

# Birhor Society and Culture: A Study on Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of Jharkhand, India

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## ABSTRACT

A significant portion of the Indian population consists of tribal communities. The world's highest concentration of tribal people with diverse cultures is found exclusively in India. Tribal people are those who inhabit a specific region, have uniform cultural characteristics, and use basic technology. Tribes are recognized for their unique ethnic and cultural characteristics, but they are losing their unique identities as a result of massive and rapid urbanization and industrialization. Since the beginning of ethnographic research on Indian tribes, scientists have been interested in the unique livelihood practices of the Birhor, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (primitive tribal group) in Jharkhand. They have historically lived in forests and had a nomadic hunting and gathering lifestyle. Large-scale deforestation brought about by urbanization and industrialization has an impact on the entire culture and civilization. Their language and unique socio-cultural structure are undergoing rapid changes as a result of their increased exposure to modern culture through different government initiatives for tribal development, the modern educational system, etc. It is therefore necessary to investigate the evolving sociocultural patterns of the vulnerable "Birhor" tribe and to put

appropriate strategies and programmes in place for the self-initiated preservation of indigenous tribal culture and identity.

**Keywords:** Oral tradition, Social life, Economic life, Birhor, Jharkhand.

## INTRODUCTION

Tribals are known for having a vibrant cultural history. Risley <sup>[1]</sup> refers to this tribe as being "son of the soil," or aboriginal. These people have a separate tribal language and a segmented social structure, and they reside in a continuous geographic territory <sup>[2,3]</sup>. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of India is made up of 8.6% scheduled tribes. Based on the Dhebar Commission report and other studies, a subcategory called "Primitive tribal group" was created inside Scheduled Tribes during the fourth Five Year Plan in order to identify groups that are thought to be at a lower stage of development. These societies exhibit characteristics of a pre-agricultural way of life, such as hunting and gathering practices, negligible or no population increase, and a remarkably low level of literacy when compared to other tribal groups<sup>[4,5]</sup>. Owing to disparate geographic dispersion, their entire culture and economy exhibit a variety of characteristics. Their economic pursuits are

diverse, spanning from early stages of subsistence through industrialization and related endeavours<sup>[6]</sup>. A Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), formerly known as Primitive Tribal Groups, is identified by its small, stagnant, and declining population, pre-agricultural technological level, and extremely low literacy<sup>[7]</sup>. Still living as nomads, some of them are hunters and gatherers. Their political organisation is a band, and their systems of exchange are barter and reciprocity. They frequently fall victim to epidemic diseases as a result of their low socioeconomic status. This could result in their extinction because of their limited population. To help their miserable living conditions, they are provided with a range of facilities. Currently, there are 75 PVTG groups spread throughout 14 Indian states and one union territory. There are eight tribal communities in Jharkhand that are extremely vulnerable. One recognized primitive tribal group is Birhor. They used to reside in jungles, where they have done so for many generations. Their home, the forest or adjacent jungles, influences every aspect of their culture; in fact, we could argue that their entire way of life revolves around it. Since the beginning of anthropological research on Indian tribes, anthropologists and other academics have been interested in the Birhor because of their unique ways of subsistence<sup>[8,9,10,11,12,13]</sup>. They are occasionally referred to as a "vanishing tribe"<sup>[14]</sup>, however statistically speaking, they do not exhibit a declining trend, despite the fact that their traditional hunting and gathering economy is in decline. They used to wander the jungle and only sometimes trade with outsiders to survive on forest produce. The Birhor people's method of sustenance has been vividly described by anthropologists through their extensive research<sup>[9,12,13]</sup>. Roy's<sup>[9]</sup> research was based on a classic ethnographic book of a tribe, which covered topics such as religion, folklore, kinship, marriage, birth and death, and the arts and games<sup>[9]</sup>. An in-depth description of the

Birhor people's way of life in the Ranchi districts and the environs of Hazaribag, Palamau, and the Chotonagpur plateau is presented in this book. Adhikary<sup>[12]</sup>, in contrast, carried out his research among the Bihors in the Sundargarh area of Odisha. His research was conducted using the "worldview" as the primary theoretical framework.

