

Livelihoods of Vulnerable People: An Ethnographic Study Among the *Birhor* of Chhattisgarh

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Abstract

Vulnerable people (VP) lack in access to resources, development benefits, such as education, health, infrastructure and basic means of livelihoods. They are considered disadvantaged in comparison to other groups in relation to access to resources and other entitlements. VP, such as women, person with disability, people living with HIV/AIDS, sexual minorities, poor migrants, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes often face numerous discrimination. One such vulnerable group known as *Birhor*, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group from the Chhattisgarh state of central India, is the focus of this article. The main purpose of the article is to look into their livelihood complexities in the contemporary period. This article is an outcome of an ethnographic fieldwork among *Birhor*, in Umaria Dadar Tribal settlement, Kota block of Bilaspur District, Chhattisgarh. The article draws its inferences based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected from the study area by using different anthropological tools and techniques. The secondary data is gathered from the *Birhor Vikas Abhikaran* (*Birhor* development agency), Bilaspur, and both published and unpublished reports of the government and civil society agencies, and other sources. The article looks into the inherent intricacies of livelihood approaches and vulnerability looking at the vicissitudes of livelihoods of *Birhors*. The major finding of the article is that *Birhor* people are slowly and steadily moving towards a settled life from their traditional life of hunting and gathering. They are accepting now the new sociocultural lifestyles in the study area.

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Keywords

Livelihoods, vulnerable people, *Birhor*, PVTG, ethnography and Chhattisgarh

Introduction

Vulnerable people (VP)¹ are swelling innumerable across the globe and more so is the case of South Asian societies. There has been a plethora of research work, which explains, theoretically and empirically, about the conditions of the VP. Scholars, such as Lange et al. (2013) have described the sources of vulnerability as inherent, situational or pathogenic, and the likelihood of their happening as ‘recurrent’ or ‘dispositional’. Earlier, Rogers et al. (2012) went further beyond the use of principles and regulation. They have theorised that the concept of vulnerability is vehemently inherent in all of human life and arises by virtue of our embodiment—our social, biological, environmental, cultural and political nature, which are subsequently unavoidable events. Some other forms of vulnerabilities are those which are related to lack of access to health care facilities, which are the result of unjust prioritisation of social arrangements. In order to bring VP into the mainstream development discourse, there was an attempt from the development agencies, such as both governmental and non-government, to implement livelihoods approach. These development agencies have popularised and recommended that livelihoods approach is the answer for all the ills of VP living across the world. They observed that livelihoods approach is useful to analyse the lives and livelihoods of VP, vulnerability contexts and the direction of change. The main features of livelihoods approach is that it focuses upon people’s assets. For improving the situation of the VP, many development programmes were initiated by the government. A sizeable body of the work significantly addresses the focus towards explaining the conditions of VP. These studies have also explained both the conditions of the VP and the development programmes directed at them. Despite these initiatives by the state and other development agencies and the academia, the precarity of these people still persists to a larger extent. Keeping these discussions in the background, the article aimed at understanding the livelihood systems of *Birhor*, a marginalised community, and shocks, stresses and trends involved in their livelihood processes.

The sustainable livelihoods approach goes back to the mid 1980s when Robert Chambers and Carney first initiated thinking in this area. Aid agencies such as UNDP, DFID, CARE and OXFAM and development scholars such as Diana Carney and Scoons have believed that livelihood approach is the panacea and need of the hour to address backwardness, vulnerability, conditions of poor and VP. The main feature of livelihood approach is to focus on the people’s assets. These assets include physical, natural, financial, human, social and political capitals. Further, it also focuses on how the people utilise their assets and deal with their problems. Few other scholars² were emphasising on the issues of sustainability and its ramifications on livelihoods framework in their studies on Asia and African countries. Many attempts can be traced to define the livelihoods. Chambers and Conway defined livelihoods as ‘the ways in which people satisfy their needs, or gain a living’ (1991, p. 5).

