



An Overview of Idioms of Mundari Language Spoken in Jharkhand

Mukta Sathisha¹, Shantanu Kumar², A. Vinay³

¹School of Life Sciences, Division of Languages, JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research, Mysuru, Karnataka, email: mukta.s@jssuni.edu.in

²Department of Linguistics (LDC-IL), Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysuru, India, Karnataka, email: shantanubhu97@gmail.com

³School of Life Sciences, Division of Languages, JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research, Mysuru, Karnataka, email: vinay@jssuni.edu.in

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the idiomatic expressions, proverbs and some unique features of idioms and proverbs of Mundari language spoken in Jharkhand. Idioms are extensively used in every language. They carry a metaphorical sense that makes their comprehension difficult as their meaning cannot be deduced from the meaning of their constituent parts. Every language has its own unique collection of proverbs. Folk proverbs and sayings are an integral part of the spiritual treasures of the culture and language of the people. The age-old wisdom and skills used by them are an important part of the culture of human language. Proverbs and sayings are part of culture of a people and have always been relevant despite progress of economy and technology. Although significant researches have been done in various aspects of Mundari language like reduplication, semantics, lexicology, folk tales etc. but not many studies have been done with respect to idiomatic expressions and proverbs of Mundari language. This paper presents an overview of the Idioms and proverbs used by the people in Mundari language. For the purpose of the study, secondary data analysis of research papers, review articles, news articles, conference proceedings and websites were done. Almost all the sources are taken into account as a secondary resource to get into deep insight of the subject. This paper contains information about the language, its history, classification, features, and idiomatic expressions in Mundari language and finally discusses the explanation of proverbs in the language.

Keywords: Austro-Asiatic, Mundari, Idiomatic expressions, proverbs, Indigenous, Jharkhand

Introduction:

Mundari is an Austro-Asiatic language spoken among the masses of the Munda community in Jharkhand. According to historians, the Munda tribes migrated to India from Central Asia and spread among various regions of Jharkhand state. This language bears the influence of Sanskrit as well as modern Indian languages. Dialects of Mundari that is, Bhumij, Birhor, Chero, Khavari etc. are spoken by several tribes. Mundari is predominantly spoken in Ranchi, Lohardaga and Gumla districts (Devy et al., 2015). An estimated 7,50,000 Mundari speakers live in Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal and 1,77,000 speakers of Khāriā live in Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh (Acharya, S et al., 2019).¹

The Munda tribal groups speak Mundari in several regions of Palamu and North Chotanagpur in Jharkhand. The ancient script of Mundari has become extinct. Modern day Mundari script is used only in urban areas of Jharkhand. The compilation of regional literature in Mundari has been very less and genre of elegant literature has been even lesser (Devy et al.;

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ICDL 2019 organized by TERI, New Delhi during November 6-8, 2019
(<https://www.teriin.org/events/icdl/know-icdl.php>)



2015, p 260).² Mundari is mainly spoken in the state of Jharkhand, which was recently separated from Bihar by the Government of India on 15 November 2000 with the adjoining states of Orissa and West Bengal in India.

As Grierson shows in the Introduction of his book (1928), Mundari belongs to the Kherwarian group of the North Munda branch. (Refer to table 1) According to the Census of India 2011, the number of speakers of Mundari is 1,661,656. From a linguistic point of view, the designation Munda is used for the language family. Mundari, on the other hand, refers to an individual language, namely the language of Munda people. *Munḍa* means 'village-headman' in Mundari but the language name *munḍārī* is given by the neighbouring people. The indigenous name is *hoṛo jagar* 'human language' or *munḍa jagar* 'Munda language'.

2. Literature Review

Several research papers and review articles on Mundari language and its dialects relating to its grammar, lexicon, semantics, reduplication, idiophones, folk tales, etc. have been published in various reputed journals.

Gray, S. "Classifications of Mundari Expressive and Other Reduplicated Structures Based on Phonological Patterns, Transitivity, and the Effects of Valence-Reducing Affixes" (2017), examines the valences of expressive, which are a class of idiophones in Mundari. The behaviour of these expressive is studied as predicates and is compared to those of reduplicated verb forms. He also describes several valence- altering affixes indicating passive voice, reflexivity and reciprocity, in conjunction with the reduplicated forms. In this paper, a set of groupings for Mundari expressives is proposed based on valence and interaction with affixes. Thus, these groupings further expand upon the existing classification of phonological patterns by Toshiki Osada (2015).

