

# Implementation of Governmental Policy and Cultural Transformation: A Case Study on Birhor Tribe in Bagmundi Block Under the District of Purulia of West Bengal

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## ABSTRACT

It is very difficult to define the term "Culture", however simply it denotes the tastes, traditions, beliefs, rituals, values, thoughts, knowledge, behavior and after all social learning of one or a group of people. Since the beginning of human civilization, each and every community has been bearing its distinctive cultural identity and trying to save it as a matter of sentiment. In this way, diversities are found among heterogeneous group of people worldwide in the form of cultural variation. But due to Modernization, Globalization lead to rapid changes of traditional indigenous culture. Among the 698 Scheduled tribes in India, Birhoris one of them. Birhor are traditionally hunter and gatherer and live in the forest of Chota Nagpur plateau. Birhor were indigenous practices of culture but due to governmental forest law and wildlife protection act force to shift Birhor habitation in plain area under rehabilitation programmed. Afterword in contacts with neighbor modern people Birhor culture gradually changes. In this paper highlighted the nature of change within Birhor culture.

## 1. Introduction

India, being a country of heterogeneous group of people has always reflected cultural tradition of its inhabitants within space-time lattice since time immemorial. One of the indigenous cultural heritages lies in the sphere of tribal society has been living in the forest endowed hills and foothills of Chota Nagpur plateau in the name of *Adibasi* or first settler who have maintained their customs, rules and rituals forming a socio-cultural distinctive community as compared to their neighbours (Roy and Das, 2011). Traditionally Birhors were hunter and gatherer thus forest is the backbone of Birhor economy and without forest they cannot think of living. It seems to the Birhors as the gift of nature. They feel secured in the area of the forest like a fish in water (Sahay A.K,2009). During the last century it is noticed that rapid deforestation and huge loss of Biodiversity is found in every part of India and in this context Indian government taken step to protect forest and animals that is why a huge numbers of forest dweller inhabitation forcefully shifted from the forest to the nearby agricultural areas. In this Governmental rehabilitation programme Birhors tribe also forcefully shifted in the nearby unfertile agricultural land with far away from forest area. In coming with new areas Birhor cannot adopt with the new sphere of life because of unavailability of agricultural land, agricultural equipment's, knowledge make their lifestyle engenders. After course of time Birhors in comes to the contact of modern people in nearby area and gradually lost their traditional cultural practices.

## 2. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this paper are the following-

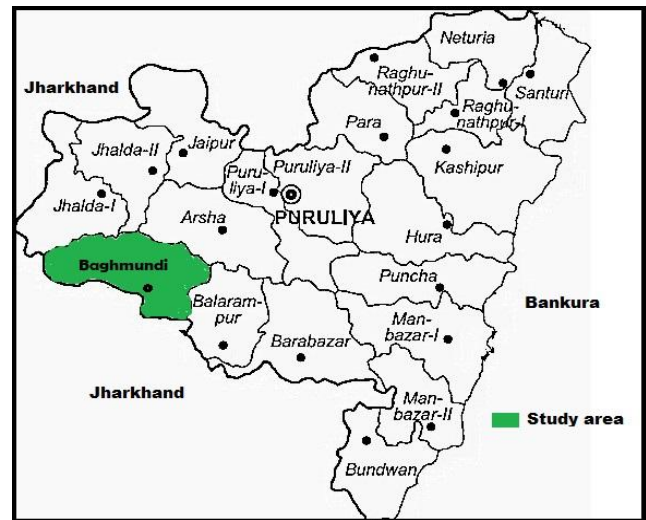
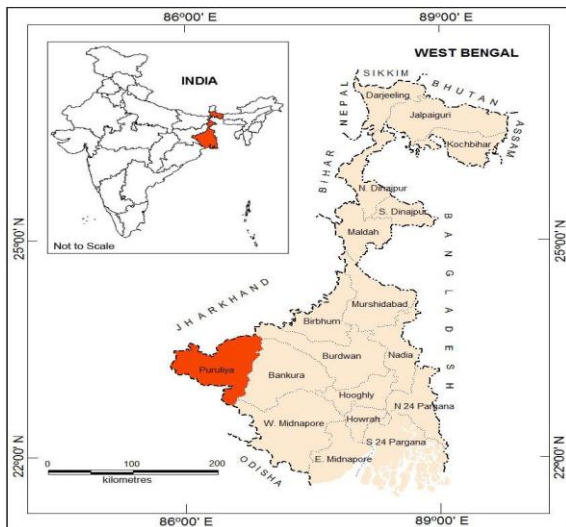
1. To represent traditional boundaries inherited tribal life of Birhor tribe.
2. To highlight the changing scenario of societal landscape of Birhor in the study area.
3. To investigate the impact of modernity upon the Birhor tribe.

