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**DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE AND LIVELIHOOD OF
A TRADITIONAL HUNTING –GATHERING
TRIBE OF EASTERN INDIA**

Introduction

The Birhor has attracted attention of the anthropologists and other scholars for their peculiar livelihood practices since the inception of ethnographic studies on tribes in India (Dalton, 1872; Risley, 1891; Roy, 1925; Sen and Sen, 1955; Sinha, 1958; Sen, 1965; Adhikary, 1984; Sahay, 2009). They were the representatives of hunter-gatherers in that part of the country (Fortier, 2009:101). Sometimes they are called a ‘vanishing tribe’ (Sahu, 1995: 13), however, numerically speaking they do not show diminishing trend though its traditional hunting- gathering economy is on the decline. They used to roam about the forest and subsist on forest produces only with occasional exchange with the outsiders. In fact, the ethnonym Birhor is derived from two words *Bir* means forest and *Hor* means man. Their traditional house-type of conical leaf –made *kumbha* and food habit relating to eating monkey had been a point of general attraction. However, anthropologists have studied them quite exhaustively and those studies have provided us with the vivid description of the Birhor’s way of subsistence (Roy, 1925; Adhikary, 1984; Sahay, 2009). Roy’s study followed a model of traditional ethnographic monograph of tribe, that dealt with the social system, kinship, marriage, birth and death, religious life, folk lore, arts and games (Roy, 1925). This tome contains an exhaustive account of the life the Birhor people living around Ranchi districts and surrounding areas of Hazaribag, Palamau in the Chotonagpur plateau area. In contrast to this Adhikary (1984) conducted his study among the Bihors of Sundargarh district in Odisha. His study was done under the major theoretical framework of ‘worldview’. The author used both the ‘formal structural’ and ‘ecological framework’ in organizing and presenting his data with appropriate analysis. Adhikary’s study (ibid) was particularly important because he tried to understand how the people were adjusting ecologically and socio-economically with the changing surrounding

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milieu of caste society where market had penetrated significantly. To him the worldview of the Birhor was much inclined towards forest and their techno-economic adaptation was integrated with their worldview (Adhikary, 1984:88-89). His study revealed that the society of the Birhor was operating between *gemeinschaft* while in the jungle environment and *gesellschaft* while in village and market. This is again a contrast between worldviews- one based on moral community and another based on 'rational' market-oriented economy (ibid). one does not find any reference to the impact of government programme on the Birhor people in the above mentioned studies. Though, the later one gives some hints about the probable nature of direction of change that the Birhor society might take at the face of interactions with settled peasantry and market forces. In the later studies, we come across discussions of social changes among the Birhor and impact of development projects on them. This type of discussion got a momentum after the government pronounced special strategies for development of the Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) which was later renamed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).¹The focus of the government on the development of the PVTGs has been the subject of many studies that tried to know their socio-economic status and assess the impact of development projects on the people (Mishra et al., 2016; Panda, 2015; Debbarman, 2015; Bose (Majumdar), 2016). Government asks each states and union territory to prepare a long term 'Conservation-cum-Development (CCD) Plan' for the PVTGs residing within their jurisdiction. The purpose of the CCD was to assess their situation and identify their needs (Mishra and Patil, 2016: xiv). Therefore we may say that the anthropological discourses on the Birhor has three major trends – ethnographic studies on the tribe, study of social and techno-economic adaptation from ecological perspective, and impact of development and change. In this backdrop, at present the major questions that confronts us are the following: What is the present socio-economic status of these communities? what impact the development inputs have made on them? what will happen to these communities and whether the present development interventions are appropriate? and, if not what should be the right strategies to approach the assessment of their development and suggest further modification in the development planning. The trends of discursive practices also reveal that every academic line of thinking has its ontological roots in the contemporary socio-economic and political environment. Thus the orientations of studies on the Birhor have been informed and shaped over the period with the changing nature of surrounding socio-political and academic milieu which is best interrogated in the backdrop of overarching theoretical paradigm of development.

The idea of development as defined by Portes (1976) as 'continuous transformations of human society' is more of an anthropological as well as social scientific import. He traced the development theory right from evolutionism. However economists favour a more positive approach reducing development to some tangible and concrete changes subject to established set

