

## Munda Tribes- Traditional Practices And Local Governance

Shivangi Tyagi

*Professional Assistance in Development Action (PRADAN)*

**Abstract :** *The study is basically about the culture, traditions and the local governance of the Munda tribal community based in Jharkhand and revolved around the village Bichna in Khunti district. Starting from the village's introduction, the routine practices of the people in the village it goes on to describing the festivals in the village including the community specific practices and traditions. And I have tried to understand one of the traditional practices in detail that is Pathalgadi, which was in limelight in 2017-18 in the district Khunti. Followed by, the details about the local governance of the Munda community, that is the Parha System; the levels of governing bodies and the individuals leading the system. The study also tries to brief about the fifth schedule in the state, and how Gram Sabhas (the village level meetings) are so powerful. It also includes my insights about the village and in the end is a compilation of the emerging areas of collective action so that we can help improving the living standards of the community which has such a rich culture.*

**Keywords:** *Dynamics of the village, Local governance, Pathalgadi, Tribal culture, Village outline.*

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

There are so many places speckled across the country, and every place has its distinct features. And in addition to that every person has a different outlook or observation. Similarly, I've been to villages formerly but the one I lived in, a small hamlet named 'Pahan Tola' (8.5 kms from Khunti) of Bichna village, north of it lies Pandu, Gamariya lies in west and Kunjla in east direction, has its own facets and I'm trying to elucidate them. Bichna is an integration of three hamlets namely Sarna tola, Pelol and Bada Bichna (which includes Pahan tola, Manjhi tola and Bada tola) with a total population of 989, speaking Mundari, Saadri and Hindi. People in the village follow Christianity, Hinduism and Sarna religion and these diversities come together for an excursion in Bichna Bazar, on every Thursday and Sunday afternoon, greeting each other with 'Yesu sahaay' or 'Johaar'. I met a really welcoming culture on the very first visit to the market which made me adore the place even more. Festivals celebrated in my village are Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Sarhul, Jainishikar, Karma and people who follow Hindu religion celebrate Holi, Diwali, and Raksha Bandhan.

I bothered to look into the lives and livelihood of the villagers, who are mainly reliant on agriculture, producing majorly rice, millets, Urad, corn, Okra (Bhindi), Long yard Bean (Barbati), during July, August and September. Vegetables like Potatoes, Onion, Garlic, Ginger are planted in the months of October, November and December for self-consumption. And some of them even sell the harvest in the Bichna market or Khunti market according to their convenience. Livestock like oxen, cows, buffaloes, goats, duck rearing and poultry farming is an essential means of support. Trees also offer a livelihood alternative like Tamarind, jackfruit, watermelon, mango and litchi.

Lifestyle of the people in the village is very different from those living in the capitals; the village is awake by 5:30 AM. The women folk begin their day by cooking food for family; and fetching water too and boil it before consumption. The children leave for school by 7:30 AM post having breakfast and return by 1:00 PM. Men leave by 8:00 in the morning and have lunch in field itself. Women also work in the field alongside men. At 5:00 PM they return home and start cooking dinner, whereas men do nothing during this time and wait for food to be served, except a few who go for consuming alcohol. In all these cases, one can clearly see that the burden on women is higher and this saddens me.

But there are a few struggles confronted by people, primarily water for irrigation, drinking or washing purpose, as they depend on rainfall which is troublesome if it rains less or doesn't rain, rest there is only one or a maximum of two hand pumps in a hamlet. To avail any medical treatment people travel to Khunti.

## **II. PROCESS OF VILLAGE STUDY**

By the same token of knowing the community, I interviewed people individually, talking to villagers in dyad and also in groups and meetings with SHG. I also prepared a questionnaire to look into the livelihood, income, expenditure and savings of the people, questioning them about their occupation, and observed that farming is their primary occupation. Few of them are teachers and are in military services too. I tried to calculate the expenditure in farming, of a few houses and got a general idea that they spend about 5000 rupees on every acre, due to increase the prices of seeds, fertilizers, and tractors rent and also labor charges. And observed that this is matter of concern for the people that are not able to save any money, and was also a reason that many women in the village did not have a bank account, but again the question in my mind was there is this issue with the women (other than the one they have in the SHG jointly). In urge of finding the reason behind this, I started to understand little bit of dynamics of village and its community.

