

Dr. Ram Dayal Munda

Dr. Ram Dayal Munda was a scholar and championed the cause of tribal rights. He was best known for his stint as the president of India Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal People (ICITP). He earned the title of being a “cultural activist” for he was an avid exponent of folk art, particularly music. In 2010 he was awarded the Padma Shri in recognition of his contribution to the field of art. Munda, a former vice-chancellor of Ranchi University was also MP in Rajya Sabha. He died of cancer on 30th September 2011 at the age of 72.

Dr. Munda was born in 1939 in the tribal village Diuri in Ranchi district, Jharkhand (*then Bihar*). He has been a member of various national and state government bodies as well as non-government organizations involved in development of the marginalized (especially Adivasi and Dalit) sections in the country. He was a regular participant at the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues and thereby lent his ideas and experience to the development of the deprived communities across the world.

He attended the Luther Mission School at Amlesa up to primary school. He did his secondary schooling at Khunti, 40 km away from his native. As the heartland of the historic Birsa Movement (for autonomy in the British Empire), the Khunti area attracted scholars, especially anthropologists, from all over the world. Dr. Munda, along with his friends, often went as guides to the visitors. The influence of diverse people early in life broadened the spectrum of his thought and was instrumental in Mr. Munda’s leaning towards anthropology.

Dr. Munda went on study at the University of Chicago and was part of the Indic group of the Austro-Asiatic Languages under the directorship of Dr. Norman Zide. Munda obtained a Ph.D. from the University and was subsequently appointed as faculty at the Department of South Asian Studies. Later, he was offered an opportunity to start a Department of Tribal and Regional Languages by the then vice-chancellor Dr. Kumar Suresh. The department became the hub for socio-political activists engaged in the movement to free the aboriginal peoples of Jharkhand from the “internal colonialism” of the Indian state.

A number of students who passed out from the department, formed a student body named All Jharkhand Student’s Union (AJSU) which served as an intellectual base for the maintenance of the Jharkhand Movement which was already underway. This contributed to Dr. Munda’s appointment as Vice Chancellor of Ranchi University in 1985. Soon, he assumed the role of a mediator between the government and the people to solve the crisis. The Committee on Jharkhand Matters was headed by Mr. Munda and the report that the committee submitted paved the way for the formation of Jharkhand.

Dr. Munda retired from active teaching in 1999 but his involvement with cultural mobilization continued. He represented the ICITP (a tribal led and managed movement) at the UN Working Group on Indigenous People at Geneva and the UN Forum of Indigenous Issues in New York which are key policy making bodies on tribal affairs. He was also member in the Bhuria Committee which recommended the Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas. Dr. Munda authored several books, his most popular being *Adigranta on Tribals*.

He believed strongly that the Adivasis would survive only if their culture would. “*Nachi se banchi* (Dance to survive)”, was his refrain to urge his people to keep their culture alive. Indeed, for him, the preservation of the tribal way of life, culture and languages along with fighting for their rights was integral to the process of their development. He consistently sought to integrate traditional culture into modern-day life. Through his school and university days he was actively engaged in building dance troupes and his troupe led the Indian cultural contingent in the Festival of India in the USSR in 1987. In 1989, they toured the Philippines, China, and Japan. Thanks to his leadership, village akharas for dance and music were revived across Jharkhand. Dr. Munda was honoured by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (for the year 2007) in recognition of his contributions to dance.

He was a Musician, linguist, writer, scholar, educationist, institution-builder, tribal activist and a key figure in the creation of Jharkhand state. It is his lifelong dedication and contribution to the cause of preserving tribal culture that will live on. _

***Information till Nov-2011**