

# BIRHOR



Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute  
(SCSTRTI), Bhubaneswar-751003



## FOREWORD

This book is mainly a visual portrayal of the Birhors. It reveals an ancient tribal culture under change with depiction of the Birhors' habitat, economic way of living, social organization, religion, political council, lifestyle, development and change. The Birhors are basically very simple, sober and culturally vibrant tribal people. They are a wandering, simple, shy and god fearing and little known forest dwelling tribal community. The Birhors live in bands and are a semi nomadic and hunter-gatherer group of people, who represent the early stage of human life in the forest environment.

The scenic Chortanagpur plateau is said to be their place of origin. From there they are said to have migrated to other places of Orissa and live in temporary settlements around the hill and forest tracts. Currently they are found in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa. They wander in forests in small bands, live in temporary leaf hutment, which they call "Tanda". They form small groups, each group composed of 10 – 15 families, having close kinship ties. They move from place to place in search of mature siali creepers and monkey for marketing of siali ropes and for selling the skin of the monkey to eke out their living.

In Orissa they are found moving in small bands from place to place in the districts of Angul, Balasore, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh and Sambalpur, but principally their temporary settlements are dispersed in and around Similipal forest and hills and even close to these areas bordering forests in Balasore, Keonjhar and Sundergarh districts. As per 2001 census, the Birhor population in Orissa is only 702 and between 1991 and 2001 census there has been decline in the population as per the census figures by 14.91 percent.

Government of Orissa since 1987 has set up a Micro Project in Jashipur and have given them Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PTG) status and extending number of developmental activities for their all-round development.

SCSTRTI under the stewardship of the present Director Prof. A.B.Ota has endeavored a photographic documentation of this colourful PTG. I take this opportunity to profusely thank Prof. A.B.Ota, Director, SCSTRTI and Shri T.Sahoo, Research Officer, SCSTRTI who have taken pain in bringing out this book. I am sure learned readers will benefit from this work.



**Shri Ashok Kumar Tripathy, I.A.S**  
Principal Secretary  
ST & SC Development Department,  
Government of Orissa.

# THE BIRHOR



**Prof. (Dr.) A. B. Ota  
&  
T. Sahoo**

**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training  
Institute (SCSTRTI), Bhubaneswar-751003**

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## INTRODUCTION



Birhor is a wandering, simple, shy and god-fearing and little known forest dwelling tribal community. The Birhor people live in bands. They are a semi nomadic and hunter-gatherer group of people, who represent the early stage of human life in the forest environment. The term Birhor is derived from two words, 'Bir' means forest and 'hor' means man and thus they call themselves as man of forest. On the basis of residence, the Birhor tribe divides themselves into two broad social groups, the Jaghi (settled) and the Uthlu (nomadic).

They are an aboriginal group originating from the same Kolarian sources like, the Mundas, Santals, Hos and Bhuiyans. They themselves claim that they are the descendants from the Sun. The tribesmen are an offshoot of the Kol. Their dialogue belongs to the Munda in Austro-Asiatic sub-family, which includes the Santal and also Ho tongues. Most of them are also conversant in Oriya.





As per 2001 census, the Birhor population in Orissa state was a small group of 702 persons (340 females and 362 males). The population of Birhor is growth negative, i.e. -14.91 % during 1991-2001. Their sex ratio is 939 females per 1000 males. Only 23.20% (29.97% males and 16.24% females) of them are literates.

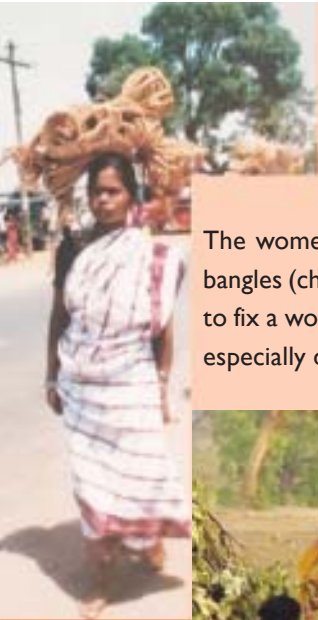
A typical Birhor has a short stature, dark complexion with long head; broad and flat nose, thick lips, wavy hair, loose arms and bow-like legs. The Birhor people are simple and shy. They catch and kill monkeys from the forests and eat monkey meat. They call themselves Birhor, the men of forest but other people call them 'Mankirdia' or 'Mankidi'. All the said three names, like Mankirdia, Mankidi and Birhor are listed as Scheduled Tribes of Orissa. The three differently named tribal communities like 'Birhor', 'Mankirdia' and 'Mankidi' are very much alike in respect of their cultural practices. These hunters and gatherers with three different names share one and

