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MUNDA STUDIES\*

A NEW CLASSIFICATION OF MUNDA

Munda is the name of a group of tribal speeches mainly spoken in the forests of Central India. It forms the Western branch of the Austroasiatic family. The Munda languages are ten in number and usually classified into the following sub-branches:

- (1) Northwestern Munda, consisting of Korku and its dialect Mowasi;
- (2) Northern Munda, consisting of Kherwari, i.e. Santali, Mundari, and their dialects;
- (3) Central Munda, consisting of Khaṛia (Kheṛia) and Juang;
- (4) Southern Munda, consisting of Saoṛa (= Sōra), Parengi (= Gorum),<sup>1</sup> Gutob, Bonḍa (= Remo),<sup>1</sup> and Ḍiḍey (= Gta').<sup>1</sup>

Of the Southern Munda languages (SM) mentioned above, the last three, i.e. Ḍiḍey, Bonḍa and Gutob, are spoken in the extreme south of the Koraput district of Orissa. They are the southernmost Munda tongues.

These three SM languages have many traits in common that are absent in the remaining Munda tongues. I propose, therefore, to divide Munda into two major groups, namely, Lower Munda, consisting of the three southernmost SM tongues Ḍiḍey, Bonḍa and Gutob, and Upper Munda, comprising the rest of Munda. It is particularly to be noted that the remaining SM tongues, Parengi and Saoṛa agree with Upper Munda in many important features, in contradistinction to Ḍiḍey, Bonḍa and Gutob.

Among the major differences between Lower Munda and Upper Munda the most prominent one is the use in the Upper Munda languages of a pronominal element indicating the number and person of the object. Mostly it is incorporated in the verb. While this morphological feature occurs in all Upper Munda languages, including Parengi and Saoṛa of Southern Munda, it

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<sup>1</sup> The present writer, while introducing these three newly-mapped tribal tongues of the Munda Branch, used the names of these tribes that are commonly known and are used also in the official records. He does not see much justification in confusing the situation by adopting new names for these tribes on the ground that these other designations, Remo, Gorum and Gta', are used by the people themselves to designate them in their own communities. It has not yet been finally established that every section of these tribes uses those proposed names to designate themselves. The old practice of calling a tribe by the name which is recognised in the whole area by every section of the tribe and every other section of the population of the region, and which occurs also in the official records – the practice followed in the case of the Santal (who call themselves Hoṛ) and a host of other Indian tribes – should be continued also in the case of these newly-mapped tribes.

is absent in Lower Munda. Outside the Kherwari group, however, the synthetic formations have become less and less obscured. Khaṛia has become entirely analytical, the object being indicated by a case-suffix only, without any trace of an object marker incorporated with the verbal form. In the Central Munda language Juang, and in Saoṛa and Parengi of Southern Munda, the use of an object marker in the verb form has become restricted to the first and second persons, whereas an object in the third person is only indicated by a case suffix, as in Khaṛia. When the object is a first or second person, the case suffix is used in addition to the incorporated object marker. In Korku, on the other hand, the objects markers are incorporated only when the object is a third person animate, a case suffix then being added to the noun.

The position of the object in the sentence has become more or less fixed in all the Munda languages, the normal word order being subject-object-verb. While the absence of the pronominal object markers in verb forms constitutes a major distinction between Lower Munda and Upper Munda, we do not know yet the exact distribution of another trait, viz. the incorporation of the abridged forms of noun-objects with verbs, which is found in some Munda languages. Cf.<sup>2</sup> Bo. *gui-təm* – ‘to wash one’s mouth’ (Bo. *tumɔ* ‘mouth’), So (Ramamurti) *anin ñam-yō-t-a-n* ‘he is catching fish’ (So. *ə-yō-ən* ‘fish’), *paŋ-ti-dar-iñ-ten* ‘he brought and gave me cooked rice’ (So. *paŋ-* ‘to bring’, *ti-* ‘to give’, *darəj-ən* ‘cooked rice’), etc. It now seems clear that Lower Munda has no pronominal object markers in the verbs or anywhere else. Instead of them it uses a prefix of an archaic nature to mark the accusative case, a feature not found outside Lower Munda except in Parengi. The prefix is used, both in Lower Munda and in Parengi, to mark a pronominal object, while noun-objects usually take postpositions. In Bonda, however, the prefix is used to mark both pronominal and nominal objects, e.g. Bo. *a-gu ɔnturɔ be* ‘leave the child, please’ (*gu* ‘child’).

Another distinctive morphological feature of Lower Munda is the genitive marker. The noun case suffix is here *-n*, contrasting with *-a/-a’* in Upper Munda (including Parengi and Saoṛa). In combination with kinship terms or words for parts of the body the pronominal elements of the first and second persons are usually prefixed in Lower Munda but suffixed in Upper Munda. Cf. Di. *pe-y-yaŋ* ‘your mother’ (*pe-* ‘your’, honorific) as against Pa. *ayaŋ-nom* ‘your mother’ (*-nom* ‘your’), So. *bab-ñe* ‘my head’, Ju. *kovñiti-ñ* ‘my elbow’, Kh. *apa-nom* ‘your father’, *bokob-naiŋ* ‘my head’, Ho *apu-m* ‘your father’, Kw. *mes-em* ‘your (sing.) elder sister’, Kor. *apu-ñj* ‘my father’, *pipni-*

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviations: As. = Asuri; Bh. = Birhor; Bo. = Bonda; Di. = Didey (Gta?); Gu. = Gutob (Gadaba); Ju. = Juang; Kh. = Khaṛia, Kheria; Ko. = Korku; Kor. = Koraku; Kw. = Erŋga Koṛwa; Mo. = Mowasi; Mu. = Mundari; Pa. = Parengi (Gorum); Sa. = Santali; SM = South Munda; So. = Saoṛa, Sōra, Savara.