



Habitus, Family, and Identity: Generational Perspectives on Social and Cultural Practices of Munda Community in Sundarbans

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Abstract

The Munda community in Bangladesh is undergoing rapid cultural transformation due to socioeconomic challenges, modernization, and external influences. As a historically marginalized indigenous group, the Mundas face pressures that reshape their language, religious practices, and intergenerational identity. This study examines these shifts to understand how cultural continuity and change unfold in their everyday lives. The primary objective of this research is to explore the socio-cultural adaptations of the Munda people, focusing on language shifts, evolving religious practices, and intergenerational identity negotiations. The study aims to assess the implications of these changes within the broader framework of indigenous resilience and social integration. This research employs a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and informal discussions with Munda community members in Datinakhali village. Using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and symbolic violence, the study examines how external pressures restructure indigenous cultural practices. Findings indicate that language loss is a critical issue, with younger generations increasingly adopting Bengali for economic and social mobility, weakening intergenerational communication and cultural memory. Religious practices are also evolving, as younger members integrate mainstream Hindu rituals or convert to other faiths, reflecting both adaptation and external pressures. Additionally, economic hardship accelerates cultural change, forcing the community to alter long-standing customs and social structures. The study concludes that cultural adaptation among the Mundas is shaped by structural inequalities rather than organic change. While resilience is evident, these transformations often reflect marginalization rather than voluntary evolution. To support the Munda community, policy interventions should prioritize indigenous language preservation, culturally responsive education, and economic programs that empower rather than assimilate. Recognizing and valuing indigenous knowledge systems is essential for fostering sustainable cultural and social development.

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Introduction

The Munda people, an indigenous community in Bangladesh, are undergoing significant cultural changes influenced by modernization, economic shifts, and increasing interactions with mainstream Bengali society. Indigenous communities worldwide are undergoing rapid cultural transformations due to the forces of globalization, modernization, and socio-economic shifts. The Munda people in Bangladesh, a historically marginalized indigenous group, are no exception. While they have long

Maintained distinct cultural traditions, including their own language (Sadri), religious practices, and social customs, these traditions are increasingly under pressure from external influences such as state policies, economic hardship, and interventions by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Mohsin, 2012) ^[14].

Cultural transformation among indigenous communities is a dynamic process shaped by historical, socio-economic, and political forces (Clifford, 1988). These transformations are particularly evident in language use, religious practices, and technological adaptation (Tripura, 2017). While these changes offer new opportunities, they also present challenges, particularly in preserving cultural identity and traditional practices.

Language shift is one of the most pressing concerns for the Munda community. The younger generation is increasingly adopting Bengali as their primary mode of communication, leading to a decline in the use of Sadri, the indigenous language of the Mundas (Mohanty, 2010). This shift is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a reflection of broader socio-economic pressures and the pursuit of upward mobility. According to Bourdieu's (1990) theory of habitus, linguistic practices are shaped by social structures and material conditions, and the transition from Sadri to Bengali is a testament to the community's evolving habitus in response to external influences. Scholars have noted that language loss among indigenous groups often results in the erosion of cultural knowledge, oral traditions, and intergenerational communication (Fishman, 1991) ^[8].

Religious practices among the Mundas have also undergone modifications due to economic constraints and the integration of modern influences. The introduction of new cultural elements, such as Hindi music in weddings, and the presence of Christian missionary activities demonstrate the hybridization of traditions (Sengupta, 2013). These transformations can be understood through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) ^[5], where dominant cultural practices subtly reshape indigenous traditions. Additionally, the adoption of non-indigenous religious and cultural practices often leads to a crisis of identity, as younger generations grapple with competing influences from traditional Munda spirituality and externally introduced belief systems (Mahapatra, 2021).

In addition to cultural and linguistic transformations, the Munda community faces socioeconomic vulnerabilities that exacerbate their marginalization. Land dispossession, exploitative labor conditions, and limited access to state services contribute to their precarious situation (Chakma & Hill, 2018). These structural inequalities reinforce the pressures leading to cultural assimilation and loss of indigenous identity. While NGOs and development programs often aim to address economic hardships, their interventions sometimes fail to integrate indigenous perspectives, leading to unintended consequences that accelerate cultural homogenization (Roy, 2022) ^[15].

This study explores how the Munda community in Bangladesh is undergoing cultural change—looking at the shift from Sadri to Bengali and what it means for identity and mobility, changes in religious practices, and how education and technology are reshaping their values and aspirations.

