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Lack of adequate income sources	44	19.40%
Unemployment	82	36.10%
Loss of Control over Natural Resources	27	11.90%
Poverty and Exploitation	58	25.60%
Lack of Awareness about Government Schemes	16	7.00%
Total	227	100.00%

Table 5: Which of the following do You think is an Economic Barrier?.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	155	62.00%
No	95	38.00%
Total	250	100

Table 6: Do you think the Cultural issue is suitable for your current situation?.

Table 6 see Appendix shows the breakdown of house type distribution in the study area of the Munda community. According to the survey respondents, 43.2% live in huts/shanties, 40.0% in mud houses and 16.8% in brick houses.

In the Munda community due to various actions and campaigns by the government and NGOs Sanitation system has improved a lot. According to the survey data, 45.2% use

Safe drainage by pouring water, 29.2% use Pit Latrine with Slab/Ventilated Improved Latrine/Composting Latrine, 9.2% use Pit Latrine without Slab/open pit, 8.4% use Raw/Open/Hanging Latrine (Permanent/Temporary), and 8.0% use Unsafe drainage by pouring water sanitation See Appendix, Table 7.

Category	Frequency	Percent
Penetration of other cultures	49	31.60%
Discouraged in linguistic practice	41	26.50%
Socio-cultural Handicaps	32	20.60%
Cultural Defacement	33	21.30%
Total	155	100.00%

Table 7: Which of the following do you think is a Cultural Barrier?.

Reasons for the Current Situation of the Munda Community

Social Issue: The tribes of Bangladesh are completely different from each other in terms of ethnic characteristics, language, social organization, cultural patterns etc. Currently Munda community is plagued with various social problems. 74.8% of the respondents consider social issues to be responsible for their current situation. 23.5% of the participants in this study think that the social factor "Lack of adequate Education Facility" is largely responsible for the current condition of the Munda community. Research has shown that, there is no provision of education in Mundari language in these areas, as a result of which many children of this community become disinterested in education. Also, other social issue identified by them are lack of awareness of sanitation (12.8%), lack of awareness of child marriage (28.2%), lack of awareness of birth Control (6.4%), lack of proper health care facility (21.4%), social inequality (13.9%), erosion of identity (3.7%).

Economic Issue: 90.8% of the respondents consider economic issues to be responsible for their current situation. On the other hand, only 9.2% felt that economic factors were not responsible. 36.1% of the respondents feel that unemployment is the most important problem among the factors included in economic issues. According to them, the

number of educated unemployed in the Munda community is increasing day by day, due to which the educated unemployed Munda youth are becoming insecure and depressed. Also, 25.6% of respondents in the survey think Poverty and Exploitation is responsible for the economic issue, 9.4% think Lack of adequate income sources, 11.9% think loss of control over natural resources, and 7.0% think lack of awareness about government schemes.

Cultural Issue: 62.0% of the respondents consider cultural issues to be responsible for their current situation. On the other hand, only 38.0% felt that cultural factors were not responsible. This study found that, 31.6% of the respondents felt that the Munda's own culture was under threat due to the intrusion of other cultures. The traditional life of the Munda's is on the way of losing the traditional diversity of customs, rituals, religion, festivals, habits etc. because the society is constantly subjected to sarcasm, discrimination and hatred of the majority. Also, 26.5% of respondents in this study think, discouraged in linguistic practice is responsible for the cultural issue, 21.3% think cultural defacement, and 20.6% think socio-cultural handicaps. An institutional framework and patronage are needed to continue and spread the cultural practices of the Munda community across the country.

Natural Issue: According to the survey, 54.4 percent of the Munda community believe that natural factors are responsible for their current situation. On the other hand, 46.6% felt that natural causes were not responsible (Table 8).

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	141	56.4
No	109	43.6
Total	250	100

Table 8: Do you think the Natural issue is Responsible for your current situation?.

Munda's have to face both natural and man-made disasters. Man-made disasters include Declaration of reserve forest, Unplanned dams in rivers. This survey shows that 32.6% of the respondents gave more importance to the human-made cause of "Declaration of reserve forest". Due to this man-made cause, the Munda's lost their rights over the forest. Forest-dependent Munda's have had to change their livelihoods (Table 9).

Category	Frequency	Percent
Declaration of reserve forest	46	32.60%
Unplanned dams in rivers	41	29.10%
Natural calamities (storms, floods, salinity, floods, droughts)	54	38.30%
Total	141	100.00%

Table 9: Which of the following do You think is a Natural Barrier?.

Also 29.1% of the respondents felt that “unplanned damming of rivers” has adversely affected the livelihood of the Munda community. The livelihood of the fishermen Munda’s has been cut off due to this unplanned river damming.