Phillips, JB & Harrison, KD 'Munda Mimetic Reduplication' (2017), presents an empirical typology of seven Munda languages, Ho, Kera Mundari, Kharia, Mundari, Remo (Bondo), Santali, and Sora (Savara). Munda mimetic forms can depict sensory qualities of sound, space, movement, texture, smell, taste, temperature, feelings, and sensations. The typology of mimetic reduplication in Munda is different across syntactic class, semantic domain and phonological form. This paper sheds light on the breadth of diverse structures in Munda languages. He suggests that this typology of mimetic reduplication can also be applied to other languages and other examinations of reduplication and/or mimesis.

Badenoch, N et al. "Expressives as Moral Propositions in Mundari" (2019), has done study on expressives in Munda language. For example, the idiophone 'taal-tuul' refers to people who are not only skilled in speech but are also good story tellers. They are able to infuse humour into their stories and thus make it entertaining to the listener. On the negative side, the word 'paṭar-paṭar' depicts rapid, fluid speech that flows well, but is not intelligible to the listener. The authors of also point out to the use of the reduplicative expressive 'siri – biri' which means gossiping and saying untrue things about the spouse of the deceased, during a ritual performed by family members after the death of the relative. This talk of immoral behaviour, that is 'siṛi-biṛi', is hoped to drive away the spirit of the deceased to leave the living in peace. The use of expressives is spontaneous and is usually motivated by the speaker's/narrators direct experience of life, drawing on his / her interpretation of events.

² Santhali Bhasha. In Tudu, M & Skeffasrod, L. O (Eds.), *Bhartiya Bhasha Lok Sarvekshan - Jharkhand Ki Bhashayen* (Volume13, Part1., pp. 260).The Orient Blackswan.



Choksi, N, 'A Course in Mundari' (2015) made an attempt to spark an interest in the younger generation to learn Mundari, both as a language of everyday communication and as a subject of scholarly research. The book extensively deals with translation of sentences from Mundari to English with reference to basic conversational aspects and aspects of grammar like parts of speech, tenses, clauses, sentences, and morphology and semantics of expressives.

The book explains about verbal reduplication which is given in the following examples:

ta'ngi-ta'ngi-ke-n-a-ko. mendo-ko senoi-j-a-n-a. (Reduplicated verb 'tangi – tangi' means 'to wait')

'They waited for a bit then went.'

jom-jom-te laiij pereij-j-a-n-a. (The reduplicated verb 'jom-jom' means 'to eat')

'They ate and ate and were full.'

Osada, T & Badenoch, N (2019), explains the distinction between "onomatopoeia" which is restricted to words imitative of sound only. Mundari expressives do include several onomatopoeic words like 'dubk–dubak', which describes the sound of knee high waters being waded through. Another example is 'jaban–jabun' which means jiggling of a fat person or animal while running usually said of an elephant or goat.

Other examples of reduplication included in the book are 'gara-garu' which means rumbling sound of thunder and 'hara-haru' which means the sound of a big bird starting to fly, of stones flying, of a fire burning. Linguistic Documentation of Endangered Munda Languages using artificial intelligence and other digital forms, has been proposed in the article 'Archiving Endangered Munda Languages in a Digital Library' authored by Acharya, S (2015) (see footnote1). The paper highlights the role of Artificial Intelligence in preservation of endangered languages. The paper suggests some ways of revitalisation of indigenous languages.

One of the suggestions is construction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) based Conversational Chabot which can talk to people in the indigenous language and thus can increase the scope of conversation in the language. The paper cites an example of a robot called Opie in Australia which is Google's AI platform to teach children the indigenous language of Australia through games, stories, and lessons. This robot is trained with 40,000 hours' worth of spoken material in six indigenous languages spoken in Australia and five languages are spoken in Asia-Pacific. Robot is an AI-enabled Chabot that understands Māori, an indigenous language of New Zealand. It can reply to messages in both English and Māori. Kumari, L & Rehman, M 'Munda Folktales of Jharkhand: A Study in Sociocultural Discourse' (2020), studied about Mundari for which the authors adopt a socio – cultural approach to study some folk tales of Munda tribes. The author concludes that these tales are the representation of cultures, beliefs and history of the Munda tribes.

Munda literature also includes several publications like novels, plays, short stories, poems, travelogues, essays etc. Several religious books have also been translated into Mundari, notable among them being "Mundari Teeka", a translation of "Ramcharithmanas" by Tulsidas and The Bible.

