

CHANGES IN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF ROPE MAKING AMONG THE BIRHOR OF JHARKHAND

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Introduction

There are thirty two tribal groups in Jharkhand, among these eight are Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). *Birhor* is one of the primitive and vulnerable tribal group in eight PVTGs of Jharkhand. Birhors are present mainly in the area of Hazaribagh, Ramgarh, Gridih, Dhanbad, Bokaro, Gumla, Ranchi and Singhbhum districts in Jharkhand. According to primitive tribal group Jharkhand survey report 2002 – 2003 (TRI Ranchi Jharkhand) total population of *Birhor* in Jharkhand is 6579.

The *Birhor* affirm that they have descended from the sun. The term *Birhor* in Mundari means a woodman or a chop cutter (lords of the jungles). The *Birhor* are largely a nomadic tribe with no fixed habitation; they roam about from forest to forest in search of subsistence. The *Birhor* are divided into two classes – *Uthlus* (the wanderers) and *Janghi* (the settlers). The *Uthlus Birhor* are always on the move, when the food supply in a particular area is exhausted they move on to another jungle. But presently it appears that in Jharkhand all *Birhor*' are settled in government colonies or *tanda* (village). *Uthlu Birhor*' are not wanderers any more in Jharkhand; all *Uthlus* are now settled. The *Janghi Birhor* on the other hand is of a more settled type. A few families, tired of wandering, have settled down on some hill top or

on the outskirts of some forest. A few have cleared some land in the jungle for permanent cultivation but the majority are landless and live mainly by hunting and selling ropes. The *Birhor* move in small bands snaring Monkeys, tracking hare, deer and other game or collecting fibers for making ropes for sale, also for collecting honey and bees wax. The temporary *Birhor* settlements are known as *tandas*. These consist of at least half a dozen huts of conical shape, erected with leaves and branches. The household possessions traditionally consisted of earthen utensils, some digging implements, implements for hunting and trapping, rope making implements, baskets and so on. In recent times aluminum and steel utensils have found their way into *Birhor* huts. After Indian Independence in 1947, the government has attempted to settle the *Birhor* by giving them land, bullocks for cultivation, agricultural implements and seeds. Schools for children, rope making centre and honey collection training centers were started. Now *Birhor* live settled life. But, still they depend on hunting, food gathering and minor food product like; bark of tree for rope making, ethno-medicine, honey leaf and fire wood. *Birhor* of Jharkhand are also known as rope makers. Traditionally they are making rope for neighboring castes and tribes by the fibers of tree (*mohlan/or chop chal*).

Objective

To study the traditional knowledge of rope making among *Birhor*, change in economic behavior and in their traditional technique and material of rope making and identification of the present socio-economic problems of *Birhor*.

Area of Research

The study has been conducted in the *Birhor tola*, Banji village of Barughutu *Panchayat* of West Bokaro Division (Ghatotand) Ramgarh District of Jharkhand. It is 46 km from Ramgarh and 20km from Charhion NH 33. It is well connected form pitch road. The total household is 54. Total population of *Birhor tola* is 207 out of this male is 100 and female is 107.

Methodology

Personal interviews were conducted upon randomly, selected *Birhor* population practicing rope making. In this study, both primary as well as secondary sources have been used. Research is mainly based upon response to a tailored questionnaire to collect data about their occupation and daily working schedule.

Interview was taken to know traditional cultural practice and change in culture. Observation, case study, focus group discussions and photography have also been used. Secondary data was collected from Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS), library, archives etc.

Birhor and Forest

Birhor depends on forests for their livelihood. They are hunters and food gatherers. For their economy, they make rope and for rope making material they depend on forests. They hunt hare, birds, etc. They collect leaves and wood from forest. They also collect *Mahua* fruits in the season of *Mahua* and dry the fruit for several purposes. They use *Mahua* as vegetable, medicines and also use for making drinks. They are collect *Bhatua sag* and dry it. Every day, they use *bhatua sag* as their meal with rice. They use tree stems and leaves for making their traditional hut (*Kumba*). Their livelihood mainly depends on forest products but today's scenario is little changed.

TABLE 11.1
Dependency on Forest Products

Hunting	Food Gathering	Gathering Indigenous Plants	Collecting Rope Material
<i>Kulhai/Kharha</i> (Hare)	<i>Bhathua sag, katai sag</i> <i>Putkal andkoinar sag</i>	Karanj and sal for Datun	<i>Mohlan</i> tree bark
<i>Titir</i> (Bird)	<i>Mahua, Sal, Honey, Karanj, Kend, Piyar, Kanda, Gethi. Etc.</i>		

Source: Field survey 2013

Table 11.1 shows the status of forest products used by *Birhor* for different purpose. They gather *Bhathua sag* and *Mahua* fruits as their food products. They also use *Mahua* as indigenous plants. And for rope making, they collect barks of *Mohlan tree*.