Literature Review

Attributes of Livelihoods

Scholars such as Carney, Ahmed and Lipton, and Chambers have tried vividly to explain the vicissitudes of livelihoods. For Carney (1998, p. 2) 'the capabilities, assets of both material and social resources and activities required for a means of living comprise a livelihood'. Further, she elaborated that 'a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope up with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base'. For Ahmed and Lipton (1988) 'livelihood consists of a set of flows of income, from hired employment, self-employment, remittances or (usually in developing rural areas) from a seasonality and annually variable combination of all these'. Thus, for them, livelihood implies systems of how people make a living or in other words, how they be able to maintain it to cope with the risks during the crisis. Later, Chambers (1988, p. 2) elucidated that the livelihood security is the 'Secure ownership of, access to, resources and income-generating activities, including reserves and assets to offset risk, ease shocks and meet contingencies'.

Livelihoods in the Context of Tribal India

Sustainable livelihoods approach brings together various perspectives. For instance, Farrington et al. (1999) argued that sustainable livelihoods approach helps to understand the underlying constraints and links micro-level understanding of poverty into policy and institutional change processes. They have shared their experience while working in western Orissa and they found that livelihoods were less dependent on natural resources than expected, partly because the poor had such limited access to these resources. Earlier, Bagchi et al. (1998) offered comparative perspective through a sample survey of 15 villages in eastern India and western Nepal. For them, livelihood trajectories meant to provide insights into the changing welfare and capabilities of individuals and of groups; make it possible to bridge the supposed micro-macro divide by a process of aggregation upwards from the lives of individuals; and combine insights in a seriously interdisciplinary spirit, from the many different paradigms prevalent in development studies. The sustainable rural livelihoods approach of the Department for International Development (DFID) puts 'people at the centre of development'. For instance, DFID and Indian state, Andhra Pradesh, have initiated Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project (APRLP) which aims to scale up ongoing watershed programme activities in the State and adopts a participatory sustainable rural livelihoods strategy, which is based on an analysis of the capital assets (physical, social, human, natural, financial and political) from which the rural poor make their livelihoods (APRLP, 1999).

The sustainable livelihoods approach takes into account the vulnerability context in order to understand the way people cope up with those contexts. There have been many attempts to define 'Vulnerability'. 'Vulnerability is best defined

relative to some benchmark of ill-being' (Alwang et al., 2001). Vulnerability related to dimensions, such as educational opportunities, mortality, nutrition and health could be measured as well (Decon, 2001). To briefly explain, 'vulnerability' is understood as the trends, shocks and seasonality over which people have limited or no control. Yet, these critically affect their livelihood status and possibilities.

The sustainable livelihoods approach is useful to analyse the tribal livelihoods, vulnerability contexts and the direction of change. It adopts a holistic approach and analyses livelihoods in the culture of a people, emphasises on people-oriented development and abandonment of top-down approach. Thus it emphasises on a need for evolving people-friendly/culture-specific policies. The sustainable livelihoods approach has been widely identified as an instrument to eradicate poverty. However, our study seeks to use this approach as a means to understand not only poverty but all the other forms of deprivations and vulnerability contexts. The tribal communities in India are overwhelmingly marginalised not only economically but also spatially, culturally and otherwise. Chhattisgarh has a significant proportion of tribal population. For instance, Gregory (2013, p. 47) observed that 'Chhattisgarh represents the deep history of economy and culture. Its uniqueness is defined by its position at the crossroads of a north/south division of India into Indo-Aryan and Dravidian speaking linguistic regions and an east/west division into wet-rice and dry-grain producing farming regions'.