### **2.1. Traditional Practices**

Talking about their traditions, beliefs and festivals, I came across terms like *Pahan* and *Parha*. Also I came to know the role of these significant individuals as people in the village talked a lot about this spiritual and administrative system, which caught my attention and later became my topic of interest. In festivals like Sarhul, it's the Pahan who performs the rituals and worships at first, people wash his feet and then (celebrate the festival). There is also a tradition named *Bangadi*, in which Pahan worship first and then people start farming. Even when it comes to health, people call Pahan if someone is ill in the house, he performs the rituals, prays for the well-being and the illness is alleviated gradually. Pahan also treats the whole village twice in a year during *Sarhul* and *Batauli* (*Kadleta Sarhul/ Chota Sarhul*). After celebrating *Batauli* in which the rituals are carried out by Pahan, a farmer can work during day as well as evening time in the farm, contrary to farm timings of 12 Noon – 1 PM which is considered as sacred and fruitful. Karma puja is celebrated as the tribal community believes that due to Karam Devta they have a good harvest. This festival is associated with harvest, which is symbolized through a Karam tree. It is very auspicious and is a symbol of fertility and prosperity. This festival is celebrated in the 11th moon of the Hindu month of Bhadrapada (August/September).



**Junior Pahan, worshipping a branch of Karam tree while celebrating Karam Pooja in school.**

Pahan can be classified into categories in accordance with the rituals they carry out, namely:

1. *Desoli Pahan*: the pahan carries out Desoli puja in which a male buffalo is sacrificed also known as *Kaada Bali*.
2. *Sarhul Pahan*: During Sarhul, the rituals are carried out by this category of Pahan.
3. *Buru Pahan*: This category of Pahan worships the hills. Like worshipping *Buru Bonga* (God of the hills), which is done when it doesn't rain.

There are eight types of gods worshipped by in this community by the Pahan:

1. *Singbonga*- The 'Sun' god, he is considered as the creator of the universe. Worship
2. *Jaaherbonga*- The 'Forest' god, people worships trees and woods.
3. *Burubonga*- The 'Hill' god, hills are worshipped for proper rainfall and avoid wild animals.
4. *Ekirbonga*- The 'Water' god, water is worshipped. There is a belief when a girl is married, Ekirbonga is worshipped and is sent with her to protect her. And if the girl passes away Pahan from her birth place goes to the village and brings the Ekirbonga back to the birthplace by performing some rituals.
5. *Hatubonga*- The 'village' god, there is a *gram devtain* every village who's worshipped every year like a festival. And at the time of event a meeting is organised where the duration and a few rules of farming are discussed. Like when they'll start farming, and people won't leave their cows and goats open, etc.
6. *Orabonga*- The 'home' god, the god who is worshipped inside the house.
7. *Namabonga* (yet to explore)
8. *Dasolibonga* (yet to explore)

In ancient times, the role of Pahan was also to look after the establishment of the village and it included mobilization of people from different castes to settle in the village and look after the same. For example, Manjhis were brought to carry out Bamboo related work, Lohar for working as blacksmith, etc. When the pahan dies, his position is given to the eldest son in the family. It has been quite evident that, after a family adopts Christianity as their religion, the importance of a Pahan reduces drastically for them and instead they look up to the Father (*Padri*) of the church. At some places Pahan is also the head of Hatu Dunum (Traditional Gram Sabhas) and Mauja Sabhas (which are held at village level), including Bichna village. Pahan, being the head of the village, also collects the revenue and provides it to the deprived ones; also treat the whole village twice every year.



**A woman from Manjhi family making bamboo stuffs**

## **2.2. Pathalgadi**

*Pathalgadi*, which is a very vital tradition for the Munda community is often misconstrued as an act of protest against government only, is actually a traditional practice which too is having 22 forms, like *Janm Pathhalgadi*, *Mrityu Pathhalgadi*, *Bhuihaari*, *Khutkati*, and more. The whole rationale behind this tradition is celebrating an event by cutting and inscribing about it on a Pathal (Rock) and erect it on a piece of land related to that particular event. *Pathal* means rock and *gadi* means burying or in simple words burial stone.