## 3. Methodology

The present research is purely based on Primary data that has been gathered through direct field observation and use questionnaires and face to face interviews with Birhor village head man, students, women and other Birhors. After collecting data, changes have been identified in the perspective of man and environmental relationship. To analyse the changing life style of Birhor tribe, with the help of tabulation and graphical representation.

## 4. About the study area

The study area Bagmundi Block is located in the southern part of Purulia district. The Block is bounded by Jhalda I, Jhalda II and Arsha Block on the north, Balarampur Block on the east, Kukru Block, in Seraikela Kharsawan district of Jharkhand, on the south, and Jhalda I Block on the west and the total area of this block is 427.95 km<sup>2</sup>.



**5. Birhor People: A geographical Identity**

Jungle people Bihhor (*Bir* means jungle, *hor* mean men) are forest people, traditionally nomadic, hunter and gatherer and inhabited in the Chota Nagpur plateau region. Ethnically they area belongs to Proto-Australoid and linguistically fall in Austro-Asiatic family (Roy, S.C. 1925). Most of the Birhor speak in Birhor language's that similar to Munda language. At present They live in scattered within the Indian state of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. On the basis of their living style in their society Birhor can be divided into two groups (a) Uthlu Birhor and the (b) Jaghi Birhor. Uthlu Birhor are nomadic and always move from one jungle to another when the food supply in a particular Jungle is exhausted. But during the rainy season, they have to stay at a particular place in the Jungle. Jaghi Birhors are the Settler and their economy is semi-agricultural economy. They were Settle in the outskirts of forest, foothill or near agricultural field. Birhors were uses pre-agricultural technology and their economy is subsistence type and their population are decreasing or stagnant in nature with low literacy make them vulnerable.

**6. Changes of Birhor traditional culture**

In west Bengal most of the Birhors were out migrated from Chota Nagpur plateau and settle in the foothill of Ajoydha hill but during the 1980s due to the dam construction in Ajoydha hill area Birhor were displace and resettle in the village

Bhupatipalli and Bareria within the Baghmundi block of Purulia district. During my field study I found that there have been rapid changes of Birhor culture in this two Birhor inhabited village in Baghmundi block. The changes occurred in the field are given below.

**Habitation:** Traditionally Birhors were hunter and gatherer and in this reason, they roaming from one place to another for the searching of food. So, they cannot make their permanent settlement they make temporary houses with the help of leaf and branches of trees this traditional houses were known as *Kumbha* in Birhor society. They are generally six to ten families are collectively living in the settlement which known as *Tanda*. They are generally living in the dense forest or the forest covered foothill area.

In my study it is find that inhabited Birhor in Bagmundi block were not the inborn people in this area their ancestor lived in the state of Jharkhand. Due to rapid deforestation and food crisis they were migrated from Jharkhand and settle in forest covered foothill area of Ajoydha hill. In between 1970 to 1980s government force to shift in Bhupatipalli and Bareria village in the scheme of Governmental Birhor rehabilitation scheme. Now their present inhabited area is away from forest and surrounded by agricultural field and live mostly within the governmental makeshift concrete houses.