On the other hand, 38.3% of the respondents felt that Natural calamities are responsible for their current situation. Natural disasters include storms, floods, salinity, tides, and droughts. Storms, tides, floods are very common in this region [8].

Challenges of the Munda Community in Daily Life

Ethnically, the Munda community is industrious and tolerant in nature. They are living their normal lives fighting against nature and man-made problems. But in recent decades they have been facing various challenges (Table 10).

Category	Frequency	Percent
Public life and culture are under threat	62	24.80%
Safety and Security	79	31.60%
Torture by Neighboring Bengalis	60	24.00%
Forced Occupation of Land	49	19.60%
Total	250	100.00%

Table 10: Challenges of the Munda Community in Daily Life.

The survey found that 31.6% of the respondents feel that the biggest challenge at present is the safety and security of the Munda community. Some recent incidents have created this fear among them. Also, the challenges faced by Munda’s are: public life and culture are under threat (24.8%), torture by neighboring Bengalis (24.0%), and forced occupation of land (19.6%).

Sustainable Development of Munda’s Community

Sustainable development of the Munda community is required to address the prevailing problems and challenges of the Munda community. Now is the time for a long-range plan to create employment, spread education, improve communication systems, and addressing existing problems (social, economic, cultural and natural) (Table 11).

Category	Frequency	Percent
Employment generation	81	32.40%
Spread of Education	71	28.40%
Improving Communication Systems	51	20.40%
Addressing existing problems (social, economic, cultural, and natural)	47	18.80%
Total	250	100.00%

Table 11: Distribution of Strategies for Sustainable Development.

In this survey, 32.4% of the respondents think that sustainable development of the people of this community is possible through the creation of new jobs. The source of income of the people of the Munda community will increase by creating new jobs, their unemployment rate will decrease. As their economic emancipation will be achieved, the existing social problems in the society will continue to be eliminated. Interest in education will increase, Munda community will be freed from social prejudices.

Respondents also think that, other strategies that can be implemented in Munda society to solve or eliminate their

social, economic, cultural, and natural problems are: Spread of Education (28.4%), Improving Communication Systems (20.4%), and Addressing existing problems (18.8%). Education rates among tribal communities are generally much lower than the national average. The main reasons for this are the lack of opportunities in educational institutions for ethnic minorities, language barriers, inadequate resources and biased behavior of classmates and teachers.

Among them, the issues of indigenous peoples have come up in several goals of sustainable development. Bangladesh Government has Committed to educational development of

tribal and tribal communities. To ensure inclusive education for ethnic minority children in Bangladesh, the government plans to publish pre-primary textbooks in six languages from the next academic year, which is a positive initiative.

In the Seventh Five Year Plan, the government laid emphasis on expanding education, health and social security services. The plan also acknowledges that the land issue remains unresolved so far. The plan identified a number of key concerns, including poverty alleviation and right to language and education among tribal and tribal communities, and proactive initiatives were taken to address them [9-11].

The researcher believes that if everything can be completed properly then the indigenous and tribal communities can make their full contribution to achieving the sustainable development goals of Bangladesh.

Recommendations

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, the Munda community is far from the light of civilization. Apart from technological and socio-economic changes, there has been no change in the people of this community. Two hundred years ago, the place from which their ancestors began their journey has changed a little in the twenty-first century. At present the Munda community is plagued with various problems. The following recommendations should be considered as very important to solve the existing problems of the Munda's:

- To preserve the language and heritage of the Munda's by officially documenting and assigning intellectual property rights in their name.
- Officially, their culture, religious festivals and traditional events should be presented to all people across the country through print media and electronic media.
- Steps should be taken to connect the people of the Munda community with the mainstream of the country through government, semi-government and NGOs.
- Necessary number of educational institutions and educational curriculum should be introduced for Munda's. Especially at the primary level providing instruction in the Munda's own language.
- Provision of merit-based employment in local administration system.
- To keep representatives of Munda's in local governance.
- Government to launch various social schemes for sustainable development of socio-economic structure of Munda community.

Conclusion

Although the forefathers started life around the Sundarbans with the idea that all the land would belong to them by settling in the forest, the current context is just

the opposite. The original sons of the land (Munda's) of that region are now landless. In addition to losing their rights to land, the rhythm of their lives, happiness and peace are gone. Our own language and culture are endangered today. The socio-economic situation is almost fragile. However, the original children of nature never give up. They have formed their own organization to claim their own language, culture and rights. In addition, joint public and private initiatives are working to improve the quality of life of tribal Munda's and establish their rights.

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