Material and Methods

Methodology

The article is primarily based on an ethnographic data collected from the village of Umariya Dadar district in Block-Kota of Bilaspur during the year 2018–2019. This study is a qualitative micro-level study. In order to fulfil the objectives of the study, qualitative anthropological tools and techniques are employed. These are mainly observation (participant and non-participant type), interviews (formal and informal) using detail checklist, key-Informant interviews, case studies, focus group discussions, etc. The secondary data is gathered from books, articles, published reports, census reports and the government documents from the respective departments. Quantitative data with regard to demographic and economic aspects, and accessibility and availability of services in the study area, and other information regarding the study was collected from primary sources through detailed census schedules.

Area and the People

Area

Selection of the sample and study area:

This study was carried out among Birhor tribes inhabiting Umariya Dadar village of Kota Block, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. Depending upon the size of the

population, an attempt is made to study the livelihood of Birhor. Umariya Dadar is one of the 152 villages situated in the Kota Block of Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. The village is located in a remote area with a tough geographical terrain. Sekar, Piparpara, Darsagar, Rigwar, Tendubhatha, Pachra, Majhwani, Bansajhal, Khaira, Chapora and Birgahni surround the village Umariya Dadar. Umariya Dadar of Kota district of Bilaspur has a higher proportion of Scheduled Tribe populations than the other districts in the region, which made me to select the district for the study.

Demographic details of Birhor people:

The population of the Birhor in Chhattisgarh shows considerable variation in the Census of 2001–2011. In Chhattisgarh, Birhor people are mainly found in Bilaspur, Korba, Jashpur, Raigarh and Surguja districts. According to Census 2001, their population was 3,744 and a slight decrease is noticed in their population in Census 2011 and it was 3,104. In Census 2011, Birhor total households in Chhattisgarh were 838. According to Tribal Research Institute data, Birhor population is slightly higher than the Census 2011 data (Tables 1 and 2).

There is a considerable variation of Birhor population in data of Census 2011 and data of the Tribal Research Institute, Raipur, Chhattisgarh. During our interaction with the researchers of TRI, they mentioned that this variation could be due to the migration of the people during the off-seasons to the nearby urban areas. It is also evident from the table that Birhor population in the study village is also very less in comparison to the other villages.

Table 1. Population of Birhor in Various Parts of Chhattisgarh, 2017.

District	Population
Jashpur	527
Raigarh	962
Korba	1,556
Bilaspur	459
Total	3,504

Source: Tribal Research Institute, Raipur (Chhattisgarh).

Table 2. Population of Birhor in Bilaspur, Block-Wise, 2017.

District	Block	Gram Sabha	Village and Population
Bilaspur	Kota	Saktibahra	Belgehna 41
–	–	Umaria Dadar	Umaria Dadar 80
–	–	Koilari	Koilari 141
–	–	Semriya	Semriya 74
–	Masturi	Takhatpur	Khaikharpara 30
–	–	Jewra	Jewra 93

Source: Tribal Research Institute, Raipur (Chhattisgarh).

People

Life of the Birhor people:

The name Birhor is derived from the word 'bir' meaning *jungle* (forest) and 'hor' meaning man and thus the word means the people of the *jungle* (forest). As mentioned by Nadal (2014), these people are usually referred to as Birhor in the government demographic reports of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and West Bengal. The Birhor is one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of the State of Chhattisgarh. In the Seventh Five-Year Plan 'Birhor' was also listed in the primitive tribal groups (PTGs) of India. Birhor is also found in the states of Jharkhand and Odisha. According to Ota and Sahoo (2010), Birhor is a little known forest-dwelling tribe in Odisha. They are mostly wandering group with simple, shy and god-fearing people. They live in bands. They are originally considered as a semi-nomadic and hunter-gatherer group and represent the early stage of human life in the forest ecosystem.

Ethnology: The Birhors belong to the same dark-skinned, short stature, long-headed, wavy-haired and broad-nosed race to which the Munda's, the Santhal, the Bhumi's, the Ho's and other allied tribes belong. Like other allied tribes, the Birhors speak a language classed within the mandarin group in the Austro-Asiatic sub-family of language.