Literature Review

The Munda people traditionally speak Mundari, an Austroasiatic language that serves as a cornerstone of their

cultural identity. However, the increasing use of Sadri (also known as Nagpuri), an Indo-Aryan lingua franca, has significantly impacted their linguistic landscape. Sadri emerged as a practical medium of communication among various tribal groups, including the Mundas, Santals, and Oraons, particularly during the British colonial period when labor migration brought these communities into closer contact (Ghosh, 2005 ; Tirkey, 2010). Sadri's adoption was driven by its relative proximity to dominant regional languages like Hindi and Bengali, making it a pragmatic choice for inter-community interactions in labor-intensive settings such as tea plantations and the reclamation of the Sundarbans (Toppo, 1999).

While Sadri has facilitated communication and socio-economic mobility, its widespread use has raised concerns about the erosion of Mundari among younger generations. Studies by Mahapatra (2007) and Bara (2015) highlight a growing trend of bilingualism or multilingualism among Munda youth, who often speak Sadri, Hindi, or Bengali alongside Mundari. This linguistic shift reflects broader socio-economic pressures, as regional and national languages are increasingly necessary for accessing education, employment, and political representation. However, the decline in Mundari proficiency among younger Munda individuals poses a threat to the preservation of their linguistic heritage and associated cultural knowledge.

The religious practices of the Munda people are deeply intertwined with their cultural identity and reflect a blend of indigenous animistic beliefs and external influences. Historically, the Munda religion centered on the worship of natural elements, ancestral spirits, and local deities, with Sing Bonga, the Sun God, occupying a central role as the creator and sustainer of life (Mahapatra, 1976 ; Bara, 1995). Festivals such as Sarhul and Sohrai are integral to their religious calendar, symbolizing their agrarian lifestyle and reverence for nature. Sarhul, celebrated in spring, honors the sal tree and marks the beginning of the agricultural cycle, while Sohrai, a harvest festival, involves cattle worship and communal feasts (Bara, 1995 ; Sinha, 1987).

However, the Munda community's religious practices have undergone significant changes due to the influence of Hinduism, Christianity, and modernization. Many Munda individuals have adopted Hinduism or Christianity, often as a result of missionary activities or socio-economic pressures (Roy, 1912). This religious syncretism has led to the incorporation of Hindu or Christian elements into traditional Munda rituals, creating a hybrid religious identity. For instance, some Munda families now celebrate Hindu festivals like Durga Puja alongside traditional festivals like Sarhul. While this syncretism reflects the community's adaptability, it also raises concerns about the dilution of their indigenous spiritual practices and the loss of cultural authenticity.

Music and dance have always been central to Munda cultural expression, serving as mediums for storytelling, social cohesion, and resistance. Traditional dances such as Jhumar and Domkach are performed during festivals, weddings, and communal gatherings, accompanied by instruments like the mandar (drum), flutes, and traditional string instruments (Roy, 1912). These performances are not merely entertainment but also repositories of Munda history, folklore, and collective memory (Hembram, 2010). Themes of resistance and resilience often feature prominently in Munda music and dance, reflecting their historical struggles

against exploitation and marginalization.

Despite their cultural significance, traditional music and dance practices are facing challenges due to generational shifts and the influence of modern media. Younger Munda individuals, particularly those living in urban areas, are increasingly exposed to mainstream Indian and global popular culture, leading to a decline in interest in traditional art forms. While efforts have been made to revive and preserve these practices through cultural festivals and educational programs, the generational gap in engagement with traditional music and dance remains a pressing issue.

The Munda community's socio-economic landscape has undergone significant transformations due to urbanization, migration, and changing economic structures. Historically, the Mundas were primarily engaged in agriculture and forest-based livelihoods, which shaped their cultural practices and social organization. However, the decline in traditional livelihoods due to land alienation, deforestation, and industrialization has forced many Munda individuals to seek alternative sources of income in urban areas (Bara, 2015). This shift has led to increased exposure to mainstream culture and greater integration into the broader socio-economic system.

While these changes have provided new opportunities for education, employment, and political representation, they have also posed challenges to the Munda community's cultural identity. Younger generations, in particular, face the dual pressure of adapting to modern socioeconomic demands while preserving their cultural heritage. This tension is evident in their evolving attitudes toward language, religion, and traditional practices, as well as their increasing reliance on regional and national languages for socio-economic mobility.