There are namely 22 types of Pothalgadi and I could explore a few of them, namely:

1. *Ziddiri (Janm Pothalgadi)* - its buried post the birth of a child after 7-9 days. A part of baby's navel is cut and buried on the entrance of the house with a burial stone.
2. *Kudaamdiri Pothalgadi*- Along with baby's stone, another stone with mother's part of the womb attached with the baby is also buried near the house.
3. *Harshali Pothalgadi*- Its buried after someone's demise, and is also called Yaadgaari.
4. *Jaatbora Pothalgadi*- As marrying in same title or gotr is proscribed, so this burial rock is implanted when people marry against this decree.
5. *Siman Pothalgadi*- This rock is implanted to assign boundary to a village.
6. *Bhuihaari Pothalgadi*-during British rule some of the villages did not give the revenue, and the lands of the villagers, except for the Munda and Pahan of the village, were sold out to some *Zamindaaars*. The villagers had to act accordingly, and the system continued. A stone is implanted in such villages, where the Pahan and Munda of the villages don not pay for any revenue and rest of the village does.
7. *Khutkatti Pothalgadi*- This burial stone is implanted in the village where all the villagers are title holder; government isn't involved in any interplay. As initially the land was cut and made fit for living by the mundas themselves, hence it belongs to the mundas. So according to them government doesn't own it and they don't even pay any revenue to the government, and the village's revenue is collected by the Gram Munda.
8. *Akhada Pothalgadi*- Every munda village has an *akhada*, which is an open space where all the events and festivals are celebrated.
9. *Akal Mrityu Pothalgadi*- This type of rock is buried in case of unnatural deaths. And is placed away from rest of the Harshali rocks.
10. *Kursinama Pothalgadi*- This burial stone is carved with the family tree, mentioning names of all the male family members.
11. *Gotr Pothalgadi*- This rock is implanted at the place of the residents, people of whose gotr first started dwelling at the place.
12. *Chaauidiri*- After a woman's death if her brothers want to bury the rock in their village, with her in law's consent, then it called *Chaauidiri*.
13. *Haaga hanating diri*- *Haaga* means brother, *hanating* means partition and *diri* is rock. This burial rock is implanted between the farmlands, after the land is partitioned among the brothers to show which portion belongs to whom.
14. *Saasandiri*- A bone from the grave is brought and buried at some place along with others and a rock is erected along with it.





### III. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MUNDA TRIBES

“Sisi bah kota-kota chalin taanah  
Nari bah naraye-naraye tem ujaren taanah”

The lines quoted above mean similar to a flower of Sisi tree which travels from one branch to other and Nari tree in which flower travels in lower and lower branches, a group of twenty-two thousand people starting from the Himalayas, then Delhi moving ahead via Gwalior travelled to a place named *Chutia me gadh*, near Ranchi in Jharkhand with their *Raja Risa Munda* in search of a place that could be favorable and propitious for them to live for and performed a ceremony to verify the same. They collected woods to light fire and brought a cock, kept it in the center of the burning woods, as the outcome would decide, if the cock doesn't burn and is alive then the place will be considered suitable to stay otherwise not. The cock came out alive and people of the *Munda Community* found a dwelling.

They started making houses, finding food, livelihood options and developing a system for them, which was completely their own system. The very first thing was an upright administration for the community. Son of the leader of the *Kabila* named *Chutia Munda* who brought an idea of distributing the *Kabila* into 22 different parts assigning a 'Kili' (title) to each group of one thousand people and named them as Parha. Hence, 22 Parhas were formed.

#### IV. LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN THE COMMUNITY

##### 4.1. Parha

The meetings of all 22 Parha rajas were organized on the *Chutia me gadh pahaad*. Once in a meeting *Madra Munda* (son of *Chutia Munda*) discussed about the marriage issues in the community as all of them were brothers and sisters belonging to same forefather. The meetings even continued up to seven days if they are not able to derive a conclusion out of the topic. So, they made an edict that they have to marry in different titles or different *Gotr*, whereas marrying in same title was proscribed. And the rule is still followed by the community. And if someone marries in same *gotr*, it is considered as a punishable offence.