Language: Linguistically, they belong to the Austro-Asiatic (Mundari) group, and their language has been related to Australoid (Mundari) group by many linguistics but they are well versed in Chhattisgarhi language, when they talk to others. Birhors can be regarded as bilingual but when we ask about their language generally, they say it is 'Birhori'.

Clans: The Birhors are divided into five totemistic endogamous clans.

As observed from the study area, the clans of the Birhor are exogamous and totemic. Informants have mentioned that Birhor get spouses through negotiation, with mutual consent, by exchange and sometimes through intrusion as well. Marriage rituals continue for two days. They pay bride-wealth as part of the marriage ceremony. It is also observed from the field that they have their own community council known as *Jati Panch*, headed by *Malik*, where their socio-economic and political disputes are settled. *Jati Panch* also sanctions divorce, which is allowed among the *Birhor* people.

Clan	Totem
Sonwani	Gold
Bandi	Fish
Badi	Banyan Tree
Baghel	Tiger
Kosandi	Cocoon

Discussion and Analysis

Livelihood of Birhor in the Study Settlement

The Birhor tribe is a classic example of a hunting-gathering tribe, which is in a rapid transitional phase, facing many problems to sustain their livelihoods. S. C. Roy in the year 1925 wrote an account of the Birhor. The Birhor claim that they have descended from the Sun. They are also known as semi-nomadic tribe as they move from one place to another when the food supply in a particular place is exhausted. It was also believed that they hunt monkeys to tame them to do acrobatics. Nowadays due to the impact of modernisation, the mixture of forest economy and wage labour can be seen amongst the Birhor people. The livelihoods of Birhor mainly depend on the forest as well as local market. They strongly believe that ‘they can’t live without forest and can’t manage without going to the market’ (Ota & Sahoo, 2010). As explained by Nadal (2014) that ‘the forest is fundamental to their identity in reference to the other neighbouring groups in the area Birhor place other communities as being in the agricultural side of the world occupied by fields, markets and villages’. The main purpose of their visit to market is to dispose their products and for procurement of their daily provisions. The eventual movements from forest to market have a direct bearing on their livelihoods in the settlements of Birhor.

They live in their traditional settlement known as *Tanda* or *Basa*. The huts are of conical shape, which are covered with leaves and branches. Birhor people build an earthen ridge around the outer circumference of the *Basa* to prevent seepage of water and entry of reptiles into it. They are skilled in constructing the *Basa* quickly within two to 3 h. Due to contact with non-tribal people and impact of modernisation, many of them have switched to a settled life in the study area. The shift in their life is also evident from the study of Pankaj among the Birhor of Jharkhand. Pankaj (2008) in his study mentioned that due to the exhaust of forest resources, their mobility is restricted and as their movement is cyclical. It is found in the study area that Birhor are settling down in one place and subsequently exploring additional means of livelihoods available in their vicinities. They involve in the subsidiary and diverse occupations such as tractor driving, agricultural labour, part-time agricultural work, household labourer work, brick-kiln industries labour work, etc.

Economic Classification of Birhor in the Settlement

According to their economic habit, the Birhor are classified into two groups: UTHLUS—the wandering Bihors, and JANGHIS—the settled Bihors. The Birhor of Umariya Dadar are not involved monkey hunting. As mentioned by Ota and Mohanty (2008) they are also called Mankirdia in the official reports of the Odisha state. They lead a semi-nomadic lifestyle and involve primarily in hunting and food gathering. For their traditional skill of rope making, trapping and eating monkey, their neighbours call them as ‘Mankidi’ or ‘Mankirdia’. Pankaj (2008)

also mentions about their skill of monkey trapping. Birhors make ropes out of a particular fibre known as *udal*. They prepare various ropes for various purposes. They make ropes for tying their cattle and for other commercial purposes. As mentioned by Ota and Sahoo (2010), Birhor economy revolves around the forest and forest resources especially the minor forest produce (MFP). They are very skilful in preparing a variety of ropes from the material they collect from the forest. Sometimes, they use jute as a raw material in preparation of ropes according to the needs and requirements of local farmers. Informants from the Birhor settlement also mentioned that these products have a very good demand in the area and through which they manage their livelihoods.