Theoretical Framework

Habitus

The sociological writings of Pierre Bourdieu have been acclaimed for integrating objective and subjective approaches that were later followed by Giddens, Margaret

Archer, John Urry etc. theorists. Bourdieu tried to analyze consumption in France by combining the notions of class and status. He maintained that a person's class position, educational status, and occupational position impact how they consume, and that consumption is an arena of symbolic struggle between members of various social classes (Stillerman, 2015).

Bourdieu (2005) further claims that the habitus is a long-term rather than a permanent system and that individuals may be imaginative and improvise in practices as a result of this reproductive schema, but only to a certain extent. He emphasizes that there is a dialectical confrontation "between habitus, as structured structure, and objective structures" when an individual's dispositions, i.e. mode of behaviour, encounter conditions "that are different from those that have constructed them, i.e. moving to a different context", or what Bourdieu calls 'field' (Bourdieu, 2005:46). The interconnectedness of habitus and field highlights the dynamic relationship between individual agency and structural constraints which made Bourdieu's framework a compelling tool for understanding social world. Bourdieu envisioned the social world as a "system of relations" (Bourdieu, 1989) and a social hierarchy with more or less dominant and dominated social positions. Bourdieu's idea of habitus is depicted in Figure 1.

"Objectively classifiable conditions of existence and their positions in the structure of conditions of Existence (i.e., economic capital and cultural capital)"

Habitus

"As a structuring structure"

Taste

"As a system of schemes of perception and appreciation"

"System of schemes generating practices and works"

"Classifiable practices and works"

Lifestyle

"A system of classified and classifying practices, i.e., distinctive signs ('tastes')"

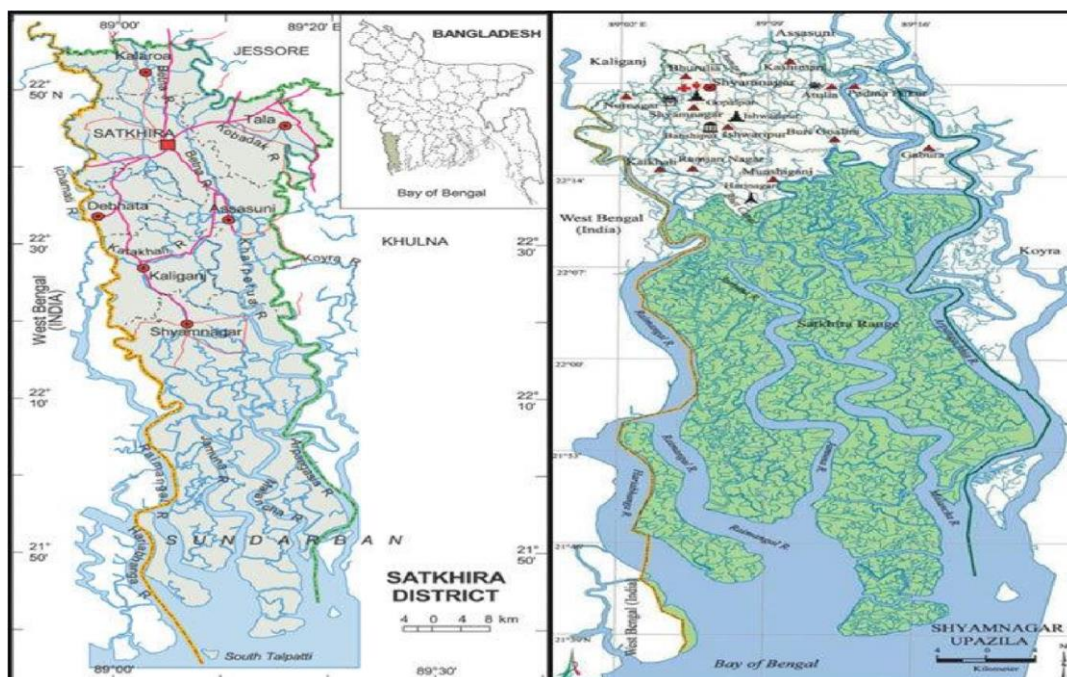


Fig 1: Map of the study area

The interrelation of religion, tradition, and language can be understood through Bourdieu's notion of the field. His framework can illuminate how people's cultural and social practices, particularly those tied to language, religion, and tradition, are both structured by their specific contexts and actively reproduced through their everyday lives. By applying Bourdieu's framework to religion, tradition, and language, a clearer understanding of how these elements act as social reproduction mechanisms and sites of symbolic struggle. They not only shape individual and collective identities, but they also mediate the tension between continuity and change in the face of changing social circumstances.