Table

	Parha	Name of the first 'Raja'
1.	Sanga	Champa Munda
2.	Hereng	Leda Munda
3.	Horo	Duka Munda
4.	Kandulna	Birsa Munda
5.	Tuti	Raiya Munda
6.	Surin	Samu Munda
7.	Kongadi	Belo Munda
8.	Kerketta	Kuru Munda
9.	Nag	Uday Munda
10.	Barla	Chutia Munda
11.	Tiru	Karma Munda
12.	Topno	Dukhu Munda
13.	Baba	Lakho Munda
14.	Munda	Salo Munda
15.	Dhechua	Gangu Munda
16.	Jojo	Jeetrai Munda
17.	Lugun	Gorga Munda
18.	Budh	Somra Munda
19.	Hemrun	Poda Munda
20.	Danga	Sanikya Munda
21.	Aaind	Lembo Munda
22.	Kandir	Mangta Munda

##### 4.2. The Parha System

I was introduced to the Parha system when I was trying to explore more about the role of Pahan. As Pahan is the head of Gram Sabha (or Tola Sabha) and the Mauja Sabha. But when I tried to understand the administrative system in detail, the next level that is the *Parha sabha* is led by the *Parha Raja*. And the *Parha Raja* owns the plenary power in a Parha. Then the assemblage of all the 22 *Parha Raja* is called the *Maha Sabha* with *Maharajaas* as the head. It was really surprising for me to see a parallel traditional administrative system running in the state and still having that importance.

##### 4.2.1. Hatu Dunum

*Hatu* means *Gram* and *Dunum* means *Sabha*. On the basic level there are hamlets called '*Tolas*' that collectively form a village. According to PESA Act (1996) every tola can be considered a village, so the elementary level of this traditional administrative system is the Traditional Gram Sabha which is conducted weekly in every tola of a village, generally on different days in different hamlets. It is compulsory for at least one person from every house to attend the gram sabha, if no member from any house is present then they are charged some fine. This meeting is led by either *Pahan* or *Munda* of the village.

In my village, the head is the Pahan, a *Sahayak Munda* along with him and a Secretary (called *Sachiv*), there are some rules like cutting of any tree like *Sal* for *Madwa* in wedding rituals they have to take permission from the Pahan and pay the amount (fixed by the gram sabha) to the treasurer of the hamlet. Hence, there is also a treasurer (called *Khajanchi* or *Koshaadhyaksha*) of a Tola, Mauja, Parha and Maha Sabha

respectively. The gram sabha discusses about the conflicts, land disputes, domestic violence, misbehavior, any upcoming event or festival, marital issues like bigamy, marriages in same Gotr, livelihood and rituals.

In a village there are four prominent persons:

1. *Munda-Munda* is also a hereditary position offered to the son of the forgoing *Munda* of the village. In many places in different Parhas *Munda* is treated as the head of the village. He is also elected as the Gram Pradhan in accordance to the Panchayati raj system. *Munda* looks after the administration in a village, and also collects the revenue of the village. The amount is used for the needy people in the village.
2. *Bhandari*- *Bhandari* is the one who is responsible of floating information in whole village before any event, and festive celebration and meetings like Gram Sabha.
3. *Pahan*- *Pahan* is the main priest of the village and also the head of the village in many villages. And has been given some land to do farming and help the ones who are in need.
4. *Panbhara*- The one who assists the *Pahan* in all his rituals and does the job of fetching water during practices along the *Pahan*. Also given some land for the welfare of the villagers.

So, there the major role is played by these people in the village, and not the Pradhan or Mukhiya, as their thus PESA Act which supports the local governance system. I tried to have an overview of the same and came across a few things, which I would like to share.

#### **4.3.The Fifth Schedule:**

As per the Constitutional provision under Article 244 (1) of the Constitution of India, the ‘Scheduled Areas’ are defined as ‘such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas’ – as per paragraph 6(1) of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The specification of “Scheduled Areas” in relation to a State is by a notified order of the President, after consultation with the Governor of that State. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6(2) of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the President may increase the area of any Scheduled Area in a State after consultation with the Governor of that State; and make fresh orders redefining the areas which are to be Scheduled Areas in relation to any State. The same applies in the case of any alteration, increase, decrease, incorporation of new areas, or rescinding any Orders relating to “Scheduled Areas”. At present, Scheduled Areas have been declared in the States of Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana), Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Rajasthan.