The Uthlu Birhors do not practice any form of agriculture and are entirely dependent upon the collection of forest products for their living. Occasionally, they also do a little bit of hunting with small basket traps. The Birhor women are hardy and industrious by nature. They are the custodian of family income, expenditure, customs and traditions. They not only do household chores and rearing, caring of children, but they also take active part in the collection of food, trapping of birds, agriculture, agriculture labour and basketry and rope making.

The women make *topa* (basket) out of cane. The cutting of cane is done by the males of the family with sickle. The cutting of cane is not an easy task, so men help the women. The women make beautiful baskets of various designs. They also make some fish trap made up of cane. Some baskets are also made up of barks of the trees. They also collect *mahua* and firewood and sell that in the market. Daily wage works, and petty business (chai stall) follow this.

In the study area, Birhor economy at present revolves around small game and rarely get an opportunity to take anything larger than wild pigs, small varieties of deer, rabbits and few varieties of wild birds. They primarily hunt animals such as hare, wild hen and wild birds. Further, it is noticed from the study area that Birhor economy since past few years shows a shift towards agriculture. In Umariya Dadar village, where they practise agriculture, though on a smaller scale the government has given them land on the basis of the number of households present and also some animals for ploughing. These people produce primarily for their own consumption. Another important and significant observation made during the field work by the researcher was regarding their habit of begging. In the interaction with the community they mentioned that begging is so strongly rooted in them and it could be also considered to be one of their economic activities in the contemporary times.

Few of the Birhor now depend on agricultural labour, construction or repair works in and outside the village. Since the type of land available is dry land, they have to depend upon monsoon for their cultivation. Frequent failure of the monsoons made the people to migrate to other areas. People from the Thanda explained that seasonal migration is high in the area as majority of them are marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers. Almost half of the households in the Thanda migrate to towns in the off-season, according to the Gram Panchayat Sarpanch. One informant stated that they are helpless and there is no other way except to migrate to other areas. It is also found from the fieldwork that few of the

younger people migrate to towns in the off-seasons and come back to Thanda during rainy season, to cultivate land or work as farm labourers.

Development Schemes

The Government of India is also running a central sector scheme exclusively for the development of the PVTGs. Government of India grants special funds under Central Sector Scheme for the development of the PVTGs. This fund is mainly utilised for the construction of the houses for them and execution of infrastructure development schemes such as road, bridge, minor irrigation, construction, renovation of ashram and school building in PVTGs dominated areas and also to create income generation through various schemes such as goatery, piggery, agriculture, ginger cultivation, etc.

The Chhattisgarh Government has implemented various schemes during the 11th Five-Year Plan period (2007–2012) with a huge budget of Rs. 108.70 lakhs. But all these development schemes proved to be a failure, due to lack of proper management by State Government. The condition of the Birhor has not changed yet. Some of the schemes are:

- *Chief Minister Security Plan:* Under this, the Birhor tribe with their below poverty line (BPL) card can avail 35 kg of rice for free, every month.
- The Chhattisgarh Government has also taken up some housing schemes, such as *Indira Awas Yojana*.
- All families are provided with an *Antyodaya* card which they use to get rice, wheat and kerosene per family per month.
- Social Security Scheme is also provided to them in which they get Rs. 400 as pension.
- Government agencies also provide hens and goats to them for their welfare.

It is observed from the fieldwork that the Birhor have been provided basic infrastructure, like houses under Indira Awas Yojana, community houses, wells, tube wells, supplementary nutrition feeding centres, 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. The Birhor community has shown good response to the development programmes initiated by the government and other agencies. By the impact of these interventions some of them have crossed the poverty line; turned literates, sharecroppers, businessmen, tractor drivers and are sending their children to schools. The main thrust of the schemes is to strengthen the assets base of the Birhor tribe in the study area. It is apt to mention here Mishra et al.'s (2016) argument that state and non-state actors must play pro-active role to help them to settle in a place. Voluntary organisations such as Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Ramakrishna Mission have started to rehabilitate them in permanent camps in different villages with built houses also providing food grains, clothes, blankets, mosquito nets, free

education, mid-day meal for the children and employment in the locally established handlooms and so on.