of calibration. The major theoretical debates and practical concerns are centered on the conflict and contrast sired by these two principal approaches. Out of these debates, an alternative development model has emerged. With the fading of classical economic models of development, the emergent theories began to tilt more towards social since they realized that human development could not be made a subject to economic reductionism. These diverse theoretical discourses have been categorized into two framing patterns – one assumed the harmonic interests and the other was based on discordant interests (Black, 2007). The harmonic interest groups included the theories of Liberal International School, Modernization theory, Cultural Causation theory and Interdependence. The discordant group was mainly ascended from the Marxist school and also included Dependency Theory, Centre-Periphery model of Development and World System Theory. Now development is much discussed under the theoretical paradigm of Neo-liberalism. The liberal school of economists advocated more government role in conducting the economic affairs of the state. In modernization theory, it is held that development is basically a social-cultural process by which a society gets well marked off from the traditional way of life through modernization. This modernization entails adoption of new values, entrepreneurial initiatives, ambitions, innovations, achievement of goals and a new form of rationality (Rostow, 1959; Parsons, 1966; Bauer, 1981). In multicultural nations, cultural causation theory seems to possess a greater applicability since it explains why 'some actors seem more rational than others in their economic dynamism and susceptibility to democracy (Black, 2007; Huntington, 1968). The Marxist analysis of development makes the economic base as the fountainhead of the development. Therefore, it must be taken into consideration how one earns a living and ones position with regard to mode and means of production. What the modernization theory views as 'promises' in the diffusion of western practices, the dependency theory considers them as 'hindrances' to the development of inclusiveness and egalitarianism in the third world countries. The centre-periphery model of development echoed almost the same concern over the exploitative relations between centre and periphery as pointed out by the dependency theorists. The world system theory also vouchsafes that the world is divided into core and peripheral areas. It points out the crucial role multinationals and banks play in influencing the state policies. The control then does not remain political, rather it becomes financial. As a result of this relationship, the people farther from the control centre are more unfortunate to receive the benefits of development and just distribution of wealth. Under these concatenations of debates, Schumacher (1973) emerged with an idea often called 'alternative' model of development. In his approach, he denounced mass industrialization of the present day and advocated small-scale self reliant economy in the third world countries. Now, no countries in the world can be found to be completely insulated from the globalized economic forces in this neoliberal world. Neoliberalism has set up a new world order of political

economy that is, at present, the overarching guiding principle shaping the development trajectories. Neoliberal economy is defined in the following way by David Harvey (2005:2):

Neoliberalism is in the first instance of a theory of political economic practices that propose that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

When the neoliberal economic regime is making a strong advocacy of free market and free trade with a limited role of the government then what would happen to the small, marginalized traditional tribal societies like Birhor. This has been the cardinal issue that the present paper has tried to explore. There are a number of studies on the Birhor and PVTGs as have been mentioned in the foregoing discussion on the Birhor. Many of the works have dealt with the issues of development of the Birhor. However, one does not come across any work that discusses the impact of neoliberal economic regime on this people. The present undertaking has its justification in this ground, too. The theories of development discussed above have their own potential and limitations if applied to understand the Birhor situation. The developmental issues of the Birhor have been deliberated upon with regard to the experiences of the people concerned and of the researcher in connection with the study of the livelihood practices. Present empirical study is largely 'anthropology of experiences'. After delineating the livelihood practices and details of development programmes for the Birhor, I would discuss the development theories discussed herein above in relation to the Birhor situation at the end of this paper.

The present study has been conducted in four Birhor settlements, namely, Bhupatipalli, Bareria, Bersa and Mahultanr, in the district of Purulia. Besides these four places, the Birhor are found to have been rehabilitated in another place in Dakai. However, The author seen only four abandoned brick-built houses built by the government for the Birhor at this place. But no Birhor family was seen there. It was informed by the local villagers that the Birhor seldom visit the place and stay there for few days before disappearing again for days. I have visited all the settlements and conducted a complete census of the Birhor living there. The study has been done in 2016-2017. The purpose of the study was to know the changing livelihood pattern of the Birhor and salient features of the impact of the development measures initiated by the government. In addition to this, the study also tries to assess the status of availability of the documents conferred by the state in support of their residential proof or proof of identity. These include caste certificate, ration card, aadhar card, voter identity card, job card, bank account etc. At present the availability of these documents are essential in order the get the benefits of the assistance from the government. The paper forwards the view that these aspects of material possession are to be known essentially to understand the socio-economic status and level of development of a community. These

documents have been termed as State Conferred Identities (Bandyopadhyay 2017). The Anthropological Survey of India, under Ministry of Culture , Government of India published a book on the PVTGs in India (Mishra *et al.* 2016).The book informs us that government has launched a number of special schemes for the development of these people. It states:

These schemes generally included housing, land distribution, agricultural development, cattle rearing, construction of link roads, installation of non-conventional sources of energy for lighting purpose, social security including Janashree Bima Yojana or any other innovative activity meant for their socio-economic development. (Mishra and Patil 2016: xiv)

However, their own study on the Birhor does not give us any information regarding the number of people covered by insurance or possessing caste certificate, bank account, mobile phones, aadhar card etc. Other works on the Birhor conducted in the recent years also lack information on these aspect of identity as conferred by the government or documents necessary for availing of the benefits of the development initiatives by the government (Panda 2015, Debbarman 2015, SKBU 2018). This is one of crucial points to which the present paper does add knowledge and information. The paper also argues in favour of conducting ethnographic enquiry on these aspects of socio-economic life of the people in any contemporary study of development practices at the grass-root level particularly among the tribal people on whom information in these aspects are essential for assessing the development intervention.

The paper is arranged in a way to give a brief outline of the Birhor and their settlement, the socio-economic status of the Birhor population under study, change of Birhor livelihood practices, and the availability of State Conferred Identities and its implications.

