

HOFFMAN
ON
MUNDARI POETRY

Dineshwar Prasad

Hoffman on Mundari Poetry



Dineshwar Prasad

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Forward

Fr. John Baptist Hoffmann (1857-1928), a German Jesuit missionary, is known all over the world as a great linguist and anthropologist. His **Encyclopedia Mudarica** (15 vol.) comprises some five thousand pages and covers the whole field of Mundari language and culture.

But very few people know that he was also a great literary theoretician. His **Mundari Poetry** (1907), essay of lasting values, is an outstanding formulation of tribal poetics and decidedly one of the major documents of literary criticism.

Dr. Dineshwar Prasad (1932-2012) formerly Professor and HOD of the P.G. Department of Hindi, Ranchi University, a specialist in linguistics, folklore and literary criticism, has rescued **Mundari Poetry** from oblivion and brought out most competently, its importance in his article entitled **Hoffmann on Mundari Poetry**. He has also presented a critical analysis and survey of the Mundari Poetic language on the basis of the materials ferreted out from the **Encyclopaedia Mundarica**.

Dr. Prasad's selection of some very fine Mundari poems available in Hoffmann's translation offers an opportunity to the reader to form an opinion of his own about the artistic merit of Mundari poetry and also the significance of Hoffmann's observations on it.

Fr. P.Ponette S. J.

Introduction

The Mundas, some eight lakhs of them, are concentrated mostly in the Chota Nagpur region of Bihar. They speak Mundari, a language of the Austric family which, again, has been divided into two sub-families: the Austronesian and the Austro-asiatic. Austronesian languages are spoken in Madagascar, Indonesia and the Pacific islands whereas Austro-asiatic languages are current in India, Buona and Thailand. Mundari, a language of the Austro asiatic sub-family, is spoken by a people belonging to the ancient Austric race which settled in the Indian sub-continent much before the Aryans and influenced their language and culture after they came here. The influence of the Proto-Munda languages of India on Vedic and classical Sanskrit has been proved beyond doubt by competent linguists. The influence of the Munda languages in the region where they are used is still a force to reckon with.

Though the Mundas have not as yet been able to develop their written literature, they possess a rich oral literature, varied in content