Issues and Challenges Faced by Birhor

Being PVTGs, Birhor tribe is known for their distinct culture. They are considered as the people of forest. Their life also represents the man–nature–culture bond in their vicinities. But the Birhor tribe residing in Umariya Dadar live in a very poor socio-economic condition. Many of them do not have their own land. Most of them are living in *non-patta* (unrecognised) land with fear in their mind of displacement. The Prime Minister's *Awas Yojana* scheme is availed by few people in the area. Majority of them are illiterate in the settlement. They still lead their life in the primitive economic stage of development. Due to the lack of money their kids roam with almost tattered outfit or with the uniform which is provided by the government school. Due to the lack of sufficient money many of them eat once in a day. Rice is their staple food in the study settlement. They consume half of the 35 kg of rice, which they use to get under BPL and *Antyodaya* schemes, and sell the rest of the rice and wheat to the nearest market for money. This is the reason most of them are malnourished and may fall prey to diseases. It is also observed during our fieldwork that the pension schemes are full of loopholes. The old people in the Birhor family are not getting pension on a regular basis. The *Sarpanch* of the village asks them bribe to process their forms for pension in the settlement.

The goats and hens are also not productive in nature as they are not able to provide them proper grazing area and lack of veterinary facilities nearby their habitats. Most of the animals die due to the seasonal diseases in the study area. They also lack knowledge about the services of veterinary due to their illiteracy and backwardness. Mainly, it is said that the tribes never show discrimination against other tribes. But the scenario is different in the study settlement. The major tribes of the village are Gond, Kavar and other non-tribals or caste groups such as Yadav and Thakur who treat them badly and discriminate against them in their day-to-day activities. The dominance of upper castes is clearly visible in the study settlement. Many times Bihors are not even allowed to put their words in the Panchayat dominated by the upper castes and other backward classes (OBCs).

On the other hand, the modernisation is also affecting their lives and livelihoods. Earlier they used to engage in the agricultural activities as wage labourers during agricultural operations. But now due to the advancement and arrival of new tools and machines, Birhor people lost their livelihoods in their settlement.

The resultant of prevailing situations in the village is migration. Since the male members migrate to the towns, women are the major sufferers, as they have to take care of their families. The conditions of women are very poor in the village. Due to poor sanitation, they are frequently affected by several diseases, and more often prone to ill health, and sometimes they lose their lives as revealed by the respondent of the settlement.

The majority of youth of Birhor have to go to nearby towns in search of their livelihoods. Once, they obtain some kind of works in the towns, the majority are not returning to their settlements except to attend functions and ceremonies in their families. Due to the lack of works in the summer seasons, remaining lot of youth form groups and go to Ratanpur and Bilaspur for wage works. They normally engage themselves in the works related to construction activities. Their daily wage rates are Rs. 250 for each person. Few of them stay in their worksite and return to their settlement during off-seasons or in emergencies. They save some money and send it to their parents. Some of the youth have turned to bad habits due to their peer group in the cities and towns. There are around 15–20 families who regularly migrate to the towns during off-seasons. Thus, these things have drastically affected the lives and livelihoods of Birhor people of the settlement.

Are PVTGs Lives and Livelihoods at Stake?

