

Educational Empowerment of the Birhor Tribe: A  
Primitive and weaker section of Jharkhand  
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**Abstract:**

The newly carved state of Jharkhand consists of 32 tribal communities constitute 26.8 percent of the total population of the state. Out of the total tribes of the state Birhor is one of the primitive tribes. This tribe is still represent the lowest stratum of development in the state in spite of several development schemes were implemented through five-year plan period. The Birhor

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are the denizens of Jharkhand. They are nomadic, semi nomadic, hunter and food gatherers. More than 90 percent of their daily routine is associated with forest. Forest is the hub of their life and plays a vital role in their economy. The Birhor and forest have had symbiotic relationship through the ages. They cannot think of their existence without forest. They are the real custodians of the forest. They like to be born in forest and die in forest. Forest not only provides raw materials for economic activities but also it is the playground and educational centre of the them right from the very birth to the death of the Birhor. They know how to manage the forest and forest resources. They use to regard forest as their own ancestral property because it provides hunting animals, food, chop, rope fibre, herbal medicine, honey, housing material, fuel etc. Edible roots and tubers, leaves and fruits are collected from the forest and consumed by them both as staple and substitute food. They possess an astonishingly wide knowledge base on the usages and ecology of the rich flora and fauna (Sahu, 1998).

**History of education among tribes**

The history of education among tribes is very old. The content of education was based on both perceived and felt experience. This education was neither supposed to introduce new and alien world view nor it was supposed to promote only conservatism. The main purpose was to equip children with those set of knowledge and mechanism for its effective functioning which was highly logical, behavioural, therefore, practical in day-to-day life with reference to both social control and social change. Hence, the nature of education was totally informal but completely functional and, therefore, practical and socially relevant. The aim of this education was to improve quality of life of tribal masses in a limited and material sense by increasing their dependence on outside forces (Choudhary, 2012). Hence, education remained a vitally important aspect of every society since time immemorial in the form of non-formal way. Subsequently, it became the formal way after becoming institutionalised way of education (Sahu, 2001; 2012).

Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa and a great revolutionary had once said that 'Education is the most powerful weapon to change the world.' A nation's development depends upon its ability to create skilled human resources through the promotion of quality education among its citizens. Thus, one of the avenues to study development is education. This also promotes social mobility to think about their betterment and instrumental in shaping their quality of life. Education means the broader process of enculturation and socialisation. Hence, Anthropologists and Sociologist have always given priority to education in the matter of tribal welfare and development, but not merely as imparting of literacy or theoretical knowledge of certain things, but also the broader process of induction into the learners culture (Bhowmick, 1980). Robert Redfield, an eminent American Anthropologist, in the discussion of social organisation of civilisation pointed out five important components for discussing civilisation, viz., environment, social organisation, human career, personality type and world view but emphasis had been given into two important paradigms, i.e, human career and personality, which highly depend on education. So, from his thoughts education should be accepted as the first change available resources for tribal development (Debnath, 2012). Thus, the important of education has been universally recognised irrespective of diverse societal patterns. This is more essential for tribal development because even after more than 67 years of independence only a handful of tribal people are educated. The tribals require not only general literacy, but also other skills which equip them to face the exogenous forces of modernisation.

Today we are having numerous means of spreading up knowledge, but during the prehistoric era humanity could have no considerable and estimable means of acquiring, imparting and spreading up of knowledge. In those days, people were almost toys of nature having very little knowledge of nature. They know one thing i.e, the sense of equality in the form of freedom of knowledge, because knowledge is not bureaucratized by any particular section of people. At the global level, considerable works have been done on the sociology of education. Karl Mannheim's study was the pioneering followed by Brameld's 'Cultural Foundation of Education, and the remarking of culture; Life and Education in purer to Rice'; Jule's Henry's 'An outline for the study of Education,' Margret Mead's 'Coming of age in Samoa'; Splinder's (Ed.) 'Education and Culture etc.' In India some important