Due to the current sweep of globalization and penetration of market forces deep into the hitherto inaccessible regions, the rich diversity is threatened and there is a danger that any further delay might swipe out this rich intangible and tangible cultural heritage before it gets preserved. The people are speedily accepting new trends of way of living and changing their old age traditions and Scheduled Tribes are not exception to this. Their oral traditions are gradually vanishing from their society as well as affecting their social structure and accepting new trends of living from their neighbouring communities. The present empirical study is an attempt to document the orally transmitted socio-cultural practices still followed by the Birhor community of Jharkhand.

#### **AREA OF STUDY**

The study was carried out in three Birhor settlements – Basukocha, Paharsingh and Chipibandhdih of Ranchi districts, Jharkhand. Basukocha and Chipibandhdih falls in the Tamar block of Ranchi whereas Paharsingh is located in Angara block of Ranchi. All three settlements are inhabited by the Birhor family only. All the settlements are situated atop a hill and is about 60 kms from Ranchi city but in a different direction. Settlements are surrounded by forest from all sides which is very similar to their customary surroundings. All three settlements collectively include 80 families who are residing in the plastered dwellings with the name of the family head engraved on the wall. The construction of these pukka houses (twelve) was facilitated by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi some

15-20 years ago to rehabilitate those nomadic Birhor community. The settlements, though situated remotely, has been witnessing development works since a long time. There is a primary school building and an Aanganwadi centre. We have observed the presence of different development initiatives undertaken by the following organizations' in the study settlements:

NABARD has constructed cemented roads stretching upto 7km and hence, the Paharsingh has a better connectivity from town. Jharkhand Tribal Development Society (JTDS) has facilitated building of pukka houses for the Birhor households under the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) and installation of two solar-powered water pump in partnership with MECON and Jharkhand Renewable Energy Development Agency (JREDA). Basukocha and Chipbandhdih also have all weathered road connectivity and the villagers are also getting the facility of uninterrupted supply of drinking water through solar powered water pump. JTDS also dig up ponds which provides the source of irrigation and to mitigate household needs round the year. Defunct pipeline connection with tap to provide water at the doorstep of each household was also observed. Despite that the community prefer to quench their thirst through a perennial *chuan* (traditional water source). In all the settlements This community is still largely dependent on forest for their livelihood by selling firewood in nearby villages as well as in local market. Seasonally they also collect and sell lac, mahua seeds. However, they themselves do not cultivate lac but collect the remains of harvested lac from the owners of lac host trees and sell in the local market. They still make ropes but the creepers were replaced by plastic as raw material. Majority of the people have marginal landholding for cultivation. As per their account, those who were settled in the beginning have land which has now been even more fragmented amongst the present generation. So the produce from those lands

are used for household consumption only and that too is not stable as there is an acute problem of irrigation. During the fieldwork we have observed the presence of fowl and goats but surprisingly no cow or buffalo in the study area. Paddy cultivators usually keep ox/cow to plough their land but they told that they hire tractor for ploughing. It is interesting to note that, since they are not traditional cultivator, hence they lack the skill to plough using animals. These people also work as labourers and sometimes migrate for 2-5 months a year outside state for working in construction sites and brick kilns. Their level of literacy is found to be very low. For the last few years, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi – a philanthropic organization is running a residential study centre at Chipibandhdih creating a significant impact among the new generation of Birhor. During the study, it was felt that these people are continuously struggling to match up with the changing market demands and diversify their products to get a good price in return. They acknowledge that they need to look out for and adopt alternative sources of income or get absorbed in the mainstream permanent government jobs to ensure a secure and sustainable livelihood in the future but what they are finding difficult is to detach from their roots that is the forest and which defines their culture. There are so many development works going on around them. Even they have been taken in the fold. But still, they continue to live at subsistence level.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The article is an outcome of the research carried out among the PVTG community named Birhor, who are considered as one of the earliest inhabitants of Jharkhand currently distributed in Ranchi, Giridih, Hazaribagh, Latehar districts of Chotanagpur plateau. This article is based on data generated from a fieldwork of more than four months on the Birhor community of Jharkhand applying the appropriate anthropological research