3. A brief history of the Mundari tribes

Mundari tribes are ancient tribes. They have a nature-oriented society. Traditionally, the Mundari tribes had an autonomous administration which has been continuing since ancient times. Instead of a king and his subjects, the political society of the Mundari tribes consists of group participation in the administration. This means that the village head or the common man both have equal importance in the society.

There is no consensus among historians regarding the history of the Mundari tribes. According to Dr. Subhash Chandra Munda, Mundari tribes arrived from Madagaskar and Africa. Before coming to India, they settled in East Tibet and West China. After crossing the Himalayas, they settled in North-Western parts of India. According to anthropologists, one half



of the Mundari tribes migrated to India via China and Tibet. The remaining tribes migrated from North east India (Devy et al., 2015).

This non consensus among historians is further illustrated by some historians believing that the Munda tribes originated in South East Asia. Chaubey et al. (2010) argues that the Munda speakers probably originally from Southeast Asia, because the phylogeography of mtDNA R7 and y-chromosome marker M95 specific to O2a is found among Khasi-Asian speakers.

Mundari language is one of the main and ancient languages among the Austric group. Historians believe that it is as ancient as or probably even older than the Sanskrit language. Munda is the mother of the languages under the Munda group that is Santhali, Kharia, Ho, Birhori etc. According to H. Rijley, “Munda tribes are India’s first aboriginal tribes. He opines that the tribal languages like Santhali, Ho, Kharia, belong to Munda group of languages and these Munda tribes are the original tribal inhabitants of India. This language used to be the state language of the entire Chotanagpur reigon in the 6th century A.D. This is proven by the fact that the tribals like Uranv etc. residing near the capital of Munda region, speak Mundari tribal language itself. According to Dr. R Munda, before Aryans and Dravidians arrival, Mundari language under Austric group was the language spoken in the whole India. Mundari language is majorly spoken by tribals living in the Jharkhand region. The Munda community and Mundari language are parts of the same body.

