



# **BIRHOR TRIBE AND THEIR OWN WORLD— TRADITIONS VERSUS MODERNITY: A FIELD STUDY IN PURULIA DISTRICT (WEST BENGAL).**

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## **Abstract:**

Science is the sum total of different specialized forms of experimental knowledge through which one can change his environment. Despite many efforts made by the so-called civilized people, the Onges and Jarwas of Andaman Islands kept away themselves from surrendering to the present civilization. They lead their own live in their own world with their unique cultures. For thousands of years, they ignored and rejected modern scientific system and run with their self identity. There are only a few such tribes in the whole world. The Birhors' of Purulia (West Bengal) District are such reclusive indigenous people. How could they maintain their own characteristics, in this age of advancement in science is the main concern of this article.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Science is the sum total of different specialized forms of experimental knowledge through which one can change his environment. Despite many efforts made by the so-called civilized people, the Onges and Jarwas of Andaman Islands kept away themselves from surrendering to the present civilization. They lead their own live in their own world with their unique cultures. For thousands of years, they ignored and rejected modern scientific system and run with their self identity. There are only a few such tribes in the whole world. The Birhors' of Purulia (West Bengal) District are such reclusive indigenous people. How could they maintain their own characteristics, in this age of advancement in science is the main concern of this article.

## Birhors Numerology in Purulia District:

The Birhor tribes in Purulia are very poor in literacy rate; percentages calculations are not included in the statistics. Till today they have been running with their traditional knowledge, which they inherited from the nature since a long time ago. Although they are found in various places of Chotanagpur region, mainly, Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad of Jharkhand State; in Purulia District of West Bengal they live only in three places. They are located in Bareria and Bhupatipalli of Baghmundi Block, Khamar in Jhalda-1 Block and Mahultarh in Jhalda-2 Block. Let it be noted that all three Blocks are the adjacent regions of Jharkhand State. The Birhors always like to live in such a place which is hilly and forested, because they are still uncomfortable with the main stream of the Indian society. Kanka Sikari, a veteran old man (65<sup>+</sup> years), who belongs to the Birhor community, says,

Civil society did not accept us as a human being till today. We are not invited to the social functions, like- marriage, birthday celebration etc. We are used only for sanitation purposes, like, washing plates, clothes etc. In a word, we are not regarded as human fellow.<sup>1</sup>

From the above interview, it is easy to evaluate that the Birhors has moved away from the so-called civilized society because they do not accept them at all. As the civilized society turns away from them, the Birhor community does not show interest in establishing any close relationships. About thirty years ago, the Birhors were resided in Baredih, Bareria, Sonkupi, Chikanbagan in Baghmundi Block at Purulia District. These villages were in the vicinity of the hills and on the edge of the forest. That is why, they accustomed to wildlife. In the year 1960, by the initiative of The Depart of Backward Class Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, their houses were built in Bhupatipalli, adjacent to the Ayodhya hills. The village was named after the famous freedom fighter in Bengal, Bhupati Majumdar. In addition to Bhupatipalli, their existence can be noticed in five more places—Bersa( Balarampur Block), Khamar( Jhalda-1 Block) and Mahultarh under Hesahatu Gram Panchayet ( Jhalda-1 Block), Bareriya( Baghmundi Block), Ulgara( Jhalda 1 Block). The numerology of the Birhors in Purulia District is as follows:

Place	Block/P.S	Total Numbers of Families
Bhupatipally	Baghmundi	29
Bareriya	Baghmundi	12
Bersa	Balarampur	12
Khamar	Jhalda-1, Jhalda	09
Ulgara	Jhalda-1, Jhalda	04
Mahultarh	Jhalda-1, Jhalda	10

\*Source on the basis of field study

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Kanka Sikari of Mahultarh, Chhoto Bakad, Jhalda-2, dated. 18.01.2020

## Daily life of the Birhors:

The daily life of the Birhors is very miserable. All the shortcomings of human life can be noticed in them. Even today they are accustomed to living a nomadic life. The lack of a specific livelihood in their lives is prominent. They depend heavily on nature and forests for their lively hood. They enter the dense forest and collect bark from it, from which they weave ropes. They make ropes in a natural way with such a big risk in life but they don't get a fair price for these products. They sell those ropes at the nearest market, where the weekly market (Hat) is arranged. It is needless to say that they are forced to live an inhuman life without getting actual price of their hard-earned goods.



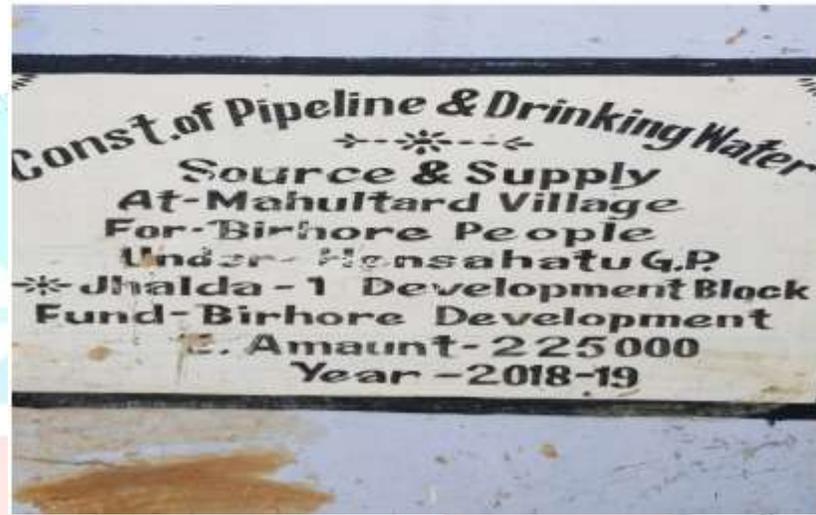
A man is engaged to prepare the handmade rope

Animal husbandry is one of the primitive professions. The Birhors, even today, have been in this profession to earn some money. Being failed to adopt any modern profession, they have been compelled to lead their lives by using the traditional profession. Realizing this situation, the Depart of Backward Class Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal has been providing them some livelihood for animal husbandry.



Pictures show about the animal husbandry

Although the Government of West Bengal provided shelter, drinking water etc. for the Birhors, but they could not adapt all these things. In fact, Birhors are belonged to such type of tribe who believe that nature is their mother. They like to get the nature as they have got it. They accept the natural evolution process.



Documents of shelter and drinking water provided by the Government

## EVALUATION:

Still now the Birhors, are following the conventional approach towards education and health care, which they got as inheritance from their forefathers. However, the 'so called civilized' society cannot avoid the responsibility in this regard. The distance between civilized and the traditional Birhors would have been bridged if appropriate opportunities for social communication were created. Even today, they have not been able to become 'modern' as the civilized society has turned away from them. It may be said that the selfishness of the civilized society is the main reason for the backwardness of this primitive men. Prolonged deprivation has forced them to go to the traditional way, a little love and sympathy could bring them towards the mainstream of society.