methodology like Observations, Interviews and Group discussions techniques including still photography. The household schedule was canvassed to collect quantitative data in order to document the different resources available in the area and related knowledge as well as to identify the role of those resources in livelihood and survival in hostile situation.

The research has been carried out in different phases. Initial period of research proved to be difficult because of hilly terrain and suspicious attitude of the respondents that gives the impression of a culture whose members constitute what Adler and Adler <sup>[15]</sup> described as reluctant respondents who are not only hard to find but even harder to secure for permission to study. However, employing a 'local boy' as field guide helps overcome this predicament. The 'local boy' plays a role of passive translator rather engaging directly in the interview process. Key informant interview, Jungle walk (for specimens' collection), Census Schedule, Observation Schedule and Specimen Identification were the key methods, tools and technique for collecting primary data. Moreover, prior to the 'real' field work, few informal meetings and interviews were carried out with some key people and potential key informants in block and village to explore more on baseline information regarding the study. The data on indigenous practices were collected through open ended interview and guided observation by the field guide. Almost every member of the village incorporating male, female, adult and young were interviewed independently to find the shared and distributed knowledge concerning resource utilization and management. The study was principally guided by qualitative methodology and data validation was based on focused group discussion and peer group meeting. A wide range of issues pertaining to the folk tradition were covered in the schedule, such as the kinds of rituals, traditional skill of rope making, forest collection, hunting, food consumed, their cultural significance etc. By

using a comprehensive approach, the research data help us our understanding of the complex function that ecology play in Birhor culture.

### **BIRHOR: MAN OF JUNGLE**

The Birhor is one of the primitive tribal groups of the state of Jharkhand distributed mainly in the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Gumla and West Singhbhum. The term Birhor is a summation of *Bir* and *Hor*, meaning jungle and man respectively, meaning 'man of jungle'. In the neighbouring Oriya-speaking region, they are popularly known as *Mankiria* or *Mankidi* meaning the people who are in the habit of eating and rearing *gari* (monkey). The neighbouring tribal people call them *Jomsara* referring to their habit of eating monkeys (in Mundari, *Jom* means 'to eat' while *Sara* means 'monkey'). They belong to proto-australoid racial stock. Linguistically, they belong to Austro-Asiatic (Mundari) group. They were found living only on the tops and spurs of the hills, cultivating absolutely nothing. They lead a nomadic life moving in a radius of 150 -200 kms. They used to move from one hill to another and one place (village) to another in bands. The Birhor settlement was known as *Basa (Tanda)*. In each place they erected temporary huts (Kumba) of conical shape and were covered with leaves and branches. They again moved from that place to a new place after few days carrying the materials on their heads and their children on their shoulders. Their territories were fixed and never used to enter into the area of the other Birhor group. They used to be continuously on move from one hill to another collecting forest products such as the *Gungu Patta* shrub to prepare ropes, honey, herbal medicines, gum, bark of some trees used for making ropes or herbal medicines, mango, *kusum*, *mohua* flowers and fruits, roots and tubers of wild plants used as vegetables etc. The *mohua* seeds are used to extract oil for cooking, body massage, medicine for healing wounds. The ropes were exchanged for the grains with local villagers

and also used to beg food from them. On the basis of their nature of habitation, Roy <sup>[9]</sup> mentioned that they had two divisions – *uthulu* (nomadic) and *jaggi* or *jagghi*. However, he found little social –cultural differences between these two divisions. Sinha <sup>[11]</sup> noticed a frequent reversal to the original nomadic way of life. Based on field observations, it is currently believed that one aspect of modern Birhor society is the existence of a nomadism-sedentarism continuum, which has evolved from total nomadism to the coexistence of both nomadism and sedentarism among various population segments to the current form in which the same group may alternate between periods of sedentarism and nomadism. Despite the existence of this continuum, permanent residency is currently the predominant mode of dwelling for Birhor.