Classification of Munda languages

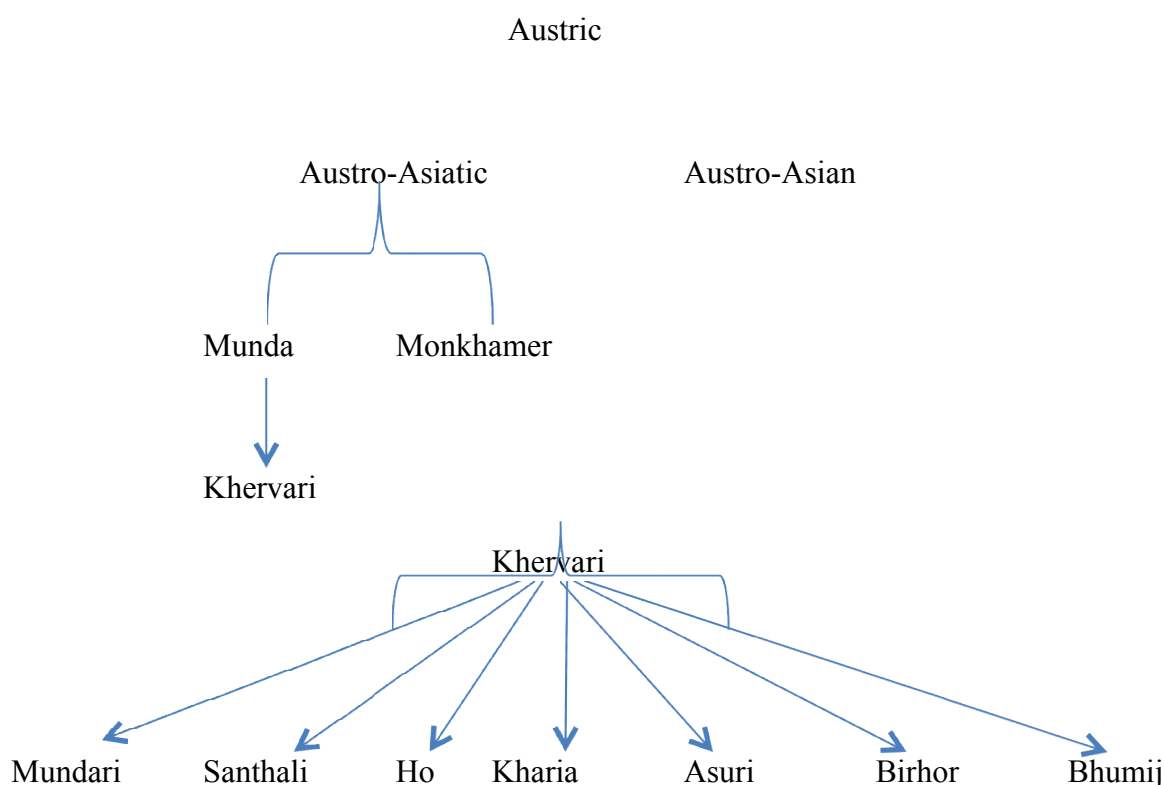


Chart1 Classification of Munda Language

4. The present form of the Mundari language today

As Hoffmann reported in the *Encyclopaedia Mundarica*, Vol.1, page (6), Mundari has four dialects; that is, Hasada from *hasa-da?* ‘(literally) land water (place name)’ in Mundari,



Naguri from *naguri* (place name), Tamararia from *tamar-ia* 'language of Tamar (place name)', and Kera from *kera* (perfect ending, instead of *keda* in another dialect). Munda (1980: kha) has proposed the name Latar dialect (*latar* means 'low') instead of Tamararia.

These four dialects of Mundari are spoken in the following regions:

Hasada Mundari: This is spoken in eastern side of Ranchi–Chaibasa Road and its nearby regions.

Naguri Mundari: This is spoken in the west of Ranchi Chaibasa Road.

Kera Mundari: This is mainly spoken by the inhabitants of Ranchi city and the adjacent area, who ethnically belong to the Oraon tribe. Apart from the Munda tribes, this dialect is also spoken by Uranv tribes.

Teaching and studies in Mundari language from 10th (Matriculation) to Post Graduation is being conducted in Jharkhand since 1967. During the same decade, programmes in Mundari were broadcast in All India Radio as well. Programs like “Kshetreya Samachar” and “Adiwasi Akhand” are being broadcast till date. Several documentaries showcasing Mundari language, cultural heritage and festivals have been broadcast on Doordarshan, a division of Prasar Bharati, Government of India. Even though no commercial cinema in Mundari has been made yet, several films on eminent personalities like Birsa Munda and Ulgulan have been made in Mundari.

5. Some unique features of the Munda language

5.1 In Mundari, the pronunciation of the visarga sound is different from Sanskrit.

In Sanskrit, the visarga, which is represented by the following symbol (:) is emphasized, whereas in Mundari, this visarga (:), is pronounced as the glottal sound check.

Example:

| S. No | Sanskrit | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|-------|----------|---------|--------|---------|
| 1. | Krutaha | Kotaha | Kanhan | Where |
| 2. | Ataha | Netaha | Yahan | Here |

Table1 Pronunciation of Visarga

5.2 Verb does not change whether the noun is male or female in the Mundari language.

Example:

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Jogesar mahatana | Jogesar kat raha hai | Jogesar is cutting. |
| 2. | Prabha mahatana | Prabha kat rahi hai. | Prabha is cutting. |
| 3. | Ram hiju tana. | Ram a raha hai | Ram is coming |
| 4. | Sita padava tana | Sita padh rahi hai | Sita is studying |

Table2 Gender

From the above example, it can be observed that the verb changes in Hindi, when the gender of the doer of a particular activity is changed, but in Mundari language, the verb does not changes its gender.

5.3 The summative characteristic feature of the Mundari language is that when prefixes, suffixes or infixes are added to a word, the meaning of the word changes.

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|---------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. | Jom | Khana | To eat |
| 2. | Aajom | Khilana | To feed someone |
| 3. | Aapajom | Eek dusre ko khilana | To feed each other |
| 4. | Tam | Marna | To beat someone |
| 5. | Tapam | Eek dusre ko marna | To beat each other |

Table3 Affixes



In the above table, when the prefixes ‘Aa’ and ‘Aapa’ are added to the word “Jom”, the meaning changes.

5.4 In the Mundari language, the letter ‘Sha’ is not pronounced, ‘Sa’ is used instead. The letter “ksha” in Hindi is replaced by “cha”.

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|---------|----------|---------|
| 1. | Paricha | Pariksha | Exam |
| 2. | Kosis | Koshish | To try |

Table 4 Suffix

5.5 Some words like cutting or breaking are used differently in different situations.

For example the verb “Katna” which means “to cut” in Hindi has different words in Mundari to denote cutting using different instruments. This is illustrated in the table below:

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|---------|------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Maha | Kulhadi se katna | Cut using an axe |
| 2. | Gedh | Chaku se katna | Cut with a knife |

Table 5 ‘Katna’ word

Similarly, the verb “Todna” which means “to break” in Hindi has different words in Mundari to denote breaking different objects. This is illustrated in the table below:

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|---------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. | Rapud | Mitti ka ghada todna | Break an earthen pot |
| 2. | Pete | Dali todna | Break a branch |
| 3. | Poa | Kisi bartan ko todna | Break a utensil |

Table 6 ‘Todna’ word

5.6 The position of the doer of an action is independent in the Mundari language. It can mean both present tense and present continuous tense.