Close to Jungle, Back to Hills

The original habitat of the Birhor is said to be the area around Ramgarh in Jharkhand. It is a forested and hilly terrain from where they have migrated following the jungle track to Ranchi, Hazaribag in Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal. In West Bengal, they are found in Purulia district in more or less permanently settled hamlets. As per 2011 census, the total population of the Birhor in the state is 2241. In Purulia district, they are found to live in five settlements. These Birhor habitats are distributed in three administrative blocks in the district. Bhupatipalli and Bareria is in Baghmundi block, Bersa is in Balarampur and Mahultanr and Dakai in Jhalda-I block. The author could have done complete enumeration of Birhor population living in these settlements except Dakai where the author found no Birhor individual to collect data. However, it is known that Dakai has a total 12 individuals with nine males and three females. In this connection, it must be mentioned that fieldwork among the Birhor is a bit difficult in a sense because they are still very mobile. Moreover as they live in the interior areas away from the common

settlements, approaching their *tanda* (Birhor colony) is time-consuming. One may find a whole colony almost deserted at day time as the adult members of the group leave for forest. Keeping all these constraints in consideration, the author visited all the hamlets of the Birhor at different times for nearby locations where I used to camp. Thus the fieldwork stretched over a period of little more than one year during 2016-2017 with intermittent gaps when I used to return to resume my usual work in university. Thus, the present study is based entirely on empirical observation using ethnographic techniques. A total of 390 individuals distributed in five settlements (for which total 402 individuals) have been studied. The population data is shown below in the table (Table 1).

The wandering Birhor were settled by the government in Bhupatipalli in 1960s for the first time. Bhupatipalli is located at a distance from habitations of other communities and surrounded by forest. The terrain is hilly with the hills of Baghmundi close by. The Birhor settlement of Bareriya is also located at the foot of the hills. However, there is now no forest immediately around the boundary of the village like that of in the other villages, but this was the place where the earliest sedentarization of the Birhor took place. Recently the construction of the metalled road to Ayodhya Pahar by the side of this settlement has exposed this habitation much to the outer world. Another Birhor settlement of Mahultanr is also found to be in close vicinity to the forest and hills. The Birhor enclave is a part of the Ichahatu village from which the Birhor hamlet of Mahultanr is well separated by physical distance with small bushes, fields and undulating lands in between. Bersa is another Birhor settlement which is also located in the midst of forest and hills at a distance of 8 km from Balarampur the block headquarters of the block of the same name. The nearest village to this Birhor *tanda* is Bandhdi which is inhabited by settled agriculturist Bhumij tribe.

From the above discussion, it appears that the Birhor settlements are always found near to forest and hilly tract. Therefore their association with the forest has special significance which has been indicated in Adhikary's study that revealed the forest-centric worldview of the Birhors (Adhikary 1984). Still this association exists to a great extent though there has been a large-scale depletion of forest cover in this region. If closeness to the forest is one aspect of the physical existence of the Birhor, then another aspect is their distance at the socio-cultural level with the neighbouring communities. The Birhor way of life is very different from the subsistence activities of the rest of the villagers. The villagers identify the Birhor with the jungle.

People of the Forest

The word Birhor in their own language means people(hor) of the forest(bir). On the basis of their nature of habitation, Roy(1925) mentioned that they had two divisions – *uthulu* (nomadic) and *jaggi* or *jagghi*

(comparatively settled). However, he found little social –cultural differences between these two divisions. Sinha (1973) noticed a frequent reversal to the original nomadic way of life. To the present understanding, it can be said on the basis of field observation that a feature of the contemporary Birhor society is the presence of a nomadism- sedentarism continuum which has been a transformation from a complete nomadism to the presence of both nomadism and sedentarism among different sections of the population to the present form where a same group might pass through periodic nomadism and sedentarism. This sort of practice is very much a feature of the pastoral communities and horticultural groups as reported elsewhere (Symanski *et al.* 1975, Meir 1986). In spite of the presence of such a continuum, the major form of habitation of the Birhor at the present place is the permanent residency. They live in the one room brick-built asbestos roofed houses constructed by the government. The houses are more or less lineally arranged on both sides of the main thoroughfare where a patch of land is available. But at Bersa and Bareriya, the Birhor houses are built on the slopes of undulating patch of land where the elevations are varying. Now the roads in their habitat have been made metalled or concretized. They use the open roads or lanes in front of their houses as place for chatting and other social intercourses.

In the morning the Birhor men along with their grown up son, daughter or wife go deep inside the forest near their place of habitation and come back by the afternoon with fuel wood, barks or other minor forest produce to be sold in the local market or *hat*. They still have a great dependence on the forest. However, the shift in their livelihood practices is obvious, that would be clear from the subsequent discussion.

Socio-economic Status

In the present study of socio-economic status we have taken into account the total population profile, marital status, occupation and education. A separate table has been given on the nature of the material possession. The (State Conferred Identitics) have been dealt with separately under a different sub-section.

The total population is given below in the table – 2. There is an increase of 39.58 per cent over the population of Birhor in the district recorded in last census in 2011. In the last four years (2013-2017), the Birhor population has been increased from 341 (Debbarman 2015)³ to 402 (present study). The present enumeration also returns higher number than the figure of the Birhor population of 368 enumerated in the study commissioned by the government (SKBU 2018). So, it can never be said that the Birhor are vanishing. Rather the studies suggest that they are getting more and more sedentary over the years and government efforts in this regard have yielded result.