They are still solely dependent on monkeys, birds, jungle roots, and plants, but they are now living in a settled colony in one-room brick homes with asbestos roofs that the government has supplied on the foothills of the forest. Where there is a vacant plot of ground, the houses are roughly lined up on either side of the major road. These days, the Birhor economy consists partly of labour and partly of the forest economy. In order to augment their income, the Bihors in the villages under study work as agricultural labourers and have learned the technique of farming. They also raise goats and chickens. The Birhor men walk far into the forest near their habitation in the morning with their adult son, daughter, or wife, and return in the afternoon with fuel wood, barks, or other small forest produce to be sold at the local market or marketplace. They are heavily reliant on the forest.

## SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

In Birhor society, the family remains the smallest social unit. It is a patrilineal family. The father, who is the leader of the household, is the one who has family authority. The structure of the family is nuclear. The husband,

wife, and their unmarried offspring make up this group. In terms of descent and succession, the Birhor adhere to patrilineal and patriarchal laws. The Birhor women enjoy a higher status and play nearly equal roles in the household. They play an equal part in upholding the family's finances, making decisions for their children's marriages, and participating in customs, etc. They assist the males and perform all household chores, such as gathering fuel from forests and making ropes from plants.

The Birhor have a number of totemic clans called *killi* such as *Bodhura*, *Soyi*, *Laguri*, *Hembrom*, *Murmu*, *Purty*, *Hansda*, etc. named after plants, trees, birds, animals, river etc. They are living in *Basa* (camp) with different clans but followed the rule of *basa* exogamy. The Birhor follow the rules of avoidance between *Sasur-Damad*, *Sasur-Putoh*, *Sas-Damad*, *Sas-Putoh*, *Bhawah-Bhainsur*, *Jethasala-Bahnoi* and *Hethal Bahanoi* particularly during the early years of marriage. The rule of joking is observed between *Jija-Sala*, *Jija-Sali*, *Devar-Bhabhi*, *Nanad-Bhabhi* and *Nandoi-Sarhaj*.

The Birhor marry just one spouse at a time. However, widowhood, bigamy, and even trigamy are practiced in cases of infertility. Remarriages by sisters and widows are common. They abide by the laws of clan exogamy and community endogamy. It is believed that marriage is essential for every Birhor. A person is only considered a full-fledged member of the community upon their marriage. For boys, the age of marriage is seventeen to eighteen, while for girls, it is fifteen to sixteen years of age. Their customary marriage is called *Sodor Bapla*, it is the parents of the bridegroom who choose a life partner for their son and conduct negotiations through the negotiator. Marriage rituals are performed by the priest of their own caste usually headman (Munda) without reciting mantra and *havan* and performed at the brides place. The parents of the boy or girl send rice applied with

turmeric powder to all relatives to invite them for marriage. Haldi mixed with mustard oil is applied to both bride and groom. Bride applies haldi to groom and groom in return to bride. The rituals are *Chumad bandhan*, *sindoor lagana* wherein the bride is carried in a bamboo basket to the marriage pandal and the groom applies sindhur on the forehead of the bride three times symbolizing the marriage. Haldi coloured rice is sprinkled on the heads and both bride and groom by all relatives. All relatives and friends are fed with rice and meat on the day of *bidhai* of bride. Father of the bride is given *dhoti*, *kurta* and *gamocha*. The mother of the bride is given two saris, but not blouse. Two sisters are permitted to marry two brothers. Divorce is not permitted. Widow can remarry at young age. But if she has children she stays back at home. Exchange of girls between two families permitted. In their marriage ceremony only Birhor people assemble and no other caste people visit them.