These elements - religion, tradition, and language - also serve as key dimensions of symbolic capital, where individuals and groups negotiate identity, belonging, and power. Language, for example, operates as a medium through which habitus is expressed and reinforced (Bourdieu, 1991) ^[5]. Individual's linguistic preferences and practices reflect their cultural heritage and social positioning while simultaneously shaping their perceptions of self and community. Through religious practices, individuals not only reaffirm shared values and collective identity but also sail across symbolic hierarchies - as religion often functions as a site for the reproduction of power relations. As Verter (2003) notes, religion acts as a form of cultural capital, shaping both individual dispositions and collective practices. Similarly, traditions—whether embodied in rituals, customs, or festivals—serve as manifestations of habitus which transmit shared dispositions across generations. The practices involved are dynamic and adaptive, which demonstrates the agency of individuals and groups as they reinterpret tradition to suit their changing environments.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design, which is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena and capturing the nuances of cultural and generational changes. Qualitative methods enable researchers to engage deeply with participants, understand their perspectives, and interpret the meanings they attach to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). This approach is particularly relevant for studying indigenous communities like the Munda, where cultural practices, traditions, and social structures are deeply intertwined with their identity and way of life. The research is exploratory in nature, aiming to uncover the factors driving cultural and generational shifts within the Munda community. It employs a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time but focusing on two distinct generational groups: the older generation (aged 40 and above) and the younger generation (aged 15 and above). This design allows for a comparative analysis of how cultural practices and attitudes have evolved over time.

The research was conducted in Shyamnagar upazilla, Satkhira district. The fieldwork was conducted in two locations : Datinakhali and Kalinchi Garage Bazar, Burigoalini. These two locations were selected for their significant Munda populations and the contrast between traditional and modern influences. Access to these areas was facilitated by a local contact, who helped build trust and navigate cultural sensitivities.

We went to Burigoalini union first to locate the respondents. Then we went to the Datinakhali village which is situated beside Sundarbans. The fieldwork was completed in two days

in Datinakhali. After that, we went to Kalinchi Garage bazar situated near Burigoalini bazar.

Study Area

The study was conducted in two specific locations: Burigoalini and Kalinchi Garage Bazar. These areas were selected due to their significant Munda population and the presence of both traditional and modern influences. Burigoalini, a rural area, is known for its adherence to traditional Munda practices, while Kalinchi Garage Bazar, a more urbanized setting, reflects the community's adaptation to modern socio-economic conditions. This contrast provides a rich context for examining generational and cultural changes.

Access to the study areas was facilitated through a local contact person, who played a crucial role in establishing trust and rapport with the community. The local contact also assisted in identifying potential participants and navigating cultural sensitivities, ensuring that the research process was respectful and collaborative.

Data collection

To ensure a diverse range of perspectives, a clustered sampling approach was used. Participants were divided into two generational groups : those aged 40 and above, representing the older generation with strong ties to traditional practices, and those aged 15 and above, representing the younger generation navigating modernity. Both groups included an equal representation of genders. In total, 20 participants were selected, with 10 from each generational group. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences in their own words. The interviews focused on themes like language use, religious practices, family dynamics, and socio-economic changes, providing rich, detailed insights into the community's cultural and generational shifts.

Data Analysis

This study used thematic analysis to examine data from interviews and focus group discussions with members of the Munda community, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method. The process included transcribing and translating recordings, coding data both inductively and deductively, developing themes such as language shift and religious change, and interpreting findings in light of existing literature and the community's socio-cultural context. While limited by a small sample size and a cross-sectional design, the study offers valuable insights into the cultural and generational changes shaping Munda identity, reflecting their ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity.

Findings

Language and Generational Change

The first part of the discussion here focus on the use of indigenous Sadri language and the changes in its everyday use as language is a fundamental component of cultural identity which act as a repository for traditions, social bonds, and shared histories (Joseph, 2004) ^[11].