the same cultural life, speak the same Mundari language and also intermarry. An analysis of the contour of their cultures, physical features and dialogue provides considerable ingredients that they are the one and the same tribe. Govt. of India and Govt. of Orissa have taken cognizance of the Birhor community as a Scheduled Tribe and the community has also been identified as a Particularly Vulnerable Group (PTG) for developmental purpose.

The traditional costumes of Birhor are plain and simple. They follow the same tribal dress pattern, like the Santal, Ho, Kol, etc. Birhor men wear small dhoti (*kachha*) or napkin (*gamchha*).

Small children remain naked or use narrow piece of cloth which cover the genitals. Women wear handloom sarees (*Sali*). The clothes of the Birhor like the neighbouring tribes have coloured check pattern and are woven by local weavers. Now-a-days the Birhor men use modern dresses, like pants, shirts and banyans and women use under garments, like sayas and blouses. The women decorate their bodies with tattoo marks.

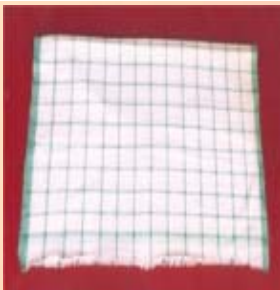




The women adorn themselves with few ornaments, coin necklaces (madli), bangles (chuli), etc. made of glass, beads and cheap metal. At times, women love to fix a wooden or plastic comb, tree branches and flowers in their hair knot, especially during festive and ritual occasions.



6



## MOBILE SETTLEMENT

The scenic Chotanagpur plateau is said to be their place of origin. From there they might have migrated to other places of Orissa and live in temporary settlements around the hill and forest tracts. Currently, they are found in Chhatisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa. They wander in forests in small bands, live in temporary leaf hutment, which they call 'Tanda'.

They form small groups, each group composed of 10 to 15 families, having kinship ties. They move from place to place in search of mature *siali* creepers and monkey for marketing of siali ropes to eke out their livelihood. When they move they carry their sick old and disabled relatives, baskets, mats, animals, birds and other belongings, to their new place of settlement.





In Orissa, they are found moving in small bands from place to place in the district of Angul, Balasore, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sundergarh and Sambalpur. But principally their temporary settlements are dispersed in and around Similipal forest and hills and even close to these areas bordering forests in Balasore, Keonjhar and Sundargarh districts. At times they travel a long distance in the forests and hills across the bordering states gleaning forest based foods and *siali* fibers-the raw materials for preparation of ropes and in search of potential mates for marriage. For example, they

move from Mayurbhanj district in Orissa to Hazaribagh district in West Bengal and TATA Nagar area in Jharkhand and return after two or three years.

The Birhor prefer to set their *tanda*, in the outskirts of a village and nearer to the forest water and local markets source. Also location of village market in the vicinity attracts the Birhor for setting up their *tanda* for sale of their rope products. Aftermath of observing the said preferences and suitability of the site through a ritual testing, they set *tanda* which comprises of a small number of 10-15 leaf hutments and accommodates for 50 people of 10-12 families.

The families in a *tanda* comprises of both consanguinal and affinal kins. In a *tanda*, every family constructs its *kumbha* (leaf hut). Besides, the Birhor community construct one smaller *kumbha* for the accommodation of the spirit of ancestor of each lineage and two bigger dormitories (leaf huts), one called Dhugala and another called Kudi Ada, for the sleeping accommodation of the bachelors and spinsters at night, respectively.