### **ECONOMIC LIFE**

The Birhor pursue a number of occupations of which making of rope and rope-made products is the primary one. They make ropes out of the fibers of a particular species of vine *Lamah* and *Udal* and they are specialized in this profession. They prepare five varieties of ropes, namely *Doga* (collar ropes for tying cattle), *barahi*-draw ropes for pulling water from wells, and *Jhal baber* (a long rope having a number of lopes suspended from it) for tying a number of cattle at a time for treading them over paddy harvest, *Mukar*- a rope for the cattle's decoration, and *Jote*, a kind of rope used in a bullock cart. Besides, these they also prepare *Topa*, a kind of small basket made of barks, for extracting oil from oil seeds such as *kusum*, *baru*, and a few varieties of *Shikwar*; a kind of rope-made net used by the potters for carrying earthen pots or by other people for domestic purposes. They also collect bark from the "*pocha*" tree for making incense. They also make and sell broomstick of "*Lukui*"

grass. Hunting monkeys and other wild games is the next important occupation of the Birhor. Before entering the forest for hunting they sacrifice a fowl and its blood is sprinkled on the *haldi* rice by inviting a *Pahan* to perform the *pooja* to protect themselves from wild animals, snake bites etc. Some old persons knew some mantras and the art of making some sounds by which the animals being hunted cannot escape. Though wild games are primarily hunted for consumption purpose, they occasionally deal in live monkeys and skins of langur. They also frequently go on hunting rabbits, wild pigs, chicken, squirrels, monkeys, birds such as peacock, mayna, bagula, pigeon etc., in groups with their dogs and specially made nets. They also catch fish by a net called *kaanta* and *kumni*. They sundry the meat procured by hunting and preserve it for slack seasons. Making of ropes and rope-made products is based on jungle resources is their primary occupation, hunting of wild games is secondary and does not contribute much to their total economy.

### **RELIGIOUS LIFE**

The Birhor believe in supernatural spirits. They worship and offer sacrifices to these spirits from time to time and endeavour to keep them in good spirits. These supernatural spirits are thought to play important role in their life and activities. They think that the whole universe is created and presided over by *Sing Bonga* -the sun god and his wife *Chado Bonga* -the moon god. Their supreme deity is *Sing Bonga* and *Dharati Maa* is his consort. These two deities are responsible for good health, harvest and happiness in the Birhor society. They also worship their household deities. The *Munda* is their priest as well as headman. He is social, political, and religious head of the *basa*. He has an assistant called *dakua*. They also believe in witchcraft and diviners *Ojhahs*. Birhors celebrate the festivals, viz., *Mokro-Parab* in January; *Phagun*-the hunting festival in February; *Sarhul* in March; *Karam* and *Jitia*

in September; *Dasai* and *Sohrai* in October, Singbonga, Sarana, Mabonga and so on. They dance the *Lujh'ri* at the *Karam* and the *Jittiya*, the *Jarga* at the *Phagua* and *Sarhul*, and the *Sauntari* at other times (Oraon:1994). They also celebrate the local festivals of the area like Maghe, Ba Parab and Buru Bonga.

During any bonga, they smear the floor with cow dung, they prepare three sun dried rice structures in the name of the deities under the roof of house and offer them the sacrifice of the fowls and goat during the bongas and black chicken to get relief from the effects of witchcraft. They also worship their ancestors and offer dhoti and sarees.