Education

There has been quite significant change in the rate of literacy among the Birhor over the years. Only, there is little micro-level quantitative data on the nature of literacy of the Birhor (Roy 1925, Sachchidananda 1965, Adhikary 1984, Sarkar 1990, 2008). However, the 1981 Census data returned 1.3 per cent of literacy rate among the Birhor. Sinha (1999) reported that only 2.32 per cent of the studied Birhor population of Madhya Pradesh are literate. As per 2011 census, 58.21 per cent of the Birhor above the age of 6 years are literate in West Bengal. In the present study, the rate of literacy among the Birhor above 6 years is 48.96 per cent. The rate is returned as 59.68 per cent of literate above 4 years in SKBU (2018) study. However, as per census of 2011, the total literacy of the Birhor was 58.21 per cent in the state. It was a giant leap from the 35.75 per cent of literacy as reported in the census of 2001. Now, in the present case, if we take the 'can sign' category as people outside formal education system, then the percentage of people outside the formal education system would be 57.58 per cent. The state level data as per current Census (2011) shows a wide gender-disparity in the rate of literacy among the Birhor. It was revealed that the rates of male and female literacy among the Birhor in West Bengal are 69.25 per cent and 46.14 per cent respectively (Census 2011). This reflects that the gender gap in literacy rate is greater in the state level than that of the present population under study. However, both the male and the female literacy rates are lower among the Birhor studied here. The rates are 52.43 per cent and 44.45 per cent among the male and female Birhor population respectively above the age of 6 years.

A micro-level study of the change of status of literacy shows that there is substantial increase in enrolment. 77.92 per cent of the total boys and girls in the age-group of 6 to 14 have enrolled. Non-enrolment at the age of 6 is only 6.67 per cent. At the age of 7, the rate of non-enrolment is also 6.67 per cent. However, at the age of 9 +, the rate of non-enrolment slightly increases to 20 per cent. Drop-out usually starts after one or two years of entry into the new level in high school. It is seen that the rate of drop-out in the age of 12 is 25 per cent, which is almost the same in the following age of 13.

Another feature of the nature of education of the Birhor is that they are not pursuing higher studies at all. But there is marked increase in the rate of literacy among them in the present generation. This is related to their transformation towards settled life. This trend of increase in the rate of literacy is consistent as revealed from the foregoing discussion on the rates of literacy as reported in different census periods and individual studies.

Occupation

Birhor is portrayed as one of the fast vanishing hunter-gatherer or forager communities of the globe particularly of the South-East Asia (Fortier 2009). So far as the ethnonym of the people is concerned, their close association

with the forest is indicated. They are, in fact, also known for their hunting and eating of monkeys. Still they possess indigenous skill of hunting in the forest, however the actual practice of hunting has diminished to a great extent. Now, occasionally they catch rabbit or monkey with nets quite surreptitiously. Jungle is mainly used as a source of their food, fodder, medicine, and other forest produce which they collect and sell in the market. Earlier they used to procure materials for the construction of houses (small conical temporary leaf hut and semi-permanent hut) when they lived inside the forest. Now the Birhor under present study live in the houses built by the government.

With the change of place of habitat the Birhor livelihood practices began to change. This change has been well reported in earlier studies (Adhikary 1984, Sinha 1999, Pankaj 2008, Sahay 2009, Bose 2016). Pankaj (2008) has stated that in spite of dependence on forest, the Birhor are engaged in tractor driving, labourer work, part-time agricultural work, brick-kiln industry etc. Mat and rope making is another income generating activity. In the present study, one finds that the forest is still the main source of their livelihood. The work participation rate is 65.2 per cent. The male and female working populations greatly vary, the work participation rates are 84.6 per cent and 44.5 per cent respectively for males and females. 43 per cent of the Birhor working men are engaged in collections from forest. The fuel wood and other minor forest produces are collected and sold in the market. They collect barks of the trees, from which they prepare ropes for market and personal use. Proportionately women are more dependent on forest as 53.06 per cent of the working women are engaged in collecting forest products. Day labourer is the next important category of occupation in which 38.4 per cent of the working men and 32.7 per cent of working women are seen to be employed. Day labourers include agricultural labourer, working under road or building contractor, helper in track or tractor etc. Agricultural work is still having insignificant contribution to their economy. The land distributed to them by the government is not arable at times or the people lack the means and skill to work on these patches of land. However, a section of the present Birhor men interviewed informed the author that they would do agricultural work if they would have access to agricultural land.

The service in regular paid job with monthly salary occurs in least frequency among the occupational categories mentioned above. It is only 2.03 per cent of total working population of the Birhor who are employed in any service. Of them, only one Birhor man is in government job in Group –D post. The regular service could be a motivating factor behind their persuasion of higher studies as a section of the youth opines that service is always preferred to other jobs because it assures them a regular income. Others category includes various emerging avenues of income. They are now engaged in substantial number in making ropes with threads extracted from plastic packing bag. Some of the Birhor youth migrate to work under some labourer contractor

outside the state for a few months in a year. In addition to these above mentioned occupations, their income economy is supported by the income from rearing of pigs, fowls etc. given to them by the government under different welfare schemes.