Plate-1: Birhor traditional Habitation



Plate-2: Present habitation in Bhupatipalli Village

**Table:1, Nature of Birhor habitation in the study area**

Habitation	Leaf hut within Forest	Mud House in forest fringe	Mud house in plain area	Governmental Makeshift concrete houses
No. of families	0	0	12	73

Source: Field Survey-2018

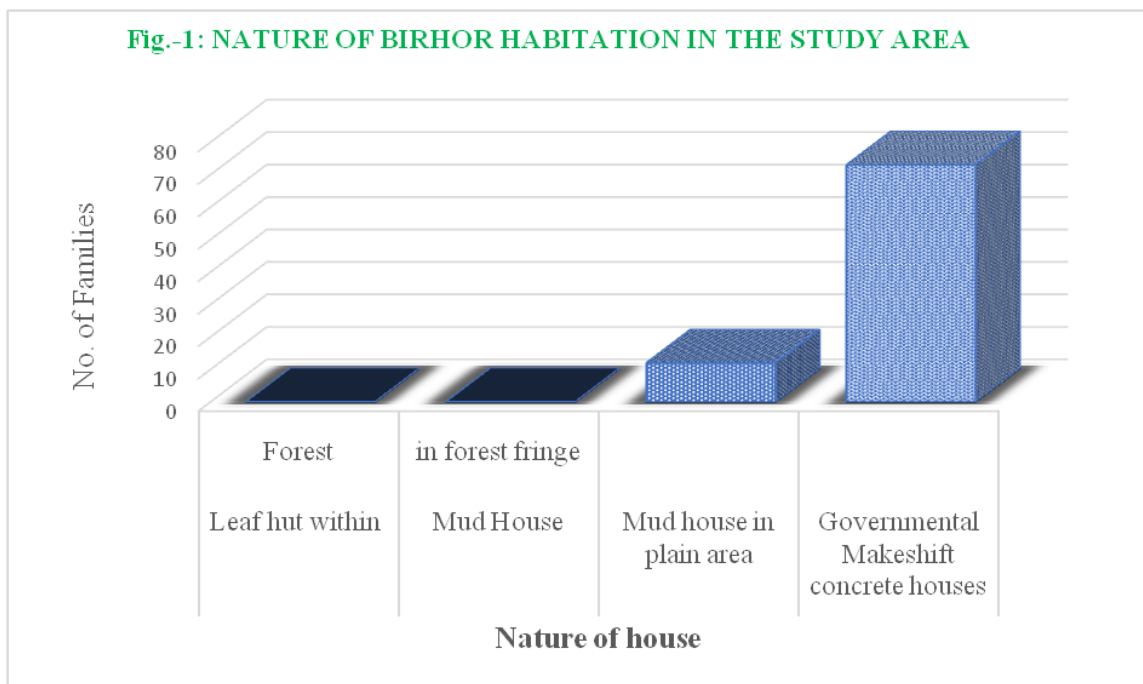


Table and figure (1) show that among the 85 Birhor families in this study area 73 families that means almost 86 percentage family is inhabiting within the Governmental concrete houses. So it can be said that Birhor were shifted their habitation from forest dweller to agricultural society and from the traditional leaf house kumbha to Governmental makeshift concrete houses.

**Settlement structure:** Earlier Birhor made their temporary houses with the help of leaf and branches of the trees that is known as *Kumbha* which is very comfortable. In this house measuring 8 or 10 feet in length by 6 feet in breadth by 6 feet in height, the doors being only 2 feet in height by 1 feet in breadth and the shape of the hut is conical or dome like. But in my study area Bhagmuni block most of the Bihors are live within the Governmental sponsored concrete houses made with brick wall and asbestos or tallies roof.