### **BIRTH AND DEATH RITUALS**

For the couple, family, *Basa*, and the community, the birth is a happy occasion. When a couple is blessed with a kid, their marriage is prosperous. As the family name, lineage, and succession pass down from one generation to the next, the birth of a child is celebrated. They hardly ever attend hospitals; the birth occurs at home. Delivery happens in a different room. For a week, she gets fed in separate plates and cups. The old woman of the community serves as a midwife. A bamboo knife is used to cut the navel. In order to protect the placenta from evil spirits and black magic, it is buried in a remote location. The woman is kept in seclusion, and the only person permitted inside the delivery room is the attendant. There's a prickly plant branch near the gate. To keep the mother and kid safe from bad spirits, fire is set near the mother and child, and a knife is placed at the mother's side. A week is set aside to observe the pollution period. After a week, the mother and child are bathed in a river or stream to purify themselves. The blankets, utensils, and room are all cleaned on this day. The mother and child are asked to be blessed by the female community members. The mother and the child are brought before the deity of the *Basa* to seek blessings. Bamboo pots represent them.

All families are invited and fed with rice, dal and local beer (*illi*).

The name giving ceremony takes place after seven days but before a month. If the child is born on Friday, is named as Shukra, if Monday as Somara or Somwari for a girl, if born on Tuesday as Managara for boy or Managari for a girl. The first feeding ceremony for the child is held after the eruption of first tooth. Ear boring is done at 2 to 3 years of age by a person of the low caste community named Sonar and he is paid a payment of one paila (less than 1kg) of rice and Rs.10/- only. *Hoyo* (mundan) takes place in a year.

The Birhor believe that the old persons die and become ancestral spirits. They join the abode of ancestors. They incarnate time to time through birth. They believe that to change of old body, birth and death at old age is essential. The death at the old age is considered as good. But death during childhood and at young age is considered bad because the soul and spirits of such persons remain dissatisfied and they may have to lead a life of *Bhuta-Preta* and evil spirits. Such spirits attack on women, children, bride and groom. The Birhor bury their dead with head to east and leg to west in lying position and pollution is observed for one week. The death is mourned at family, lineage and clan level. On 7<sup>th</sup> day the house, utensils and clothes are washed. Women take purificatory bath. The male members shave head, mustache and beard and take purificatory bath. On 15<sup>th</sup> day all families bring one kg of rice and cook together and offer food in the name of the deceased. The members of the community are given a feast (*Bhoj Bhandan*).

### **FOLKLORE AND MATERIAL CULTURE**

Oral traditions are passed down from one generation to the next by means of their parents, guardians, relatives, friends, elder members of the community, and day-to-day activities. From the moment of their birth until their death, oral traditions are a part of their sociocultural existence. These include games

and sports, folklore, ceremonies, rituals, customs, music, dance, and language. In the area of their technologies, oral traditions are also present, particularly in the knowledge of their economic operations related to hunting, trapping, and other activities.

About the creation of earth Birhors mention that 'there was all water in the beginning. In the water, an *Upal* (lotus) plant stood with its head above the water. The supreme spirit 'Singbonga' was then in *patal* (the nether region). He came up of the waters through the hollow of the stem of the lotus plant to the surface. He took seat on the lotus flower, then commanded the *Horo* (tortoise) to bring up some clay from underneath the water. The tortoise asked Singbonga, where (the shell) should I leave my house? Singbonga told him to 'take your house with you'. Then Tortoise jumped into the water and took up some clay, and placed it on its back but the clay was washed off the shell while coming up and the Tortoise failed to bring clay from the underneath water. Now term is for the *Katkom* (crab) but he also failed to bring some clay from the deep water. Then, Singbonga ordered to *Lendad* (leech) to bring some clay from beneath the waters. The Leech swam down to the bottom of the ocean and devoured its fill of clay and came up to Singbonga and vomited out the clay from its stomach into the hand of Singbonga. Singbonga pressed the clay between his hands and threw a bit of this clay in each of the four directions of the world. And forthwith there arose on the surface of the waters a four-sided land mass and thus was formed this Earth. The Singbonga began to level because the earth was moist and uneven with the *karha* (leveler). Some unplanned lands became the hills and mountains. After that, He scattered seeds around and trees and plants sprang up all over the earth. Then, the Singbonga created mankind after he created of animals through the clay figures.