Mostly in Orissa their *tandas* are located in and around the Similipal hills of Mayaurbhanj and Balasore and forest areas of Keonjhar and Sambalpur districts. Their settlements are seen in and around the Similipal National Park bordering the village areas of Karanja, Jashipur, Rairangpur, Bisoi, Bangriposi, Udala, Khunta, Morada and Thakurmunda blocks in Mayurbhanj district and Nilagiri block of Balasore district. They shift their *tandas* from place to place more frequently in summer and winter than in rainy season. In the monsoon period they set up their *tandas* and stay months together in one place close to a peasant village and a weekly market. They adjust with frequent changes of place and settlement primarily in search of forest based food and raw materials for rope makings.



Shrinking of forest resources and diminishing market demands for ropes compels the Birhor to change their settlements frequently from place to place in the days except the rainy season. During this time they seek wage earning in agriculture operation of the local peasants as they find limited scope in exploiting the forest resources.



The recurrent changes in the settlement of Birhor *tanda* takes place due to the incidence of inadequate availability of forest based raw material in the vicinity of forests for making rope and diminishing demand of such produce in the locality. The other reasons of such change of residence are superstition over the issue of unnatural and premature death of *tanda* dwellers, disputes and conflicts among inmates family disputes relating to marriage violation of incest taboo, observation of rites and rituals of a close relative residing at other *tanda*, etc.





## LEAF HUT

In Birhor dialogue, the hut is called as Kumbha. It is a cone shaped leaf hut of short height made of saplings and dry branches covered with fresh leaves of *sal* (*shorea robusta*) tress and *siali* creepers. Its ground circumference is about 50' and the height at the center is 5'. It is windowless but has a door (Badgir) shutter of 3'x3' size made of twigs and leaves.

They build an earthen ridge around the outer circumference of the *kumbha* to prevent seepage of water and entry of reptiles into it. The Birhor are skilled in constructing the *kumbha* quickly within two to three hours. Only two persons take few hours to collect the required



materials such as sal branches and leaves and construct the structure. The roof of *kumbha* is examined from time to time by observing the sun beam from inside. They keep constant watch on the leaf roof of the *kumbha* and repair it as and when required so as to keep it warm in winter, cool in summer and water proof during monsoon.

The *kumbha* provides shelters to men, domestic animals and birds. The central place of the *kumbha* serves as the kitchen during rains. A separate *kumbha* is set up for the expectant mother for child birth. The *kumbha* environment lacks sanitation. Still the delivery of child takes place there. Food is served to the new mother and care and nursing of the newborn baby are done there. Besides, the *kumbha* accommodates a few household belonging such as scanty clothes, cooking and serving pots and utensils, few implements made of wood and iron used for preparing ropes. The Birhor enter into the *kumbha* by creeping.



In every *tanda*, back to the Kumbha of the lineage headman, there is a small shrine of their ancestral deity made of leaf, called Alabonga. They strongly believe that the spirits of the deceased live with them in the *tanda*. At the time of departure from a *tanda* the Birhor comes out of *kumbha* by making a hole



at the back of *kumbha* and destroy it and then proceed in search of a new *tanda* at a different location. The Birhors moves in bands with their ancestral deities and scanty household materials along with the livestock.

Whenever, the members people of a *tanda* want to shift to a new place, all the families of the *tanda* move together to the new place where they set up their new *tanda*. A man can leave his parent *tanda* at his will and join a new *tanda* elsewhere. He is also at liberty to return to his parent *tanda* where he will be received cordially. It is the customary practice that the newcomer offers drinks to the headman and other inmates of the *tanda* for his readmission.



## LIVELIHOOD



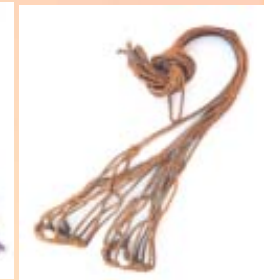
Crafting ropes from *siali* bark, a raw material collected from the forest, is the lifeline of Birhors. Thus the livelihood of the Birhor mainly depends on the forest as well as the local market. They can't live without forest and can't manage without going to the market. They frequent forest mainly for collection of siali fibres from white collecting siali fibres from the finest they also gather other MFPs which they come across.