The data collected in the present study cannot be fully compared with the data of the Census because the latter's enumeration does not keep any category of collection of forest produce or Rope making. But one has to pay attention to these pursuits if one would want to depict the true picture of their economic activities. However, the present study bears much similarity so far as the general trends of economic activities identified in the other studies (Debbarman 2015, SKBU 2018). It is seen that dependence on agriculture has not increased despite the best efforts of the government. The percentage of people engaged in agriculture has also not increased. There is only a marginal increase in the service from 1.04 per cent (2013, Debbarman 2015) to 2.03 per cent. Of the other income generating activities, rope making has assumed an important place. It can be noted here that rope making has been one of the traditional economic pursuits of the Birhors. From the nature of the occupations of the Birhor, a glaring contrast between the development target and actual practice can be noticed.

Experiences of Development

The government's initiative to settle Birhor dates back to 1958 when a few Birhor families were settled by the Government of West Bengal in Bhupatipally under Baghmundi block. Still, it is the largest Birhor settlement in Purulia district. Later a number of special schemes for the Birhor were launched. Under the CCD plan, more focused approach was adopted for the development of these people. The government has built houses for them, constructed concrete road, made provisions for drinking water, and gave them sanitary latrine. One finds that a number of schemes for development of the Birhor in Purulia have been initiated by the government in last two financial years (2016-2017 in Table 6 and 2017-2018 in Table 7).

The fund allocation for development schemes for the Birhor in the financial year 2017-2018 has been increased to almost double the amount sanctioned in the previous annual plan period. The nature of allocation has been shown in the following table. From the tables 6 and 7, it is quite clear that though funds have been allocated for various developmental activities among the Birhor, there is a yawning gap between the actual scenario at the ground level and the developmental inputs in terms of fund invested.

A case study of the Bersa village would reflect how the schemes launched by the government are reaching them.

... We don't know which particular patch of land belongs to whom. Nine families of this village have received *patta* from the government. Some

two years back we were given goats for rearing. We have not received any training from the government in agricultural practices. We have not given any fishing equipment or accessories. Our houses were repaired two years back. No medical team visits us. Only Asha worker comes to our village. The government has given each of us brick-built one roomed house. It has also constructed road in our settlement. Five of our children are staying in Ekalabya School Hostel in Purulia. They were given books, pen and pencils. But the children who go to the local school have not received bag or books or other things like pen, pencil, and exercise books. No awareness or health camp has been organized in our place. Two water sources are there in our hamlet. One is out of order for long. Another has stopped functioning for two days. ...

It is a fact that government has distributed 10 decimal of land to each of the nine families through forest *patta* (deed of land) in J.L. No.21 (Mouza: Bersa) in the Plot No.101 in 2016. However, these lands are yet to be demarcated to the families. Government officials who were interviewed told the author that they had plans to fence their (Birhor) land after demarcating them. The worst thing about this land is that these are classified as 'Jhuri jungle' land in government record, which is not suitable for any good agricultural work. Not only that the land records are not up to date or corrected since there are death of *patta* receiver or mistake in the name of the *patta* holder.

With regard to development schemes, very often there is no concern over the ground reality in formulating plans for them or translation of the schemes into reality. There are provisions for ten facilitators for generating awareness among them through 'Information, Education and Communication' (IEC). One already knows from the case studies that the Birhor have not seen any such programme into operation in their village. The non-implementation of such programme can also be understood from the possession of SCI as discussed later. The plan for the free coaching for competitive examination for 45 students at 10+2 and graduate level is another eye-wash since there is only 3 students fulfilling the requisite eligibility. Another example of such improper planning is the provisions for distribution of mosquito net to 200 Birhor families, when only around 100 Birhor families are residing in five hamlets altogether. The fund however small could have a better utilization. Again, there is provision for providing training on improved agricultural methods while the *patta* holders do not know which one is their land for doing agricultural work. If improper planning is one aspect of the development initiatives, the other aspect is their non-implementation at the real sense.

One already knows that no facilitator, or medical teams visit them. The children are not getting the school stationeries. The houses are not regularly repaired. The livestock distribution is also not regular or done once in a blue moon. If one goes on summing up the number of houses allocated to them each year and fund allocated for their repairing the total number would outnumber the families residing in the Birhor settlements. In a situation of fund allotment for repairing, one must expect that the houses would also remain

well maintained. But if one visits cursorily in any of the settlements of the Birhor, he or she would notice the cracks on the wall or other marks of damage that need immediate repairing. The mechanized rope making unit was not in the sight in the hamlets visited. The report submitted by the SKBU (2018) also identified the non-implementation of development schemes as conceived in black and white. But, it is undeniable that the development intervention and frequent interactions with the outside agencies have caused many changes in their livelihood.