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | Aaj mandi jom tana | Main khana khata / kha raha hoon | I eat / I am eating food. |
| 2. | Mayij jom tana | Main khana khata / kha raha hoon | I eat / I am eating food. |
| 3. | Mandi jom tanaj | Main khana khata / kha raha hoon | I eat / I am eating food. |

Table 7 - position of doer of an action

5.7 In Mundari language, elementary sounds produced by the breath alone like “tha” and “dha” etc are used to express anger.

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Tam | Peetna | To beat someone |
| 2. | Tham | Peetna | To beat someone |
| 3. | Tega-thega | Lath marna | To kick someone |

Table8 ‘anger’ word

5.8 Deletion of some consonants in Mundari

5.8.1 The consonant “sha” is replaced by “sa” in Mundari.

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| 1. | Sahar | Shahar | City |
| 2. | Dos | Dosh | Fault |

Table 9 - Deletion



5.8.2 The consonants “ksha”, “tra” and “ru” are not used in Mundari.

Unlike Hindi, but similar to Sanskrit, there are singular, dual and plural words in Mundari.

| S. No | Type of pronoun | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|-------|-----------------|---------|----------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Singular | Aaya | Mai | I (First Person) |
| 2 | Dual | Aalid | Hum Dono | Two of us (First Person) |
| 3 | Plural | Aabu | Hum Log | Us (First Person) |
| 4 | Singular | Aam | Tum | You (Second Person) |
| 5 | Dual | Aaben | Tum Dono | Two of you Second Person) |
| 6 | Plural | Aape | Tum Log | All of you Second Person) |
| 7 | Singular | Aaye | Vah | He/She |
| 8 | Dual | Aakidh | Vey Dono | Those two |
| 9 | Plural | Aako | Ve Log | Those people |

Table 10 Numbers

6. Some Mundari Idiomatic expressions and their meanings

Every language has its own idioms, a special kind of set expressions that have developed within a language. English and Hindi are abundant in terms of idioms. An idiom is a group of words which has, as a whole, a different meaning from the meaning of its constituents. In other words, the meaning of the idiomatic expression is not the sum of the words taken individually. Idioms are fairly controversial. There is no one set definition of what an idiom is. The word itself comes either from Latin word “idioma”, where it denotes special property, or from Greek word “idiōma”, meaning special feature, special phrasing. Hence, the logic imposes associations with elements of language phrases that are typical for a given language and, therefore, hard to translate into another language. An idiomatic expression may convey a different meaning, that what is evident from its words.

Given below are some Mundari idioms translated from Mundari to Hindi and English:

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|----------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Jala Misale Dandaye Aadeya | Andha ek hi baar danda khata hai.(Saavdhan hona) | Once bitten twice shy |
| 2. | Lupu rege sukuri | Bhusi mein hi suwar. (Dhani admi) | A rich man |
| 3. | Soben Haiko choke jaana | Sabhi machliyan, mendhak ban gayi (Badi mehnat , chota labh) | Big fuss, tiny result |
| 4. | Jilu sa thege banyit sinoa | Maas ki oor hi churi chalti hai(Bharosa karna) | To trust someone |
| 5. | Aatudan diri ka Gadedoa | Nadi mein ludhakte huve pathar par koi nahin hota.(Asthir vyakti kabhi dhan nahin kama sakta) | An unstable person can never succeed in life. |
| 6. | Aapirtan kavuyi othod tana | Vah udte hue kouva ka peeche karta hai.(Vah jhoot bolne valon par vishvas karta hai) | He believes only those who lie to him. |