The crafting of rope is a major aspect of Birhor economy. They harvest good variety of fibres by chopping and stripping the bark of seasoned *siali* (*lama bayer*) creepers. On an open air workshop, set up in front of *their Kumbhas* and most often beneath the trees, they tear the *siali* fibres into different sizes and thin threads and braid and twist them to get the finished products of ropes, slings, nets, bags and small baskets (*topa*). Now-a-days some Birhor are making fancy items like hand bags out of jute, plastic and *siali* fibers. In this craft they use small and simple tools, like axe (*tangi*), knife (*chhuri*), bamboo club (*thenga*) and knife-sized bamboo/wooden blade (*hanta*).

At times, they use jute as raw material to prepare ropes according to cater to the requirements of local peasants. These products have a good demand among the local peasants. The women folk preferably the old generation weave mat out of date-palm leaves for their own use.



They visit weekly market for disposal of ropes and for procurement of their daily provisions. The other attractions of going to market is meeting, gossiping and interacting with friends and relations. At the market the bachelors and spinsters seek the opportunity of meeting with their beloved ones from different *tanda*. Under the forces of modernization, the Birhor minds are tuned with the market economy but they still practice barter. Occasionally, they are seen in village streets trying pushing-sale of ropes and small baskets in exchange of rice and *mudhi*, fried rice, the popular fast food of orissa.



Forest provides them free supply of raw materials, i.e., *siali* fibres. Their skills in processing fibres help crafting ropes. The market facilitates their rope selling. The eventual movements from forest to market have a direct bearing with their livelihood round the year. While making movements inside forests in search of raw materials for crafting ropes, they revolve round the forest by selling and supplying ropes to the local farmers. The custom made *siali* oil





seed containers (tapa) are used for extraction of oil in crude method by the tribals. On an average daily earning of a Birhor hardly exceeds to Rs.30/- to Rs. 40/-.



The Bihors are expert monkey catchers. They use large nets made of *siali* fibers for catching monkeys. Previously they used to kill monkeys, eat their meat and sell the skins to the local skin traders for cash. Due to forest and wildlife conservation laws this has declined to a great extent.

16



Often they use to live in makeshift hutments in the forest for about half a week or so for forest collections and return to their *tanda* for rope making. Previously they use to catch and carry birds, snares, squirrels, hare and deer with the help of traps (*kuleibasi/patampasi*) and nets (*hanu jhali/ghejma*), but this has stopped now for forest regulations.





The birds and animals are skinned and their tanned skin are sold in nearby villages or at market places for cash. Often the skins are used for preparation of musical instruments. In many sal and other trees in forest cocoons are available and the Birhor pick and sale these cocoons which add to their income.



The Birhors rear domestic animals like, goats, fowls, dogs, etc. to supplement their food and income.

Due to cultural contact with the peasant community many Birhors have learnt some of the agricultural activities such as weeding, transplanting and harvesting of paddy. The local people very often employ them as labourers during agricultural season.





## FOOD

The rice is the staple food of Birhor. With the sale proceeds of ropes and forest produce they purchase their weekly requirements of rice and other provisions from the market. They also buy corn and minor millets in harvest seasons and eat these in addition to cooked rice. They collect various types of green leaves, mushrooms and fruits such as Kendu, palm and mango from the forest for their own consumption. They also dig out roots, tubers and collect honey, which supplements their diet. During festive occasions they prepare and eat non-veg. dishes, various kinds of cakes and other items. They are quite fond of eating the flesh of monkey. When they kill monkey and have some surplus meat, they dry it under the sun and preserve it for future consumption.

18



The Birhors are also very fond of rice beer (*handia*). They occasionally take alcoholic drinks, especially, mohuli liquor. Handia is their most favorite drink which women prepare at home during festive occasion. They also buy and consume drinks available at the weekly market. Birhor males smoke. Two men holding two pieces of sticks in their hands make fire by rubbing one flat stick kept on the ground against the other moving in vertical position. Both males and females of the Birhor community chew tobacco.