Rope Making Knowledge of Birhor

Rope making is a traditional knowledge among *Birhor* tribe. They make rope to earn money. This knowledge is only used to earn for their livelihood. They

make rope and objects made up of rope. Previously, they started making rope for their personal use like; hunting, for tying animals and for hanging honey with help of *sikka*. This work was done traditionally by tree fibers. But now a days, they make rope from plastic sacks provided by TISCO (Tata Iron and Steel Company). Process of making rope takes time and effort. Firstly they dry the fibers of trees and then they separate the fibers after that they roll the fibers to weave the ropes. After that they roll the bundle and at last they overlap two thin rolls of fibers and weave the bundle of rope. They make rolls of rope from their ethnic tool called *Dhara*. This ethnic implement *Dhara* is very rarely found.

Rope Making and Economy

Birhor tribe started making rope for their lively approximately from 50 years. Before that, they used to make rope or items made by rope for their personal use. Tata Iron and Steel Corporation provide plastic sacks to them to make rope but the sacks provided to 54 households are not sufficient for their livelihood. They also keep goat, pig, hen and duck for their household or for economic purpose.

TABLE 11.2
Cost Analysis of Rope Making

Sl. No.	Name of object	Used for	Time taken in making object	Market	Cost	Profit
1.	Rope	Pulling water from well	1 day	No market	100 Rs per bundle	100 Rs
2.	Animal collar	For tying Goat and Ox	4 in one day	No market	20 -30 Rspercollar	20 – 30 Rs
3.	Sikka	For hanging utensils from roof	3 – 4 in one day	No market	60 Rspersikka	60 Rs
4.	Trapping net	For trapping Hare or Titter	2 -3 days	No market	Not for sale	--

Source: Field survey 2013

Table 11.3 shows various types of things made up by *Birhor*. Mostly they make rope for pulling water from well. They take one day in making one bundle of rope. They sell it from door to door. They earn Rs.100/- for one bundle. One bundle of rope is sold once a week or sometimes twice a week.

They make animal collar as per demand for tying goat and ox. They make four piece collars in one day. They sell one piece at the rate of Rs.20/- to 30/- per piece. They make *sikka* as per the demand. It is made to hang utensils of food from roof. 3-4 pieces of *sikka* are made in one day and per piece are sold in Rs.60/- they also make trapping net for their personal use for trapping hare or titter. They take 2-3 days in making tapping net.

TABLE 11.3
Change in Rope Making Material and Technique

Sl. No.	Name of Material	Use	Period from being used
1.	<i>Patsan</i>	For making all type of rope and rope made material	Little in use
2.	<i>Mohlan</i>	For making all type of rope and rope made material	Little in use
3.	Plastic	For making all type of rope and rope made material	From 20 years

Source: Field survey 2013

The changes have taken place in last 20 years. *Patsan* are used very little to make rope because it is not available. Sometimes farmers provide *patsan* fibers to make rope for agricultural purpose. As a substitute of rope they give some rice. *Mohlan* is very little in use for making rope they are now mostly making rope from plastic sacks. They make rope from plastic sacks in same process and separate plastic threads from sack. They make rolls of those threads and weave them as rope.

Participation of Women

Women's participation in their economic work is impressive. They do all the work of rope making same as their men. They separate threads from sacks, rolls and then weave rolls of rope. They also go to neighboring villages and nearby weekly markets to sell these bundles of ropes.

Change in House Pattern

As the figure shows traditions of *Birhor* are vanishing day by day. *Birhor* used to live in traditional hut (*Kumba*) made up of leaves and stems of trees but now government has provided them *Indira Awas*.

Problems among Birhor

- *Birhor* used to make rope from *Mohlan* barks but Forest material (*Mohlan*) is not available for rope making. *Mohlan* tree is very few in forests now days. These trees are restricted by forest department.
- Market is not available for selling rope. They go from village to village to sell rope or rope made items.
- Importance of items made by them is decreasing due to industrialization. People are using factory made or plastic made rope for their daily purpose.
- Literacy is very low among *Birhor* tribes. Anganwadi Centre is active in *Birhor tola* but children and parents both do not give importance to education.

Conclusion and Suggestion

- Their livelihood is only dependent on the occupation of rope making. And they earn very little and it is not sufficient for their livelihood.
- Traditional knowledge and the technique used in making rope from forest products are increasingly going out of use.
- Some of the *Birhor's* are working as labours and tractor drivers. They are not practicing their traditional occupation.
- In 1948, after establishment of at the coal mines Ghatotan, Company settled the *Birhor's* of this area in Banji village. This place is far from forest and *Birhor's* dependency on forest for their livelihood took them to vulnerable situation.
- *Mohlan* is not available for rope making TISCO provide plastic sacks for making rope and items made by rope.
- Material provided by company is not sufficient for the livelihood of 54 households.
- They have little land but there is no facility for irrigation.
- They collect *Mahua* for making vegetable, medicines and for making drinks.
- Government and company should give training to use new techniques and preserve their traditional knowledge.

- Awareness regarding education, government programme, health and sanitation should be provided to them.

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