Srivastava (2008, p. 30) in his critical essay 'Concept' of 'Tribe' in the Draft National Tribal Policy argued that the word 'primitive' to be used for certain kinds of societies came into vogue in the latter half of the 19th century during the colonial era. The Victorian scholars were interested in finding out the stages through which human society had passed before it reached its then extant state. It was also thought that the non-western societies (of Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America) of that time were the 'remains' 'survivals', 'social fossils' and 'vestiges' of the prehistoric ages, and their intensive study would illuminate the past of the Victorian society. The term 'primitive' was, therefore, used in a temporal sense. Nevertheless, in later course of time, post-independent nation state along with the then academia carried the word to denote the people who are vulnerable in all their spheres of life.

A growing body of literature over the past few decades has tried to explain the PTGs and their classification, but they could not succeed in neither defining it nor providing new dimension to the term. Nevertheless, in the year 1973, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) set up the 'Debar Commission' that named the PTGs as a separate category among the tribes who are lesser developed among all the tribal groups. The PTGs were again renamed as PVTGs in the year 2006 as researchers felt that calling them primitive is derogatory and inhumane.

Earlier, Radhakrishna (2009, p. 14) in her paper vividly discussed that PTGs are a subgroup identified for special attention by the government within the larger category of scheduled tribes (STs). The identification of ST itself is done on the basis of the following characteristics: (a) primitive traits; (b) distinctive culture; (c) geographical isolation; (d) shyness of contact with the community at large; and (e) backwardness (Standing Committee on Labour and Welfare, 2002). It was recognised by the government in the year 1975 that there were certain communities even within this vulnerable category which were at a much lower level of development compared to the other ST communities, and that the major share of funding went to those communities among them who were more assertive. Hence,

certain groups were identified for the first time in 1975–1976 (and then some more again in 1993) within the ST category, as the ‘poorest of poor amongst the STs’ and were called PTGs. The criteria fixed for identification of the PTG were: (a) pre-agricultural level of technology, (b) very low level of literacy and (c) declining or stagnant population (Radhakrishna, 2009).

According to Xaxa (2014), these tribes have been characterised based on their ‘vulnerability’. He also argued that despite of their classification as vulnerable, vulnerability has not been defined properly by any of the scholars. There are 75 PVTGs identified on their few characters:

- Livelihood totally depend on the forest
- Pre-agricultural existence level
- Low rate of literacy
- Stagnant or declining rate of population
- Subsistence based economy

Many Social Science scholars have argued that is this classification enough for categorising PVTGs. With the changing definitions of tribe the PVTGs have lost in a classification trap. According to the recent report by Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) no base-line surveys have been conducted among more than half of PVTGs. AnSI researcher also added that, of the 75 PVTGs, base-line surveys take place for only 40 PVTGs, even after declaring them PVTGs. These surveys are done to identify the habitat and socio-economic status of the PVTGs, to initiate the development schemes and policies for them, based on the accurate facts and figures.

Earlier, Misra (2016) in his study clearly mentioned the requirement for the revision of the PVTG list as the present list has overlaps and repetitions. The list contains synonyms of the same groups such as Birhor and Mankirdia in Odisha, as both of which refer to the same group, because of their traditional monkey hunting practices. The nearby tribal people also call them Jomsara for their custom of eating monkeys (in Mindari, ‘jom’ means ‘to eat’ while ‘sara’ means monkey) (Mishra et al., 2016, p. 61). However, in his pioneering work, S. C. Roy (1925) wrote an account of the Birhor about nine decades ago. He stated categorically that Birhor is peripatetic and semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer community and inhabiting in the midst of thick forest and jungles of Chotanagpur region of the then state of Bihar. According to Nadal (2014) the ‘Mankirdia’ are usually referred to as Birhor. This name is also used by peoples of various states which they inhabit.