The economic life of the Birhor is full of hardships with meagre earning and food scarcity. Yet they live from hand to mouth. Still, they seem to be happy and relaxed in market days and festive occasions. Health and nutrition is a problem for their expectant and nursing mother and children. The services of ICDS, like supplementary nutrition programme and health care do not reach to the Birhor temporary settlement. The children suffer from different kinds of skin diseases. The swelling bellies of most of their children indicate high incidence of malnutrition.





## SOCIAL LIFE

The Birhor believe life as a continuous process from birth to death. After birth the life goes through successive phases, like infancy, adolescence, youth, marriage, family life, old age, and finally ends in death.



During pregnancy a woman observes some taboos and prohibitions regarding her food, work and mobility. She is relieved of doing hard work and particularly, cooking. Most often she is not allowed to go out or come in contact with a dead body and move near the shrine. She is forbidden to take consecrated meat. While going out she must cover her body completely with her clothes to ward off other's evil eye, which may cause harm.

The child birth takes place in a separate *kumbha* which is built for the purpose. A traditional midwife helps in the delivery. After the birth of the child, the whole *tanda* is considered polluted for a period of 7 days. The family in which the birth of a baby takes place observes pollution for 21 days. In the Birhor society the birth of a baby in a family is a matter of great rejoice. The couples blessed with baby remain happy and the issueless couples remain unhappy. Since both men and women contribute to their family incomes, the Birhor society hardly see any difference in the birth of a girl or a boy.





Marriage in Birhor society is regulated by the principle of endogamy and monogamy. It is a very colourful event in the life of a Birhor. It takes place after a girl attains puberty at the age group of 14 -18 years and a boy reaches the age of group of 20-25 years. At the pre-marriage age the Birhor boys and girls enjoy the dormitory life and there they learn the lessons of life from their seniors, which facilitate smooth and easy post-marriage life. Marriage within the *tanda* is permitted in case the *tanda* is multi-clan in structure. Two brothers marrying to two sisters and marriages of sororate and levirate types are in vogue. Arranged marriage is common. Besides, marriage by elopement, marriage by exchange and service are also practised. Bigamy is never seen. In all regular and arranged marriages, the customary bride price is paid by the groom's side to the bride's parents. Usually, the bride price comprises some amount of cash and three pieces of clothes. The Birhor society gives recognition to divorce, remarriage of widows, widowers and divorcees.

There is no specified month for holding wedding ceremonies. Generally the best time for marriage among the Birhor is after the monsoon when people have some savings in hand and the guests and relatives can be entertained without difficulty. On the wedding day the groom accompanied by his friends, relatives and *tanda* members goes in a merry procession to the bride's *tanda* where they are accorded a warm reception by the bride's side.





With pomp and ceremony the marriage is solemnized by the groom smearing vermilion on the bride's forehead. At this time the boys and girls from both the sides dance and sing in great joy and happiness to the tune of the music by playing the drums, flutes, banam and other musical instruments. After the wedding ceremony is completed, the bride and the groom with the bridal party return to the boy's *tanda* where the groom's father hosts a feast for all.

The Birhor family is invariably of nuclear type. It comprises of father, mother and unmarried children. In some cases either the widow mother or the widower father lives with the married son in his family. The Birhor tribe is divided into a number of clans, such as Sinkhili, Hembrum, Nagpuria, Malihi, Sikria, etc. The clans regulate marriages and prohibit incestuous sexual union.

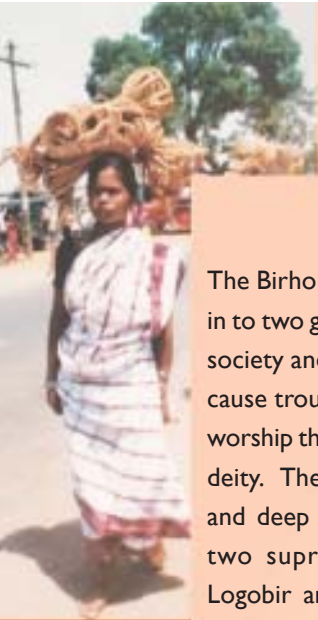
In a Birhor family men and women enjoy equal status. Comparatively, the male folk take up harder work, like hunting climbing trees while women accomplish relatively lighter tasks including fibre processing, rope making, housekeeping, child care, processing, cooking and serving food. Children are socialized to help their parents and thereby learn the art of living in their respective gender based domains. The Bihors take care of the aged and old people. Some able old people do not sit idle. They do whatever they can to contribute to the family income.