There is another folktale about their origin and present descendants 'there was a Kherwar

King in Chotanagpur, who had two sons. His sons started quarrelling over the throne after death of the king. Then the elders of the state came forward to mitigate the dispute. They asked the sons to run a race on horseback and told that the throne would go to the son who would win the race. There was a competition of race and the younger son won the competition. The elder son was delayed because his turban got entangled into the thorns of a bush on his way. The younger son became the king of the state while the elder one took to a wandering life in Chotanagpur jungles. The present Birhor are the descendants of the elder son of the deceased Kherwar king of Chotanagpur'.

The dress and ornaments of the Birhor are very few. Infants and children hardly wear any clothes. Boys and girls of above five years of age wear readymade garments and some time they wear lion clothes also. Some young boys do wear shirts and banians. The adult men wear loincloth but most of them wear no upper garment. Now a day young women wear Sari and blouse. The young unmarried and married girls sometimes wear earring, necklaces and conchs, and the small girls and aged ladies do not wear ornaments.

They procure different vegetable and animal food items from jungles; the staple food of the Birhor is rice, dal and meat of the animals hunted from the forest. They sometimes eat wheat flour and rice products like *Khajari* (perched rice), *Taben* (flattened rice). The common vegetables are Potato, cauliflower, sellary, burjuflowers, saag-sirali, matta saag collected from forests. They do fishing in the nearby streams and rivers for self-consumption. They are very much addicted to *Dokta* (tobacco), *illi* (rice beer) and *arki* (local liquor).

Their household possession consists of earthen pots and Aluminium pots, now-a-days, some steel and bronze utensils have also reached the Birhor families with the contact and communication with other people in the local



*Haat*. They have axe, *gulel*, bow and arrow as hunting implements. They have *Kudi*, *Khurpi*, *Sabli* and *Khanti* as digging implements. For trapping the birds, monkeys, rabbit, etc., they have trapping nets, rope made articles like rope carpet, rope sikia, rope baskets are also seen in their *Basa*. For rope making, they have special type of tools. They use leaf and grass mats for sleeping. They possess wooden utensils like *okhur*, *mushali*, for pounding grains.

### ETHNOMEDICINAL PRACTICES

They also collect horns, bones, skins and other parts of rare wild dead and trapped animals from jungles and sell them in the neighbouring market and villages for magico-religious purposes. They lift the dead animals of village and skin them and sell to Mochi. Earlier, they used to sell honey after collecting from the jungle, but this business is no more today due to its unavailability and deforestation. Some of them occasionally work as mines labourer in the neighbouring mines and building construction works in nearby semi urban town and some work as agricultural labourer in few villages. The Birhor also engage in fire wood selling in the nearby villages and semi urban areas. Some of the Birhor women and men are also found to resort to begging in the neighbouring villages and markets.

Some Birhors have knowledge of jungle herbs for medicinal use. They prepare the medicines for stomach pain, joint pain, and eye diseases. For stomach pain, they make medicines from the *nagbail*, which will be grinded then mix with water prepared *sarbaat* to drink to cure stomach pain. The *samarkana* is grinded then made hot and applied on the part of pain for about four days for complete relief from the joint pain. Fever and malaria are treated through the jungle herb called *cowputhi* grinded with *gutki* the black pepper along with mustard oil and made warm and massage on the body for cure from the fever. *Pillia* is treated from the hot copper wire and burnt on the part of liver enlargement. Seed of *Kadru*

*phal* is grinded and mixed with coconut oil, made warm and applied on the forehead to relieve from headache. If some one has been given poison, he/she has to drink at least for two days morning and evening the prepared drink from the *nagbail* and the poison is vomited.