The dominance of the tribal population, the area and economic status are some of the criteria for declaring a schedule area. Objective is to provide protection to the tribal living in the schedule area from alienation of their lands and natural resources to non-tribal. In these areas, the Governor has the complete power as far as their administration is concerned.

##### **4.3.1. Tribal Advisory Council (TAC)**

This council consists of a maximum of 20 members, out of which 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the members are Schedule tribe MLAs in the state. They counsel the governor on matters regarding the betterment of tribes. The council and all the conduct and businesses are controlled by the Governor. He can bring independent legislations in respect of tribal affairs in consultation with the TAC. If there is a negligence of TAC, it will imply the negation of the tribal rights and stalling the process of governance.

##### **4.3.2. The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act, 1996or PESA**

A law enacted by the Government of India for ensuring self-governance through traditional Gram Sabhas for people living in the Scheduled Areas of India. The scheduled areas were not involved in the Panchayati Raj act of the constitution, and PESA was promulgated on 24 December, 1996 to extend the provision of governance with some modifications and also exceptions. Self-governance is allowed regarding customary resources, minor forest produce, minor minerals, minor water bodies, selection of beneficiaries, sanction of projects, and control over local institutions, and people decide their own pace and priorities for development.

Each hamlet, as per the convenience of people, can be recognized as a village and can have Gram Sabha of its own hamlet, due to the scattered habitation of the tribal community, which makes the connectivity difficult. The Gram Sabha has to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution. Initially, the tribal communities resisted greatly to the British territorial conquest, and a Schedule District Act (1874) was introduced so that the tribes can be exempt of certain acts. Then the Wildlife Protection Act and the Forest Conservation act led to



In accordance to the above, the next level is the *Mauja*. All the hamlets integrate to form a Mauja, and people of the whole Mauja usually the males, get together for a meeting either once or twice a month for the Mauja Sabha. This meeting is again led by the Pahan or Munda of the village accordingly. The matters which cannot be dealt with, at tola level are brought up to the Mauja Sabha. In summers Mauja Sabha is conducted twice a month in some villages, or generally according to the matters being discussed. Mauja Sabha is basically conducted by people's consent and decided in the preceding Gram Sabha.

- *Present-* Conflict management, making and maintaining rules for the village like not cutting trees of others without their approval, no support for Naxalites, land disputes, marriages in same title, inter caste marriages, etc.
- *Past-* Following customary practices, discussion about organising events and festivals, worshipping *Gram Devta* once every year and all the rituals should be performed so that any calamity may not occur.
- *Future-* livelihood discussions like when people should start farming and finish, people are told not to leave their cattle open, deciding labour wages, etc.

Initially, when the titles were distributed and people of same titles settled geographically in same places in some specific number of villages called *Mauja*. So, all these *Maujas* collectively form a '*Parha*', like my village falls under '*Tiru Parha*', which consist of 58 *Maujas*. And I got to know about '*Sanga Parha*' which consist of 60 *Maujas* and '*Tuti Parha*' which consists of 17 *Maujas*. *Parha Sabha* is led by the *Parha Raja*, one who represents the people of that title.



- *Devan*- The secretary of the Parha Raja. And looks after all his works.



- *Laal*- There are three Laals (basically advocates) of a Parha Raja, Badh laal, Manjh laal and chhot laal. Who make rules for the Parha.
- *Sipahi*- A knight for safeguarding the Parha Raja.
- *Kartha*- One who worships and performs the rituals.
- *Balichalwa*- Is the one who sacrifices hen, goat or buffalo on any specific event.
- *Ghas Kaata*- Is the one who cuts grass and feeds the horse of the Raja.
- *Thakur*- Is the one who shaves the Parha Raja, like a barber.

The issues that cannot be sorted in the Mauja level are brought up to the Praha Sabha. People who marry in same *Gotr* are called in this meeting and are punished; they are boycotted from the village. Like recently, a case in Gamhariya Village of Bichna Panchayat, where in March a couple was punished for the same and also a burial rock was erected on boundary of the village.

Also if a guy marries a girl from some other caste, people from all 22 Parha are invited for the '*Shuddikaran*' (where some rituals are performed like blood of white hen sprinkled on them) of the couple, the couple has to pay an amount like 20k or 30k, which is used to treat the people from all Parhas and also the whole village.