When a Birhor dies, his family members arrange for sending the news to all their lineage members and relatives living in other *tandas*. Premature and unnatural deaths in Birhor society are believed to be caused due to the machination of evil spirits or sorcerers. Generally the corpse is buried in a trench with the position of the head in southwest direction. The pollution is observed for a period of ten days. On the 10th day Dehuri (priest) conducts purificatory rites and sprinkles cow dung mix water all over the *tanda* and over the lineage members. In the evening a mortuary feast is arranged for all persons of the *tanda*, lineage members and other invitees. The death, which brings life to an end, takes him/her to the unseen world where the life is transformed into a spirit and starts influencing the fate of living human beings. At times, the rebirth of deceased members is believed have happened in a family and it is only confirmed by the Dehuri when the peruficatory rite after birth of a baby is conducted.





## MAGICO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

The Birhors believe in animism. Their faith and worship revolve round the nature. They classify their deities in to two groups, the benevolent group, i.e. who bestow progress and prosperity and well being to people and society and the malevolent ones, who cause trouble, illness and death. They worship the Sun God as their Supreme deity. They believe that in the thick and deep forests the abode of their two supreme deities, namely the Logobir and Budhimai lies. Forest is their lifeline. Therefore, they venerate the natural forest for their safety from the attack of wild animals and for a successful hunt and availability of forest produce. Annually they have a great ceremonial hunt in the forest, known as Disum Sendra, which begins with a ritual worship of forest deity.



Like other Kolarian tribe, they observe new fruit, mango and *mahua* flowers eating ceremonies in which they worship their deities. In addition to that they always worship their ancestors' spirits. Therefore, every clan members in a *tanda* construct a small leaf kumbha which serves as a shrine of the ancestral deity. Food and prayers are offered to the deity on all ritual occasions and women during pollution period are forbidden to touch the shrine. They worship their ancestors regularly in different occasions for up keeping good health and achieving wellbeing of family and clan members.





At the concluding part of every marriage ritual, the Dehuri while officiating as priest, gets into trance and tells the about the future fortunes and misfortunes of the newly married couple. In case of indication of misfortunes, he prescribes remedial measures for protection and wellbeing of the new family. The Dehuri of a *tanda* also act as a traditional healer. As and when required in trance he identifies the cause of illness, evil eye and untimely loss of life and prescribes remedies through rituals and sacrifices to ward off the misfortune. Similarly, in other times, the Birhor people depend on the *Dehuri*, who prescribed traditional medicines for curing ailments. The *Dehuri* chant *mantras* and often goes into trance to identify the cause of diseases and prescribe remedial measures. At times he is seen selling raw herbs in weekly market. He acts as a traditional herbal healer and provides instant herbal remedies for common ailments for the outsiders.





## TANDA COUNCIL

Every Birhor *tanda* is a self governed socio-political unit. The *tanda* council is at the apex of the mechanism of social control. It comprises of the Naik, the secular head, Dehuri, the religious head and all the head of the



households in a *tanda*. It is the customary law enforcing body for all *tanda* members. The Naik is the traditional chief of the *tanda*. The post is hereditary. Sometimes, the *tanda* chief acts as Dehuri, the priest, worships the deities and officiates in all the rites and rituals. He does not receive any remuneration for his services. He is offered food and drinks along with a share of the sacrificial meat. In the *tanda* he is respected by all his fellowmen. The Naik of a *tanda* is responsible to enforce customary laws, norms, mores in the settlement and these are binding for all the fellowmen. All matters, economic, social, religious, etc. relating to the *tanda* and its members are discussed and decided in the

meetings of the traditional *tanda* council. The *tanda* council imposes fines for the minor violations. But if the offence is grievous, like breaking of incest taboo, it orders major punishment of 'chindal' or 'began', i.e. excommunication from the *tanda* to the offender. Formation of maggots in the sore on the body of person is considered as the effect of sins and the affected person is socially boycotted till his sore heals after which he undergoes a purificatory ritual and hosts a feast to the *tanda* members.