Traditional practices are a collective expression of the Munda habitus, the result of generations adjusting to their unique ecological and cultural setting (Bourdieu, 1977) ^[2]. The respondents frequently mentioned that while the older generation still speaks the language at home, the younger

generation has increasingly shifted towards Bengali. This aligns with a form of habitus adjustment, where social, economic, and cultural changes prompt shifts in linguistic practices (Bourdieu, 1990). In linguistic context, habitus implies that social circumstances affect language use, preferences, and meanings. It shows how historical and social dynamics shape language practices like the Munda community's Sadri-to-Bengali transition (Bourdieu, 1990).

The changes in language use also signifies an erosion of cultural capital as well as represents a loss of symbolic capital—an erosion of the cultural distinctiveness that once tied the community to its heritage, as language is a key element in the reproduction of cultural identity. As one of the respondents note, “The elderly speak Sadri at home, but the younger generation prefers Bengali. most of them can understand, but few can speak it fluently. We don’t have scope to practice the language.” This poignantly captures this linguistic shift in the community.

Cultural capital is linked to the ability to speak the dominant language of the state and society. One of the respondents mentioned :

“Apart from using to interact with the community people, Munda language has no further benefits. Learning Bangla is essential here for education and wider communication with the local people.”

The younger generation's preference for Bengali can be interpreted as a response to the pressures of social integration and the desire for upward mobility. Speaking the dominant language of the state - in this case Bengali - increases one's ability to access power, education, and economic opportunities. Respondents also touch upon the generational divide, with the younger generation being less proficient in the traditional language. Such generational change accelerated by globalization and the process of cultural assimilation, which often leads to the erosion of indigenous languages. Studies on the Gond community, for instance, show that younger generations often shift toward dominant languages to access education and economic opportunities, mirroring the Munda youth's preference for Bengali (Fürer-Haimendorf and Fürer-Haimendorf, 2021; Khattri *et al.* 2022) ^[19, 13]. This shift, however, is not merely a matter of individual preference but is deeply embedded in broader power structures. The assimilation into Bengali is often associated with greater social mobility, whereas the continued use of Sadri is increasingly perceived as a marker of cultural identity that, at the same time, imposes economic constraints.

Language, as a form of cultural capital, is more than just a means of communication—it carries identity, history, and power. For the Munda community, speaking Bengali is increasingly seen as a pathway to better opportunities, while holding onto Sadri “feels like clinging to a heritage that the broader society undervalues.” Dominance of Bengali caught Mundas in a difficult struggle : adapting to the mainstream for a better future or preserving their ancestral tongue at the risk of being left behind. This transition is not merely a matter of language ; it is a symptomatic of larger societal factors that determine who gets to speak and who does not.

The respondents then lamented the decline of Sadri language due to the increasing interaction with Bengali-speaking communities, which means an aberration in cultural assimilation that might ultimately result to the loss of language and traditions. The decline of the Munda language

is part of a larger process of fitting in with mainstream culture, which often leads to the marginalization of their own. The desire to preserve the Sadri language and teach it to younger generations is crucial for maintaining cultural identity. However, the lack of formal written representation of the language, and the community's limited access to written resources, complicates this effort. One of the respondents mentioned :

“By which means I am going to teach our children. We don’t have any comprehensive written book which could enable them to learn. I have heard that somebody is working from SAMS (local NGO) – I don’t know much.”

Education among younger Munda people emerged as both a point of pride and a source of tension. The struggle for cultural legitimacy – defined as recognition and validation of Munda traditions, language, and identity (Kaime, 2014) ^[12] - is evident in the declining use of the indigenous language.

Thus, education and modernization have introduced new dimensions to the community's habitus. The younger generation is growing up with greater access to education and modern technology, like smartphones, which sets them apart from their elders. This shift is reshaping their habitus. As education and technology open up new opportunities, younger Munda people are developing aspirations that differ from previous generations. The younger generation is embracing education and new skills, moving beyond traditional ways thus adapting to a changing world.

This change shows how habitus has been reoriented in reaction to the challenges posed by globalisation and modernisation. Bourdieu's idea of doxa, or the taken-for-granted customs and norms, offers a lens through which to see these changes in the community (Charlesworth, 2000). Munda community struggles with the conflict between maintaining cultural authenticity and adopting new practices. Once functioning below the level of conscious thought, these taken-for-granted norms are currently being questioned and renegotiated as new forms of knowledge, entertainment and religious expressions. What was formerly unquestioned is now open to reinterpretation as doxa is shaken. This forces people to adapt, resist or integrate these influences in their cultural lives. And, it leads us to the discussion regarding religious changes and adaptation among Munda community.