As church also plays a vital role in lives of people in my village, so church also takes care of the same, even people who are found to have a live-in relationship are punished and are shunned for 3 weeks. The guilty ones are asked to sit on the church's gate and no people greet them or shake hand with them. If they don't follow the terms and condition of the church they are abandoned by the blessings offered by church.

#### 4.6. Maha Sabha

The *Parha Rajas* of all 22 Parha meet on 28<sup>th</sup> of every month at a place named '*Pakra*', which is located on the road connecting Pokla and Rourkela, and this meeting is called the *Mahasabha*. One of the Parha Raja of Tiru Parha, who lives in Bichna introduced me to the system and gave an overview. The cases after the Parha Sabha are referred to Mahasabha. This Sabha is led by the '*Maharaja*' of the 22 Parha, presently its *Gabrial Surin*, who is the Maharaja from Surin Parha. Then there is a Secretary and treasurer in this assembly too. They discuss whether everything is okay or not in all the Parhas, rules and regulations of the community are being followed or not, new rules if necessary are made for the community.

I visited a place with my field guide in Muruhu block, named *Kathal Toli*, where there is a Sal tree surrounded by 22 stones cut and made for sitting purpose, where all 22 Parha Rajas used to gather for the Mahasabha in the past, and is called '*Gandu Sarmali*'.



**Gandu Sarmali**

### V. INSIGHTS ABOUT THE VILLAGE

People in the village are so welcoming and accepting which is really great, people from nearby villages like Pandu and Gamharia also visit the village, to their relatives place or even to work on daily wages in people's field and a lively, happy and peaceful environment can be sensed. But when I looked deep into the terms shared by the people, I observed that they don't prefer eating at someone else's place and even asked not to have food or tea anywhere except for the two or three houses in the hamlet. They believe that people do some black magic and are jealous of each other. Some people once burnt the granary of the Pahan in the hamlet because of jealousy. Whereas, talking about the administration, what I felt during the process of the whole village study was that the government's Panchayati Raj Act and the traditional system, both the systems are running parallel, I have also discussed above in the PESA Act that the Gram Sabhas are funded by the government and people in the village choose their own contractor regarding any intervention in the village, as quoted by the Parha Raja in my village. There are also Gram Sabhas for discussing about any new scheme propelled by the government and is led by the Pradhan of the village, Mukhiya of the respective panchayat. These processes affect people's life in various aspects, like-

- *Socially*- The community is maintaining its culture and traditions by such practices and system. Laws are made to maintain the decorum of the society. But the system has not been reorganized with time hence women are disadvantaged as they are not a part of the decision making council.
- *Economically*-The system after being recognized by the state is helped financially and the community is working according to their priorities in developing the villages. Also, there are people who are so

under privileged that they cannot meet the expense of visiting a police station in case of any trouble, so they convey their issues to the Gram Sabha for the justice. The collection of revenue within villages, help the community to use that amount whenever required by one. And Gram Sabha also offers loan at very low interest rate. People utilize their own forest and water resources.

- Political- As the governance is completely through this system, so it has given them enough power to take any decision for the betterment of the tribes. So politically the system has strengthened the community. But issues like Pathalgadi have disturbed the peace of the community and has also created a misconception about the tradition of the munda community.

Whereas, people in the village are really active and try their best to be updated about their topic of interest, what's happening around them, about the system, about the latest livelihood options, active participation in any of the vent be it schools, be it *Aaganbari*.



**Women participating in Aaganbari event**



**Females restriction at the Sarna Sthal**

And especially the Self Help Group in the Village, women from the entire hamlets walk for around one mile to attend the *Gram Sangathan* meeting, which includes total six SHGs, the women even once tried to protest against alcohol and where successful, alcohol in the village was banned for around two months. Even after being so dynamic, I observed that there was negligible participation of the women in the whole system. Women are even deprived of decision making rights; any rule or decision has to be accepted by the females.