As regards their social interaction with the neighbouring communities, the Bihors eat cooked food in the houses of Santal and Kolha but not the vice versa. They do not accept cooked food from the Muslims, the Scheduled Castes and the Kharias. Any breach of this social norm leads to social boycott.



## PERFORMING ARTS

The Birhor are very fond of music, songs and dances. Their artistic talents are manifested in their performing arts such as music, songs and dances. They dance and sing in their leisure time and at times of the rituals and festivals. In festive occasions, they sing, dance and beat the drums and blow the flutes continuously throughout the night. There is similarity in the music, songs and dances of the birhors with other tribes such as the Ho, the Kol, the Munda, and the Santal.



The principal varieties of dances they traditionally perform are known as the Dong, the Lagre, and the Mutkar, the Jadur (with Gena) and the Karam (with Khemta, Jhumar, and Hansda) dances. Each of these dances is associated with appropriate songs known respectively as the Dong siring, the Lagre siring and Mutkar siring etc. The characteristic Birhors dances- the Dong, the Lagre and the Mutkar are really wedding dances performed in accompaniment to marriage songs on occasions of weddings. Lagre songs are mostly worded in Hindi. Devotional songs are sung during religious ceremonies.

For dance and music they use various kinds of musical instruments like the dholak or *madal*, *tomka* or *nagra* (kettledrums), the *tirio* or the bamboo flute with 3 or 5 or 7 holes along its length and stopped by the fingers, the *kendera* or *banjo* with a wooden body and a sounding board covered with the lizard skin and strings played with a bow, and clappers and ankle-bells (*ghungurs*) both made of brass.

Dancing is a must in all happy and socio-religious occasions, like births, weddings, feasts and festivals. It is invariably accompanied by singing and drumming. The males play the musical instruments and females dance to the rhythm singing songs.

The Birhors dance is a group affair. Boys and girls, old and young, participate in it. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the time and place for dancing. But they generally dance at night. The dancers do not wear any special dress during their performances. Birhors dances, even today, are a source of healthy recreation.





## CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

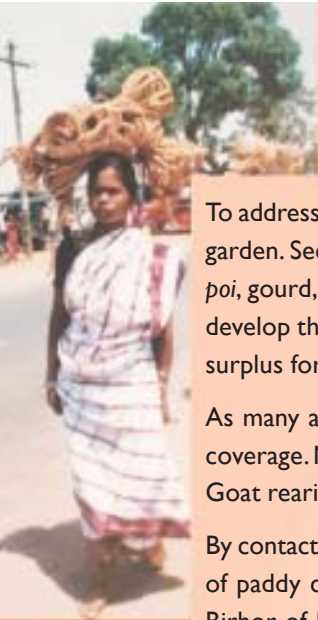
The development intervention for the Birhor/Mankirdia started in 1987 by Govt. of India as well as Govt. of Orissa through establishment of a Micro Project, namely, Hill-Kharia and Mankirdia Development Agency, Jashipur, Mayurbhanj. Since then it is working for the all round development of about 60 Birhor/Mankirdia families at two villages (Durdura village of Jashipur Block and Kendumundi village of Karanjia block) coming under Karanjia ITDA in Mayurbhanj district. There they have been identified as a PTG and provided development inputs by ST&SC Development Department, Govt. of Orissa under the aegis of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India. At the above cited two villages, the Birhor have been provided basic infrastructure, like houses under Indira Awaas Yojana, community houses, wells, tube wells, supplementary nutrition feeding centers, kitchen gardens, and social welfare measures, such as voter identity cards, ration cards, BPL cards, old age/widow pensions and assistances under different Income Generating Schemes, individually and in group mode through SHGs. The Birhor community has shown a good response to the development programmes initiated by the micro project and other agencies. By the impact of these interventions some of them have crossed the poverty line; turned literates, sharecroppers, businessmen, tractor drivers and sent their children to schools. All of them have given up their wandering habit and lead a settled life.