Religious Practices and Change

Religion remains a vital part of the Munda community's cultural identity, shaping their daily lives and reinforcing their sense of belonging. For many, religious rituals are more than just traditions ; they are a way of holding onto who they are despite the pressures of a changing world. During interviews with the Mundas in Datinakhali village, elders often spoke about their commitment to maintaining traditional Hindu rituals, even as economic hardships forced them to make adjustments.

One elderly man, sitting on a worn-out wooden stool under the shade of a large banyan tree, explained with quiet determination :

“We observe all the Hindu rituals as much as we can. We build a temporary temple here (pointing to an open field nearby) and bring in a Brahmin to perform the ceremonies. It's not the same as before, but we still do it every year.”

For the older generation, continuing these rituals—no matter how simple—represents resilience. However, they also acknowledge that things are changing. Many younger Mundas, while respecting these traditions, are adapting their

practices in ways that reflect modern influences. Some have started participating in Hindu festivals that were previously not part of their ancestral traditions, while others are questioning the need for costly ceremonies in times of financial struggle.

A middle-aged woman, adjusting the folds of her sari, voiced her concerns about these shifts:

“We used to have grand celebrations, with singing, dancing, and offerings to our gods. Now, the younger ones don’t seem as interested. They say it’s too expensive or that they don’t have time. But what will happen if we stop? Who will remember our ways?”

This tension between generations highlights what Bourdieu (1991) ^[5] calls symbolic violence—the subtle ways in which dominant cultural norms reshape traditions, often without the community fully realizing it. Over time, external influences, economic pressures, and societal expectations push communities to alter their practices. The blending of Hindu deities with traditional Munda spiritual beliefs is one example of this process. While it may seem like an organic adaptation, it is, in many ways, a result of external pressures that gradually shift cultural identity.

An elder who had witnessed these changes over the decades reflected on this blending of traditions with a mix of

Acceptance and nostalgia :

“My grandfather used to tell stories of our own gods, the ones who protected our forests and rivers. Now, people talk more about Shiva and Durga. Maybe they are all the same in the end, but sometimes I wonder if we are forgetting where we came from.”

Beyond religious practices, economic struggles have played a major role in reshaping spiritual life. Large gatherings and rituals that once required community-wide participation have become difficult to sustain. Some families have replaced traditional ceremonies with simpler, more affordable alternatives. Others have found new ways to express their faith, sometimes incorporating practices from dominant religious groups. This shift can be understood through Bourdieu’s (1984) ^[3] concept of the social field, where individuals navigate between traditional beliefs and the larger socio-religious landscape, often making compromises to fit into the dominant order.

A younger Munda man, who had recently moved to a nearby town for work, explained his evolving perspective :

“I respect our traditions, but sometimes they feel impractical. My parents expect me to follow everything the way they did, but life is different now. I have to think about work, about money. If I can pray in a simpler way, does that make me less devoted ?”

These changes do not necessarily mean a loss of faith but rather a transformation in how religious identity is expressed. While the older generation clings to the rituals they have known for a lifetime, the younger ones are negotiating a new way of being Munda in a rapidly shifting world. Some have even converted to other religious affiliations, drawn by the promise of education, employment, or social mobility. Although not widespread, such conversions reflect the larger struggle of navigating faith, identity, and survival.

Despite these transformations, one thing remains clear: religion continues to be a source of strength for the Munda people. Whether through grand rituals or simple daily prayers, their faith provides them with a sense of continuity and resilience in the face of change. As one elderly woman, her silver hair neatly tied back, put it:

“No matter what happens, we still pray. Maybe not in the same way, maybe not with the same offerings, but our gods know our hearts.”

This evolving religious landscape underscores the complex interplay of tradition, adaptation, and economic realities. While change is inevitable, the Munda people continue to find ways to hold onto their spiritual heritage, ensuring that even as practices shift, the essence of their faith endures.

Modernization of Rituals and Cultural Expression

The impact of modernization is also evident in the way traditional Munda rituals and cultural expressions are evolving. Weddings, festivals, and life-cycle ceremonies—once deeply rooted in indigenous customs—are now blending with modern practices. Traditional songs and dances are still performed, but often alongside contemporary music. Clothing styles are changing, and technology is playing a larger role in celebrations.

One elder woman reflected on how weddings have transformed :

“In the old days, a wedding was a village celebration. The bride wore our traditional jewelry, and everyone came together to sing and dance. Now, people hire DJs, wear jeans, and bring cameras. It feels like these rituals are no longer ours—they have become a show for outsiders.”