| | | | |
|-----|---|---|--|
| 7. | Aare chaanaal da chi kaaji chaanaal kaji. | Pani chidakna arthath afwah failana. | To spread rumours |
| 8. | Iniya hatu narey katu. | Uskan a gaav hai na chaku. (Vah atyanth gareeb hai). | He is extremely poor. |
| 9. | Dumakante kula ma. | Baithe hue hi baagh ko maarna. (Deeng maarna) | To indulge in exaggerated self-praise. |
| 10. | Heldar karedo maad rechi? | Kareel mein nahin to kya baas mein? (Bacche bachpan mein hi sudhare ja sakte hain, budhape mein nahin). | Kids can be corrected when they are young, not when they become old. |
| 11. | Jom kenu kalu reyi. | Jis pattal mein khana, usi mein mal tyagna. (akrutaghna hona) | To be ungrateful. |
| 12. | Da daallerey ka hatidoa | Maarne se pani ka vibhajan nahin hota. (Parivaar sambandh mazbooth rehne par koi use tod nahin sakta) | No one can harm a family which stands united against all odds. |
| 13. | Doye rey tonota koko rey konota. | Tote ne dhaan ki bali todi, ullu ko dant tey hai. (Ek kare galti, saza doosre ko). | One does a mistake, but someone else is punished for it. |

Table 11- Idioms & Phrases

7. Some Mundari proverbs and their meanings

A proverb is defined as a concrete or short saying which is often repeated. Proverbs usually represent a truth of some kind which may be philosophical, spiritual or practical. (Brahmaleen, K et al. 2010). Proverbs may be defined as words collocated together which tend to become fossilized or becoming fixed overtime (Saeed, 2003). In the area of corpus linguistics, collocation is defined as a sequence of words or terms which co - occur more often than would be expected. (Verlag, 2005)

| S. No. | Mundari | Hindi | English |
|--------|---|---|--|
| 1. | Aaytaha re tamba na re tumba | Mere paas nna taamba hain na tumba (May atyanth gereeb hoon) | I am broke. |
| 2. | Umbul Oota | Chaya dabana (Vyarth prayatna karna) | Efforts gone in vain |
| 3. | Ula paarkom jaanaye | Uski chaarpayi ulat gayi (Vah mar gaya) | He died |
| 4. | Ili bul sutiya songanti ulk a sutiya | Sharabi ko hosh ayega par ishqbaaz ko nahin (prem pagal) | Head over heels in love |
| 5. | Aapan racha sida jo lagatida. | Apna aangan pehle buharna chahiye. (Apna kaam pehle karna chahiye). | One must do one's duty first. |
| 6. | Aapan racha rey eenga simoye kecherena. | Apne aangan mein murgi bhi nirbjeek hogi. (Apne ghar mein kamzor bhi balwaan hota hai). | Even a weak person is strong in his own house. |



| | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| 7. | Aaladh re gudh, tutkare katu. | Jeebh mein gudh, sir ke peeche churi.(Kapati aadmi). | A wolf in lamb's clothing. |
| 8. | Ayeta niya joota tiddh. | Doosre ka joota dhona(gulam hona) | To fawn over someone.(to have a subservient attitude towards someone). |
| 9. | Iniya jomsakam tundu jaana. | Us vyakti ke Jeevan ka patta saaf ho gaya. (Mar jana) | To die. |
| 10. | Aama kaji sakaamreyo ka loteooga. | Tumhari bbat patte par bhi nahin latkegi. (bina sir pair ki baaten karna). | Headless talk (Foolish or rash talk) |
| 11. | Aama bardom aaya go keda. | Maine tumhara bojh vahan kiya. (Main tumhaare lie uttaradaayee hoon). | I am responsible for you |
| 12. | Aama medh horate mayom da ududoa | Tumhari aankhon se lahu niklega. (Kanjoo vyakti se dhan nikalna mushkil hai). | It is difficult to extract money from a miserly person. |
| 13. | Iniya bo(☹️) do tudu tukage tortaam. | Uska sir gilahari ka ghonsla jaisa hai.(Vah bada ashisht lagta hai). | He looks very indecent/ discourteous. |

Table12 Proverbs

Conclusion

Mundari idioms and proverbs depict the world in which they are situated. They are significant tools of communication among the Mundari tribes. They depict everyday life situations, evoke discussions on moral values, and throw light on the philosophy and spiritual beliefs of Mundari people. The length and breadth of lexicology in Mundari, across syntactic class, semantic domain, and phonological form, has shown that this language is rich with sensory depictions.

Proverbs are concrete and short sayings. Because most proverbs have their origins in oral tradition, they are generally worded in such a way as to be remembered easily and tend to change little from generation to generation, so much so that sometimes their specific meaning is no longer relevant. There is much left to be done, both in studies of idioms and proverbs, and we believe that an examination of the wide range of forms in other Munda languages can challenge and aid in the development of new discussions and models.

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