- Division of labour is uneven in the system, a woman works really since dusk to dawn and still criticized, even fetching water is considered to be a female's job.
- Women work harder in the farmlands but are not considered as farmers. No issue of land or any other asset by the women.
- Labor wages which are decided in the Gram Sabha are lesser for females (80 or 100 rupees), whereas for male it's more (150 or 200 rupees).
- A man can marry twice and it is acceptable in the society.
- Some of the women are even termed as '*Dayan*' by the society, if some misfortune occurs they blame her.
- Women are not allowed in the holy place of the community, which is the *Sarna Pooja Sthal*.
- Washing feet is considered to be a womanly job. Even festivals like '*Jani Shikar*', which is celebrated once in every 12 years, females dress up like males and go for hunting in different villages, and are welcomed by males in the villages, who dress up as women as females and then wash feet of the females, which again shows the same.
- Many women when ask about the matters being discussed in the meetings are scolded by the males in the house and said that it's none of their business to know about it.
- Women in the society has to follow all those unsaid rules like she cannot loosen her hair, outside the house or in front of elderly males, she eats in the end when everyone in the house especially her husband is done, she cannot sit beside her father-in-law or brothers-in-law and many more.
- Women are not invited in the Gram Sabhas or any other administrative meetings. And can only attend the sabha if they are facing some trouble.



**Women celebrating Jani Shikar**

And the reason behind all this, as told by the women was the system has been the same from the past and things are going on in the same way, plus as they keep busy with all the household chores it becomes difficult for them to go out for attending the meetings, hence they are deprived of their rights.



## **VI. Emerging Areas for collective action**

I believe the culture is so rich, and what lacks is the balance in the system, the community can flourish courteously if women are also treated as important as men in the community. And the SHG group of the village, which has also been invited in the villages Mauja Sabha recently, in case of domestic violence with a woman in the Bada tola of Bichna, and they were included in the decision making. I think a collective action along with the group can help in some furtherance. And any decision should not be forcefully implemented for the women. They should be a part of the hamlet level meetings at least, and play a vital role in decision making.

In accordance with the same I got to know about a female Parha Raja of Horo Parha, Mukta Horo, which is yet to be explored. I was really elated to know about this new Parha Raja (would love to call her 'Rani') and eager to meet her if we could just take an initiative for the same.





**Mukta Horo (Parha Raja of Horo Parha)**

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

It is very well quoted that “You have to taste a culture to understand it,” so living in the village and coming across such a wide range of novel experiences, so many new people, new places and their culture has made me adore the community and the people. The generosity and welcoming nature of the community is so astounding, the way people in the village accepted me made me more than happy. And I too tried to merge with the culture to learn from the people as much as I can. Life of the villagers is so discipline than those living in the inner-cities and me follow the same naturally. Getting up early, changing food habits, routine works, fetching water from well, learning to cook on mud Chulha, learning at least one new thing had also become a part of my daily routine.

Engaging with the community was a really great experience for me. And the special treatment that people gave me was so exciting at first, but I became one amongst them with time. People from the community like the ones I lived with treated me like a family member and helped me with their efforts like exploration related to my interest, also displayed me a slice of life they have lived before and what all they have gone through which was really touching. It feels really great to correspond to the Pahan, Munda and Parha Rajas of different places, being recognized by them and learning things about the community and its culture which is so vast.

Besides that team’s support from time to time has made it easier and comfortable to proceed with the same. Sharing stuff and getting feedbacks from the team and my field guide was really helpful and facilitated in better learning. The process of exploration and also the sample size was amplified. Overall the place has been suitable and good for learning experience like this.

About the action plan, I think there are people who support the issue that I’m concerned with. Though the community, their system and traditions are admirable but still, I think people specially the women will at least take an initiative collectively and raise their voice against the status they have been provided with and come together to make a better system for the coming generations.

## **VIII. Acknowledgements**

And lastly, I would feel contented to mention that the discussion about this action phase would not have been possible with the basic idea of study and the efforts required in the right direction to continue, given by my field guide, *Vijay kumar Viru*. And of course the co-travelers *Bilkan Tiru (Tiru Parha Raja)*, *Rupa Barla, didis of Taara Mahila Mandal*, and *Johan Tiru (Pahan)*, *Kalyan Munda (Village Munda)* and *Soma Munda (Sanga Parha Raja)*. And hope that we’ll be able to explore for more emerging areas for action collectively.



**REFERENCES**

**Wikipedia:**

- [1] <https://tribal.nic.in/declarationof5thSchedule.aspx>

**Book:**

- [2] Dr.Niranjan Mahawar, *Cultural Study of Oraon and Munda Tribes* (AAYU Publications, New Delhi, 2019)