This shift illustrates how cultural capital is being redefined within the Munda community. Younger generations see modern elements—like photography, Western-style clothing, and digital music—as symbols of status and progress. As Bourdieu (1993) ^[6] explains, cultural production is not static; it evolves as external influences reshape the doxa, or taken-for-granted norms. What was once considered an essential part of Munda identity is now being adjusted to fit changing social realities.

However, these adaptations do not occur without tension. While some see modernization as a way to stay relevant in a fast-changing world, others worry about the gradual erosion of their heritage. This balancing act—between preserving traditions and embracing new influences—defines much of the Munda community’s current cultural landscape.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the cultural transformations occurring within the Munda community by focusing on four key objectives: (1) to analyze the shift from Sadri to Bengali and its implications for cultural identity and social mobility, (2) to investigate changes in religious practices and their significance in the community’s evolving habitus, (3) to explore the role of education and technology in shaping aspirations and redefining traditional values, and (4) to assess the impact of external interventions, such as NGO activities, on the socioeconomic and cultural landscape of the community.

Driven by aspirations for social mobility, younger generations within the Munda community are consciously reshaping their linguistic and cultural practices to align with dominant societal norms. Language, as a key marker of identity and belonging, is at the center of this transformation. By prioritizing Bengali over Sadri, younger Mundas are not only seeking better integration into mainstream society but also positioning themselves for economic and educational advancement. This shift, however, creates a clear generational divide, as older members of the community continue to uphold traditional linguistic and cultural practices as symbols of heritage and collective identity.

This divergence underscores how *habitus*, rather than being static, is constantly negotiated and reshaped within the changing social field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). While the older generation embodies a *habitus* rooted in tradition and historical continuity, younger Mundas are developing an adaptive *habitus* that facilitates their engagement with broader social and economic structures. The influx of modern influences—such as urban migration, digital communication, and education—combined with economic pressures, has restructured the ‘field’ in which *habitus* operates. As the boundaries of cultural participation shift, the values, expectations, and everyday practices of the Munda people are being reconfigured in real time.

The decline of many customs poses a significant challenge to the intergenerational transmission of *habitus*. Traditionally, cultural knowledge, values, and social norms were passed down organically through familial and communal interactions. However, as younger generations increasingly adopt external ways of life, the mechanisms of cultural reproduction weaken, leading to a gradual erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. This disruption signifies not just a change in customs but also a loss of cultural memory—a vital aspect of community cohesion. Without a shared cultural and linguistic foundation, the generational bonds that once provided stability and continuity within the Munda community are at risk of fragmentation.

Language loss, in particular, accelerates this process. As fewer young Mundas speak Sadri fluently, it becomes increasingly difficult for the community to articulate and sustain their unique worldview. Language is more than a tool for communication; it carries the worldview, values, and philosophical underpinnings of a people (Fishman, 1991). With its decline, certain cultural expressions, oral traditions, and indigenous ways of understanding the world may fade into oblivion, replaced by dominant narratives that do not fully encapsulate the Munda experience.

This ongoing transformation creates tension between generations. For older Mundas, the embrace of Bengali by younger members can be perceived as a rejection of tradition and an erosion of cultural integrity. Meanwhile, the younger generation views linguistic and cultural adaptation as a necessary step toward upward mobility, greater access to opportunities, and social inclusion. This intergenerational conflict, while indicative of a shifting *habitus*, also reflects a deeper struggle: the attempt to balance cultural preservation with socio-economic advancement.

Despite these tensions, the evolving *habitus* of the Munda youth is not simply about loss—it also represents resilience

and strategic adaptation. By navigating between tradition and modernity, younger Mundas are crafting hybrid identities that allow them to participate in new socio-economic realities while still retaining aspects of their cultural heritage. This fluid negotiation demonstrates that culture is not merely inherited but actively constructed and reconstructed in response to changing circumstances.

As the Munda community continues to grapple with these changes, the challenge remains: how can cultural continuity be maintained without limiting the aspirations of younger generations? This question highlights the importance of community-led initiatives that foster bilingualism, cultural education, and the intergenerational exchange of knowledge. Rather than viewing linguistic and cultural shifts as a zero-sum loss, there is potential for a middle ground—one where tradition and modernity can coexist in a way that strengthens both individual agency and collective identity.

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