**Table:2, Nature of change in Birhor Settlement structure in the study area**

Settlement Environment	Traditional	Present situation
House materials	Leaf and branches or Mud wall with tallies	Concrete wall with roof or Asbestos
Window	No Windows	Wooden and Iron window
Doors	Small door makes with bamboo or leaf and branches	Iron or wooden 5 feet by 3 feet door
ventilator	No ventilator	With ventilator
Comfortability	Very comfortable	Uncomfortable

Source: Field Survey-2018

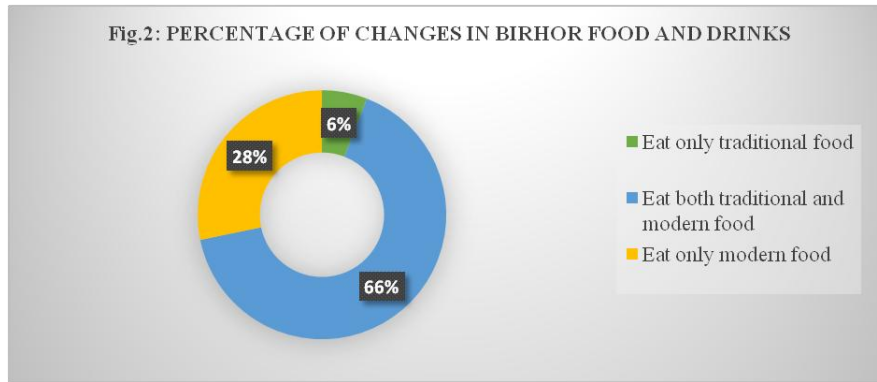
**Food habits:** Traditionally Birhor were hunter and gathered as they could eat different kinds of animals particularly monkey, birds, different fruits, honey and eatable tree leaves with roots. But recently due to wildlife protection act and reduction in forest cover has changed their traditional life

and habitation that also lead to changes their food habits. Now they are eating modern people like rice, roti, vegetables, egg and chicken like modern food. Changes also found in their drinks, in traditionally they drink *Hundia* which is made from rice but recently they drink liquor that comes from urban area.

**Table:3, Change in Food and drink**

Nature of Food	Eat only traditional food	Eat both traditional and modern food	Eat only modern food
Percentage of Birhor accepted	5.88	65.88	28.24

Source: Field Survey-2018



From the above table-3, and Fig.2 show that only 5.88 percentage Birhor eat traditional food and remaining 94.12 percentage of Birhor are shifted from their traditional food.

**Dress materials:** Due to Globalization, modernization leads to changes of Birhor Dress. Earlier Birhor male wearing 'Bhagoa' a piece of cloths and females are wearing 'Lahanga'

short saree (Adhikary,1984).The children in their early of ages wear only ganji. The half portion of the body generally remains naked. In late childhood, the boy wears pant, shirt, ganji etc. They girls wear pant and frock. But now they're wearing all modern dresses. Both male and female dresses are completely changes.



Plate-3: Traditional Birhor dress

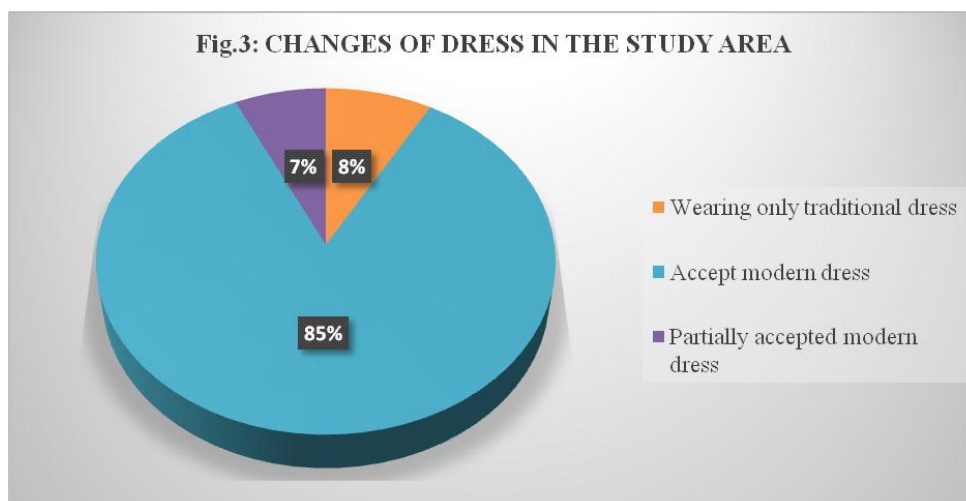


Plate-4: Modern Birhor dress

Table:4, Change in Dress materials within the Birhor tribe in the study area

Types of dress	Wearing only traditional dress	Accept modern dress	Partially accepted modern dress
Percentage of Birhor accepted	8.24	84.70	7.06

Source: Field Survey-2018



From the table no. 4 and the Fig.3 it is clearly found that almost 85 of Birhor denied their traditional dresses.