As a final note, it can be said that the PVTGs in India are the representatives of the rich ancient culture. Misra (2016) in his study said that the PVTGs, despite of all odds, have survived to this day. So, development programmes and base-line surveys are needed for them to bring them to the mainstream of the society. The measures of the state are clearly echoed in the Draft National Tribal Policy. According to the Draft National Tribal Policy, tribal communities witnessing

[T]heir habitats and homelands fragmented, their cultures disrupted, their communities shattered, the monetary compensation which tribal communities are not equipped to handle slipping out of their hands, turning them from owners of the

resources and well-knit contented communities to individual wage earners in the urban conglomerates with uncertain features and threatened existence. (Dev Nathan & Xaxa, 2012)

In this article, Mishra et al. (2016) vividly highlight the ethnographic outline of the Birhor Tribe Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal. Further, they mentioned that livelihoods of Birhor people primarily revolve around the rope making out of fibres of a particular species of vine called as *Lamah* and *Udal*. They prepare different varieties of ropes, such as collar ropes for tying cattle, ropes for pulling water from wells, and a long rope having a number of loops leading from the main rope for tying cattle while treading them over paddy grains, a rope for the decoration of the cattle head, and a kind of narrow rope for use in bullock carts. A few of the Birhor people work as labourers in agricultural fields for weeding grass, ploughing, harvesting, transportation, and so on. In this article, Pankaj (2008) is primarily focused on the changing economy of Birhor tribe. Due to their contacts with neighbouring non-tribal people, Birhor are also looking for other avenues, such as tractor driving, construction work labourers, brick-kiln workers, etc. In this article, Firdos (2005) captured the kinds of changes experienced by Birhor people in their livelihoods patterns in the Central India.

Conclusion

To conclude our argument, it is apt to quote the report of the World Indigenous Peoples. The World's Indigenous Peoples' Report (2009) has made it clear that although the countries where these groups reside are making efforts to move ahead on account of some of the social and economic indicators, they are squarely failing on account of improving their education, health and living conditions in order to bring them to the manifolds of social and economic development. It has also stated that these groups suffer from disproportionately high levels of poverty, illiteracy, poor health and human rights abuse. The situation of Birhor tribe is similar to the other south Asian region tribal and indigenous peoples. Anthropologists of colonial and post-colonial India intimately tie the livelihoods of Birhor with the forests, which was evident from the numerous ethnographic works. However, the forests are also intimately tied up with the Indian state and commercially minded multi-national corporations (MNCs) who are only interested in its value as a commodity. It is also evident that the large-scale exploitation of forests by the MNCs in the name of development has never augured well with its small-scale usage by tribes to collect their MFP and to eke out their means of livelihoods (Gregory, 2013, p. 55).

It was also evident that since Independence, majority of the programmes meant for the upliftment of the marginalised have not yielded the desired results so far and VP are still becoming more vulnerable and poor. Thus, they are looking at the state for help and aid (Kasi, 2011). The development programmes and schemes are broad encompassing various issues, integrative and ideal efforts to stamp out vulnerability, poverty and to eliminate inequalities in distribution of

assets and resources equally, by creating favourable infrastructures and offering support to individuals and individual households. Further, the programmes are beset with problems relating to coordination of various elements that necessarily intervene and intersect the areas of operation. These include human elements—discharging the duties of the functionaries, location of the institutions, power politics and natural local conditions. By all these vicissitudes, the life of Birhor in Chhattisgarh is still looking beamy and they are still hoping for a positive change in the years to come.

Though, nowadays, Birhor started a settled life due to the restrictions on their movement by the forest laws and also exhaust of forest resources, their traditional occupation of hunting and gathering is still in the back of their mind as revealed by the one of the informants during our fieldwork. It is apt to mention here the statement of Firdos (2005) that due to massive degradation of forest resources and reduction of forest cover, the traditional livelihoods of Birhor are altered significantly and they are now moving towards alternative forms of livelihoods available in their vicinities. It shows that they need the support of the state and non-state actors to provide them better access to forest resources and equal distributions of land and other natural resources. To conclude, we propose that proper coordination and cooperation between the state and non-state actors to implement the interventions in a meaningful way is the only way out to free the VP from the clutches of poverty and social and economic inequalities.

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Note

1. The term ‘people’ is used interchangeably with tribe and community or group to refer to *Birhor* in the article.

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