Changes in the Livelihood

The changes in the livelihood pattern can be discerned well by comparing the present conditions of living of the Birhor with that of the way of life of these people depicted in the studies done earlier. There is a consistent record that this PVTG has been studied more or less adequately from time to time. On the bases of these two major groups of data – one roughly more than fifty years old and another more recent - the salient features of the changes have been shown in a nutshell in Table 8.

Table 8 basically presents a comparative view of the different dimensions of the changing facets of the Birhor life. State has now been playing a crucial role in deciding the nature and future of their economy. With the directed changes, the Birhor are emulating or trying to emulate the ethos of the neighbouring non-tribe people.

The features of changes mentioned in Table 8 are structural – both at the social and at the cognitive levels. The changes in the nature of subsistence activities have been instrumental in generating new social formations. These social formations require all kinds of material and non-material possessions (including knowledge and skills) to sustain them. In the Birhor case of the state played the main role in bringing in the changes.

The state's interventions are perceptible in the Birhor they are responding to the government institutions and are connecting with them. The nature of material possession and State Conferred Identities reflect their connectedness with the larger social and politico-economic milieu.

Material Possession

The material possession is an indicator of the level of development and socio-economic conditions (Table 9). The Birhor possess some of the material items that contemporary urban and rural societies in India are used to. The type of material items on which data has been presented here include a range of possession that would indicate the way of life people are familiar with. The bi-cycle as a means of commuting occurs most frequently (16.9%), whereas the internet and computer, which are the pillars of today's communication revolution, returned nil occurrence among the Birhor. Mobile phones have

penetrated them as we find that 13.8 per cent of them do possess mobile phones, and smart phones are gradually creeping in. Therefore, it can be said that they have already accepted the utilitarian value of the mobile phone and have networks with the outside world. On the basis of this possession of material goods, it can be inferred that they would positively respond to the further changes for economic betterment, directed or spontaneous.

State Conferred Identities (SCI)

During colonial rule the category of tribe or caste was separately enlisted in schedules for the first time. The Government of India (Scheduled Caste) Act, 1936 identified 76 castes many of which are now enlisted as Scheduled Tribes. The Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order, 1950 scheduled seven tribes for the first time. Thus scheduling has become an important process of conferring identity to the tribe by the state. This conferment of identity has also become meaningful and rewarding for a group because this entails a number of benefits for the community. An individual belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) is issued a Caste Certificate upon the application submitted by the concerned person. Now the application can only be submitted through online mode. Therefore, possession of caste certificate also requires awareness about the mode of procurement and availability of infrastructure. In case of the present Birhor population under study, the people live in the interior areas of the state. The low frequency of the caste certificate among them reflects that there may be lack of awareness, infrastructure or assistance. Whichever of the above three or some or all of them are lacking, it tells about the level of response to development. On enquiry during fieldwork, the author came to know that no awareness generating activity or special drive has been done in their area. Besides this the identity of an individual as well as a group is also established by other forms of documentary evidences such as Aadhar card, ration card, voter card, etc. These identities as conferred by the state to the individual and communities have been termed as State Conferred Identities (SCI) (Bandyopadhyay 2017). For these SCIs, cards or papers are issued for different purposes.

State Conferred Identities (SCI) are documents which are issued by the state and may be used for the purpose of establishing the identity or claim particularly for the purpose of enjoying the benefits distributed by the state for its citizens and others. Again, one can notice differences in the percentages of the availability of these documents (SCI). We find that a great majority of the population possess ration card and Aadhar card. But most pervasive among these documents is EPIC or voter card (Table 10). Ration card is essential for every individual for availing the benefits of getting rice and wheat from government under PDS at highly subsidized rate. Aadhar number is the most sought after evidence for multiple purposes like residential proof, opening of bank account, applying for certificate or license etc. On the other hand, bank

account is necessary for availing the benefits of financial assistance from the government apart from depositing one's own money. The number of bank account is much less than the number of working population. Again nearness to bank, urban employment, and education are important factors behind higher percentages of bank account in a village. However, in the present study the implication of comparatively lesser number of bank accounts is that a good number of people who are part of the working population do not possess bank accounts. A marginal group of people like them usually do not generate any or substantial surplus money for saving. Therefore, they generally do not open bank account since they do not make any transactions through bank. Thus, bank account, apart from indicating people's practice of saving and surplus income also indicates two things in their case: i. Students are getting financial assistance from the government and ii. People are getting development assistance from the government. But the present scenario brings before us a different picture that does not match the high sounding claims that adequate development has already been done. Where people live almost under subsistence level, there the bank account opening cannot be done until and unless there is an obvious necessity. Another pitiable aspect of the development scenario among them is the absence of insurance cover. It may tell heavily upon the security of life of these people. In fact we do not have any data on the availability of life insurance or insurance among the tribal people in India, however, they should be the real people who are in dire need of such coverage. Among the Birhor, we find that only 1.5 per cent of the total population is covered by life insurance.