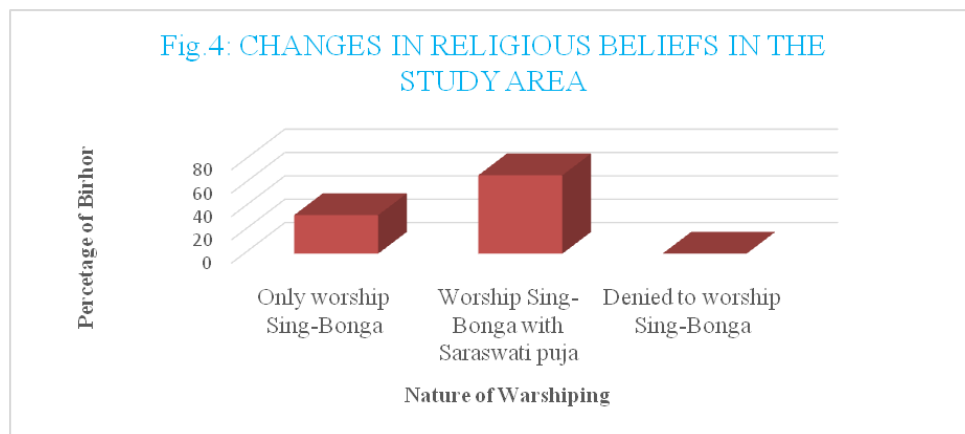
**Religious beliefs:**The religious life of the Birhor is colored with different God, Goddesses and sprits. They think that the whole universe created and controlled by Sing Bonga. Sing Bonga is regarded as their supreme deity which is extremely powerful. Besides this, there are other deities are present in their society which are Devi Mai (who are earth god), Kando Bonga (which is absolutely benevolent) Hapram Bonga (which

is ancestral god) etc. Except these goddesses, there are some spirits having effect in their society day to day life. The main scared head among the Birhor is Naya. Under the Governmental Rehabilitation programmed modernity touches in every part of Birhor religious beliefs that change their traditional Religious beliefs. Earlier sing Bonga is their supreme deity but recently Birhor celebrate *Saraswati puja*, Kali puja like Hindu deities and the post Naya in Birhor society is gradually going to abolished.

**Table:5, Change in Religious beliefs within the Birhor tribe in the study area**

Nature of Worshipping	Only worship Sing-Bonga	Worship Sing-Bonga with Saraswati puja	Denied to worship Sing-Bonga
Percentage of Birhor accepted	32.94	67.06	0.0

Source: Field Survey-2018



In the above table no.5 and fig. 4 show that 67 percentage Birhor is worshiped Hindu ditties that indicate the changes of traditional religious beliefs.

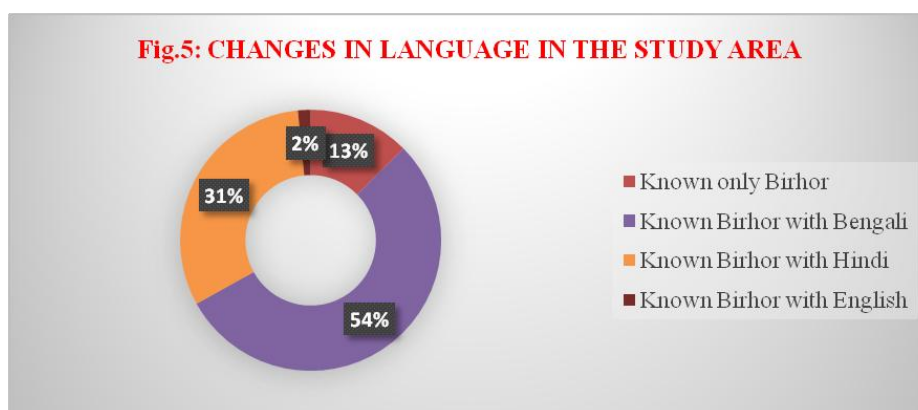
**Language:**Birhor belongs to Austro Asiatic language family that is very close to Mundari and Santali in its vocabulary. It is difficult to distinguish Birhor from other