*Tawij* is made to save from the evil eye, called *nazar*. They believe that nazar is very dangerous for human beings because this is the cause in rural areas to victimize any body and sometime people who have been affected may even die. *Bhut* and *preat* do not attack people who are wearing the tawij. They fill up the tawij with fox bone, elephant bone and the bones of *kali billi*- a black cat and tied at neck or waist with black thread. The tawiz are also prepared using the bones of animals such as monkey, siyar, camel, ass, bandurkar, peacock, bilwa benda, kuduri benda and so on to vile away the evil spirits or to remove poison from the body. The tawiz are also prepared by putting the roots of some of the trees such as Ratan gaura, Sabar bhanj, Alarjora, Barbera, Maida gaj and so on to vile away bhoot prët. The case of the tawij is made from silver, copper or steel.

They also use *garuda phal*, which is available in jungle for stomach disorders. The *garuda phal* is also useful in restricting the entry in the house of snake and scorpion (*bichchu*) in the house, they grind *garuda phal*, is mixed with water and spread in three directions. The snake will get out from the one open direction immediately. In case of snake, scorpion and the dog bite the paste of *garuda phal* mixed with mustard oil is applied on the bite to remove the poison. For any cut and injury on any body part they apply the paste of the ash of the burnt cotton cloth and mustard oil and it will dry quickly. *Raali* a shrub like pan leaf and its stem are boiled to make sharabat about 5 glasss for five days to cure from the cold and cough. They generally suffer from the cold, cough, fever, stomach disorders, and dysentery. *Paatal Kohnda* –a root collected from the

jungle, which is found five feet deep inside the earth is grind mixed with water and boiled and the soup is taken in the morning and evening to cure stomach disorders. The *Paatal Kohnda* is a long shrub grows clinging to a big tree. The roots of Langhan, Jhingi are grinded to extract the oil and applied to get relieved from the pain.

### **DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE**

The government is working hard these days to have them all settled in one area and has built up one-room housing for them. Aside from providing food grains, clothing, blankets, and mosquito nets, voluntary organisations like Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha have also started projects to rehabilitate them in permanent camps in various villages with built homes. These programmes also offer free education, midday meals for the children, free medical care for both indoor and outdoor patients, employment opportunities in locally established handlooms, and so on. Even the boys and girls were sent to Tatanagar and Ranchi for further education, but they never stayed there; instead, they went back to their communities.

The government agencies have also taken up many schemes for their upliftment such as Birsa Awas, goats and poultry, agricultural equipments such as spade (Gainta), including the pension for the old, pension under the social security scheme for the men and women, also goats and chicken to rear and supplement their economy. All the families hold the Antyodaya Card and get the food grains such as rice, wheat and Kerosene per month per family at free of cost. But a few opine that whatever assistance they receive from the government they sell and spend on local drinks. Many of them start drinking from early morning.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Birhor are an isolated 'primitive' hunting and gathering tribe dependent exclusively on

jungle produces in the earlier days. The Birhor 'a primitive tribe group' having specialized in hunting, gathering and jungle-based crafts have developed an essential economic interaction with the settled peasantry and operate like a 'nomadic' group within the broad framework of the agrarian economic structure in rural India especially in Jharkhand and Orissa. All these occupations were based on jungle resources and their traditional knowledge of these resources. But, the Birhor have been quite disrupted in recent decades due to deforestation and government attempts to settle them in permanent colony or agricultural villages although, they are still continuing their oral tradition from one generation to another with salient changes in term of ceremonies or functions. These tribal communities are losing their native cultural values, religious practices, rich oral tradition, and dialect as a result of urbanization and industrialization, which is having a detrimental effect on them. This will have an impact on their society and culture overall. The government has attempted, but failed, to use integrationist and isolationist strategies to safeguard and preserve its culture. While we are moving closer to being a technologically and economically powerful nation, our own native tribal culture is in danger of going extinct. Our cultural identity will be in jeopardy if these characteristics of our culture become extinct at the current rate of development. If culture and language disappear, the country will also perish. Therefore, it is imperative that we research and protect our rich cultural legacy and the path of development should be chosen in accordance with the requirements and cultural values of tribal community.

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