Conclusion

The development plans and programmes launched immediately after the Independence of the Country had their ideological roots in liberal schools of economics. Government's plans like CDP, TSP, ITDP, MADA necessitated a greater role of the state for the development of the tribal people. The settlement of the Birhor in a colony was the result of this developmental approach. It was assumed that the measures like this would certainly initiate modernization process among them. It was true that some new values crept into the life of the people resulting in new ambitions and goals among them. But why the entrepreneurial and innovative skill could not be much developed among them can be explained well through Marxist analysis of their economy. Still some members of their community fared better than others and cultural causation theory is a good fit in explaining such cases. The process and goals set in by the modernization cannot work in favour of the people in an unequal condition of dominant-dominated relationship. The dependence on the economically powerful countries by the third world countries result in a prioritization of goals unsuitable for the backward sections of the people in developing countries. The argument also holds true for the Birhor. The

development of the Birhor in the line of a general set of development model therefore yielded adverse consequences for them.

From the ground level experiences of development as revealed through the present study, it is seen that many of the development measures have failed to yield desired result leaving some imbalances in their livelihood. In the jungle, they would have their own way of dealing with the challenges of life which were either in their control or were in the control of the supernatural power with whom the Birhor negotiated. When they were settled out of the forest under planned development, they become subject to many forces and agencies about which they had no idea. This left them in a 'betwixt and between' condition – somewhat of social liminality – that is full of ambiguity – they do not know where they are actually led to. This ambiguity of existence has generated a new kind of 'worldview' about which the earlier authors had no idea obviously. So, when they began to interact with the present author in fatalistic terms, She came to realize that they have resigned to fate despite of having some incipient ambitions which if properly nurtured would have proved positive for development initiative. They have a faint idea that money comes for them for development, but no real change occurs as the fund seems to have evaporated in the mid way. Gradually they have reasoned that no real betterment in terms of development would occur. On the other hand, the government continues on pouring the fund for their development without taking the ground realities into consideration. The government, as a social welfare state, has its obligation for dispensing equitable justice. The positive discrimination and special fund for the backward sections of the people clearly indicate this stance of the government. On the other hand, under the pressure of neoliberal system, government is also opening its economy to the market forces and moving towards more privatization and de-regulation. The government has also introduced private property rights among the Birhor who had their subsistence based on communal rights of property. The SCIs are in a sense recognition of individual identity. Therefore, government's position is also in 'limen' – betwixt and between- with regard to the development of this people. It is the strength and capability of the Indian economy that would decide how far government may strike a balance between these forces of neo-liberal economy and welfare-state economy. If government truly values its resources, the plans should have been chalked out considering not only the actual needs of the people, but also keeping in mind the measures to reach them to fulfill those needs. After assessing whether the plan outlets have reached them or not, next cycle of plan should have been launched. It is not the fact that the Birhor do not accept modern medicine or reluctant to start agriculture, what they actually want is the proper designing of plans considering the realities at the ground level and their proper coordination and implementation.

Table 1
Birhor settlements and their population in Purulia, West Bengal.²

Name of Settlement	Male Population	Female Population	Total
Bhupatipalli	124	127	251
Bareria	36	28	64
Mahultanr	19	17	36
Bersa	22	17	39
Total	[51.5]201	[48.5]189	[100.0]390

Source: Field Survey

Table 2
Age-sex wise distribution of the Birhor population in Purulia

Age-Group	Male	Female	Total
0-4	31	31	62
5-9	37	32	69
10-14	16	16	32
15-19	9	7	16
20-24	18	23	41
25-29	15	17	32
30-34	15	10	25
35-39	12	14	26
40-44	12	8	20
45-49	13	8	21
50-54	7	3	10
55-59	6	7	13
60+	8	6	14
70+	1	4	05
80+	1	3	04
Table	201	189	390

Source: Field Survey

Table 3
Change of population of the Birhor in the area over different census periods

Year	Number
1981	198
1991	193
2001	265
2011	288

Source: Census of India, Government of India

Table 4
Status of literacy of the Birhor in Purulia as per present study

Gender	Pre-school	Primary (I-IV)	Upper Primary (V-VIII)	Secondary (IX-X)	Higher Secondary (XI-XII)	UG/PG	Can Sign	Illite-rate	Total
Male	16	46	32	5	2	1	11	88	201
Female	18	37	21	7	0	0	11	95	189
Total	34 (8.72)	83 (21.28)	53 (13.59)	12 (3.08)	2 (0.51)	1 (0.26)	22 (5.64)	183 (46.92)	390 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey

Table 5
Occupation of the Birhor people in Purulia

Sex	Agriculture	Day Labourer	Collecting	Service	Others	Total
Male	5	38	43	2	11	99
Female	2	16	26	1	4	49
Total	7 (4.73)	54 (36.48)	69 (46.62)	3 (2.03)	15 (10.14)	148 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey

Table 6
Development schemes for the Birhor of Purulia during 2016-2017

Sl. Development Schemes	Amount Sanctioned (Rs. in Lakh)
1. Engagement of facilitator for one year to ensure 100% enrollment, IEC, TLM, ExerciseBook, school bag, pen/pencil, special coaching (1000 students)	10.00
2. Training on improved agricultural practices, vegetable production in poly house structure – tie up with activities of NHM	5.50
3. Seasonal fisheries activities in existing water bodies @15 per group	1.50
4. IEC – Health, education, livelihood awareness programme	2.00
5. Immunization of mother and child – tie up with H& FW Deptt. Cost for logistics for special camps	0.25
6. Creation of lift irrigation sources with 6.5HP diesel pump set with delivery pipe and other accessories – 3 units	6.00
7. Construction of ICDS centre in two villages in convergence with MGNREGS	10.00
8. Connecting road – 3 villages	5.00
9. Repair of dwelling houses – 35 families	8.50
10. Construction of sanitary latrines 15 families	1.50
Total	

Source: BCW & TD Deptt., Government of West Bengal

Table 7
Development schemes for the Birhor of Purulia
during 2017-2018

Sl. Development Schemes	Amount Sanctioned (Rs. in Lakh)
1. Services of 10 facilitators for one year to continue to ensure 100 enrollment, IEC – on health and livelihood.	6.00
2. Special coaching to students (10 +2 & graduates) to continue – for competitive exams- Entry into government jobs/services (45 students may be benefitted)	11.25
3. Seasonal fisheries for 10 groups	10.00
4. Mechanized polypropylene rope making unit @ 5 lakh per unit – 5 units involving 25 families	25.00
5. Cattle rearing – goat @ Rs.7500/- per unit for 50 units	3.75
6. Repair of dwelling houses – 50 families	17.50
7. Repair of pen shade 50 units @ Rs.3500/- per unit	1.75
8. LLIN mosquito net to cover 200 families @ 2 net per family	1.60
9. Connecting road- 2.5 km	6.25
10. Sanitary latrine – 35 families	4.00
11. Drinking water source – 4(Mark IV standard)	9.00
Total	96.10

Source: BCW & TD Deptt. , Government of West Bengal

Table 8
Changing facets of the life of the Birhor under present study

Aspect	Traditionally Depicted	Present Situation
Ecology	Forest and Hill	Fringe of the Revenue settlement unit, near to forest and hills.
Habitation	<i>Kumbha</i> – leaf houses, conical leaf-made temporary structure	Permanent brick-built houses with corrugated or asbestos roof built by the government.
Typological category	<i>Uthulu</i> (nomadic) at the earliest time, <i>uthulu</i> and <i>jaghghi</i> (semi-nomadic to settled)	Settled, a third category of rehabilitated or settled Birhor called <i>Basalu</i> predominating.
Worldview	Forest centric, moral community	Less Forest –centric, substantially market oriented, ‘rational’ market economy.
Structural formation	Ecological framework	Formal structural framework centered on networks and connections beyond forest – ecological setting.

contd. table 8

Aspect	Traditionally Depicted	Present Situation
Social/ Community organization	<i>Gemeinschaft</i> at forest based habitation	<i>Gesellschaft</i> in village situation.
Group size	Small in a <i>tanda</i> suitable for forest hunting and foraging economy	Comparatively large settlement i.e. larger group size.
Occupation	Initially a complete hunter-gatherer, then with limited exchange, barter system. Occupation confined to the use of limited resources at their disposal (rope making, etc.)	Forest collections, agriculture and daily wage labourer. Diversification and plurality.
Education	No literacy. Then basic education confined to primary level and non-formal education.	Rate of literacy has substantially increased. Near universal literacy among the present generations.
Connectivity	Inaccessibility. Little interaction with the outside world.	Connected. Road to the Birhor settlement has been constructed by the government. Mobile phone is in use.
Development response	Indifferent. Ignorant. Disinterested.	Interested. Responsive. Zealous.
State Conferred Identities	Insignificant.	Relevant.
Orientation	Communal sense of property. Non-accumulative.	Sense of personal property. Zeal for possessing the property present.

Table 9
Nature of material possession among the studied Birhor population

Sl.No	Item	Number	Percentage
1	Mobile Phone	54	13.8
2	Smart Phone	2	0.5
3	Computer	00	00
4	Internet	00	00
5	Bi-cycle	66	16.9
6	Motor Bike	1	0.3
7	Television	5	1.3
8	Cooking Gas	1	0.3

Source: Field Survey

Table 10
Availability of SCIs among the Birhor as revealed through
the present study

Sl.No	Item	Number	Percentage
1.	Voter Card	183	46.9*(85.92)
2.	Ration Card	296	75.9
3.	Caste Certificate	13	3.34
4.	Aadhar	275	70.5
5.	PAN	3	0.8
6.	Bank Account	85	21.8
7.	Life Insurance	6	1.5

Source: Field Survey (*If we deduct the population up to 18 years, then the overall percentage of people having voter card would 85.92 per cent of the total Birhor population belonging to voting age.)

NOTES

1. The poorest of the poor section of the tribal communities were identified for the first time for special developmental assistance during 1975-76, and after 1993 these communities - - total 75 in number - were named Primitive Tribal Groups(PTG) which was later renamed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
2. The total Birhor population including the Dakai is 402 with total ...males and ...females. However, the present quantitative data has been presented on 390 souls covered through direct census enumeration.
3. Originally the survey was conducted in the year 2013 , Debbarman,2015, P.7.

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