neighbouring tribal languages such as Santali, Mundari or Ho languages. Traditionally all the Birhor are speak in Birhor languages. But after Governmental rehabilitation programme Birhors come to the Bengali people in my study area and also do interact with some Hindi speaking people also influence their speaking languages.

**Table:6, Change in Speaking language within the Birhor tribe in the study area**

Language speaking	Known only Birhor	Known Birhor with Bengali	Known Birhor with Hindi	Known Birhor with English
Percentage of Birhor people known	18.82	81.17	47.05	2.35

Source: Field Survey-2018



In present time Birhor in Baghmundi block speak in mixing languages and most of them are interacting with outsiders of

Bengali and Hindi languages. From the above table no.6 and fig.5 show that only 13 percentage Bihor known only Birhor

language but the others 87 percentage are known Birhor other languages. 54 percentage are speaking with Birhor with Bengali, 31 percentage speak in Birhor with Hindi and 2 percentage are known Birhor with English. So, it can be said that changes of truly Birhor speaker in plain area.

**Economy:** Traditionally hunting and gathering is the main way of Birhor economy. Birhor catch different animals and Birds from the jungle and also collect honey, different flowers, fruits, and medicinal roots and sell these to the nearby village or market. They also making rope and rope making articles from Chop fibre that are collect from jungle and sell for them to maintain their livelihood. But after Governmental rehabilitation programme lead to change the Birhor life style. Due to unavailability of agricultural land, agricultural equipment's, knowledge make their lifestyle engenders. Presently Birhor in my study area are engage in agricultural labour, track driver and constructional work. Due to lack of job opportunities most of the Birhor in this area are live with extreme poverty.

**Others:** About other relevant aspects related to the livelihood pattern of Birhor are the festivals, recreations, and after all education. They celebrate their festivals with their traditional folk dance, songs and music which are very much popular. They have different thematic songs based on devotion, love, hunting, death, marriage etc. The Birhor society is full of different festivals, some of which has been bearing imprint of their tradition. *Phagun* the hunting festival Birhor celebrate in the month of February that is forest centric. But possibly these celebrations of them may no longer exist due to their present habitation and Governmental wildlife protection act. Simultaneously being educationally developed large section of their society think their traditional based values were orthodox and need to be renewed under the canopy of modernity.

## 7. Major Findings

On the basis of direct observation and interaction with the Birhors in this study area identify the following major findings.

1. There is a massive change in the socio-cultural landscape of the Birhor people in the study area.
2. Indigenous cultural practices are inadequate.

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## 8. Conclusion

It is proved that the society of Birhor tribe had indigenous tradition with idiosyncratic identity and background which was wealthy, diverse and enjoyed with closeness. Those sweet moments are today's sweet memories for them and they tried to continue a lot but unfortunately society, culture and elegance of past have been suffering from identity crisis due to advent of modernity, even are rarely reflected in today's generation of Birhor society. May it be fine that the touch of modernity has made them developed than before but simultaneously it is also true that their tradition, ethics, identity are being endangered. It is a matter of thought that when emphasis is being given on indigenous people's restoration network for integrating culture and nature, to sustain ecology and tradition, how far it will persist under the impact of modernization and globalization, if social, cultural and economic sovereignty of those people are not properly protected. Therefore, the survival of those social and cultural practices require a large degree of management for tribal restoration effects in the era of mass environmental degradation and socio-cultural loss by conserving socio and eco-cultural diversity