There are about 209 Birhor families in Mayurbhanj and Balasore districts, who live beyond the Micro Project area. They, being aware of the development interventions by Govt. of Orissa for Birhor/Mankirdia desire for a settled life and the development interventions. But development benefits hardly reached them according to their requirements leaving their very survival at stake. However, the district administration of Balasore and Mayurbhanj districts and some NGOs, especially ANWESANA, a local NGO of Mayurbhanj district have come forward and tried to extend helps to the Birhor by initiating some development programmes, like, housing, nutrition, education, etc.

To control the death and diseases of the Birhor people and to ensure food security among them, Grain Banks have been established with the financial support by Anwesana/Action Aid NGOs. At Kusudiha village in Oupada Block a house-cum-store room for the Grain Bank has been constructed with the contribution of labour from the Birhor people and material from Anwesana. The NGO also extends the food grain support to the Grain Bank to ensure food security at the village during crisis period. The Grain Bank house serves different purposes, like a place for preprimary education, storehouse of food grains and raw materials for rope making and shelter for people during heavy rains. Often it is used as a dormitory for the bachelors. Through the skill development training programme the Birhor have learnt the use of hand operated machine for preparation of rope out of *sabai* grass.





To address the problems of malnutrition, support and assistance are extended for the development of kitchen garden. Seeds of fruit bearing trees, like papaya, banana, drumstick etc. and vegetables, like chilies, pumpkins, *poi*, gourd, and carrot and green leaves, like *palanga*, *methi*, are being distributed. The people are trained to develop their kitchen garden and consume the fruits and vegetables to check their malnutrition and sale the surplus for cash.

As many as 209 landless Birhor families were provided financial assistance for goat rearing with insurance coverage. Now all the Birhor families of Kusudiha village rear 5-6 goats due to the development intervention. Goat rearing generates additional income to their families.

By contact with the local peasant culture the Birhor have learnt the technique of paddy cultivation. Some of them have turned paddy sharecroppers. The Birhor of Bageipur village in Khaira block of Balasore district and Dengam village in Khunta block, Durdura village of Jashipur block and Kendumundi village of Karanjia block of Mayurbhanj district have taken up paddy share cropping.

The development intervention includes checking economic exploitation of the Birhor by other people. The Grain Bank at Mahalibasa has helped the people to sale their produce in correct measures. It also helps in rope making activities.

Animators of Aneswasa had helped promote the immunization, health checkup and supplementary nutrition programmes for the Birhor at the village level. Previously the people were not in favour of medical treatment of expectant mothers and nursing mothers and newborn babies. After motivation, now they have accepted these health and nutrition provisions.

In the Grain Banks at Kusudiha and Dengam villages the nursery schools are running. The Aneswasana provided teachers and the free mid-day meals for the children in the age group 3-6 years. This is done under the First Generation Learning Programme (FGL). The successful students have been sent to Residential Sevashram (Primary Schools and hostels run by ST & SC Development for formal education.



Sri Baya Mankirdia, is the first matriculate of the Birhor *tanda*. He belongs to Baliposi village of Jamudiha Gram Pachayat in Kaptipada block. Has been extended educational support and supplied with reading and writing material and motivated to continue his study. His dream is to become a teacher and teach his little brothers and sisters and make educational advancement of his own community.

The traditional architecture of Birhor hut is being changed from the circular to rectangular shape. The roof of the hut is now thatched with straw instead of leaves but the leaf walls are retained. Regular contact of the Birhor with the local peasants and weekly markets has helped them in adopting the latter's agricultural practice, learning their language, slowly following their religious faith and way of life, etc., and that leading to a situation like tribe-peasant continuum.

In spite of some development assistance extended through the government and NGOs, most of the Birhor families are reported to be below poverty line. The development interventions made for the Bihors so far seem to be inadequate to meet their basic needs. Central Govt. and State Govt. in collaboration with NGOs should extend all possible human development interventions for the settlement of semi-nomadic Bihors.





Web site –scstrti.in, E mail – scstrti@yahoo.co.in, Telephone – 0674-2563649 / 2561635

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