works have been done in this direction like those of K. P. Chattopadhyay , B. N. Basu, T. N. Madan, Sachchidanand, , L. P. Vidyarthi, N. K. Ambasth, Sita Toppo, D. S. Nag, Hilda Raj, Chaturbhuj Sahu etc. They have left the need of remodelling the educational pattern for the tribal people (Samantha 1997). Chaturbhuj Sahu's work on the educational achievement among the Birhor (a Vanishing Tribe of Jharkhand ) was a landmark in the history of the development of Birhor, who had zero percent literacy and could start to write letter within nine months of teaching (Sahu,1995). We find that non- formal education was replaced by formal education i. e, opening of school in tribal areas especially after 1950. The school is the effective instrument for the spread of literacy. But even after 67 years of schooling education, the present of literacy in India is only 52.2 percent whereas in UK ,West Germany and USA, it is 100 percent. ( Sahu, 2014).

### **Literacy Level**

Literacy is taken as an important indicator of development status in education .The literacy rate for the total population in India has increased from 52.12 percent to 64.84 percent during the period from 1991 to 2001, whereas the literacy rate among the scheduled tribes has increased from 29.60 % to 47.10%. If we see the trend of educational development 1931 onwards, we will find the increase in literacy rate from 0.7% to 47.10% in scheduled tribes, while 8.3 % to 64.84% in general population. Among the numerically larger tribes, Oraon and Kharia have more than half of the population in stage of seven years and above are literate while Munda and other dominating tribal group have literacy rate than that of the national average. Out of the 8 primitive tribal groups of Jharkhand the worst condition of educational literacy is found among the Birhor. The total population of the Birhor in Jharkhand is nearly 4500. Out of them about 10 boys have attained education upto Matric. This could be possible by the efforts taking by Bokaro Steel Plant and few other voluntary organisations. About 4% children in the age group of 5 to 14 years are attending school situated in their respective areas.

### **Educational experiments among the Birhor**

Since the tribal area is vast and regional variation is wide to cover under the literacy programmes a well planned and effective implementation of educational programme is different. As a result , the literacy programme is failed to produce desired results . The two main issues in education of tribal children that emerged were inadequate physical access and socio-cultural differences which came in the way of their participation in schooling. The seventh All India Educational Survey 2002 shows that a total of 80 percent of tribal habitations have schools within or less than 1 km radius at primary level. Thus , for 20 percent of the habitations at the primary stage access was still an issue.

The Birhor comes under the category of 20 percent . For educational development among the Birhor credit goes to late Prof. L.P. Vidyarthi, the then Head, Department of Anthropology , Ranchi University, Ranchi and his student Prof. Chaturbhuj Sahu Ex.- HOD Anthropology , Vinoba Bhawe University, Hazaribag. Prof. Vidyarthi attempted to start a school exclusively for Birhor at Chalkari Birhor Tanda in the year 1976. Chaturbhuj Sahu, a young, enthusiastic and trained Anthropologist was deputed to undertake this great task to impart education among them. To teach a Birhor student is not a easy task, because they did not have any tradition of education.

In the month of March 1977, Prof. Vidyarthi received three full length letters written by three Birhor students. It was a landmark in the history of development in the field of education that a community which had zero percent literacy only in about 9 months could write a letter.

Thereafter the government tried every best to increase the literacy rate among the Birhor by deputing teachers from the local areas but the result is again not encouraging. The authoress of the present paper found that almost all Birhor expressed their views of role of the teachers deputed by the department of Anthropology i.e, Chaturbhuj Sahu. They were of opinion that Sahu Sir used to devote his full time right from the morning to the late night with the children (Sahu, 2012). They also complained that the school teacher is very irregular in almost all Birhor Tandans. On this account they expressed their great resentment and dissatisfaction. Any discussion on educational empowerment of a weaker section like Birhor may be meaningful only if it based on any understanding of their demographical, cultural, and ecological sphere. The old approach to education was based on uniform policy for the whole of Indian tribes which totally failed because not taking into consideration over the above facts. One could take one of the two conventional approaches while discussing educational achievement. Education is a tool of transition of culture accumulated knowledge and experience of a society. Hence, the planners of educational development should take the suggestions and recommendation of well experienced educationist on the basis of culture and felt needs of the community instead of science based. The new National Policies of Education was again formed in April 1986 . For the first time the policy laid emphasis on education improvement of scheduled tribes. This accorded the following:-

- i. Opening of Primary School in tribal areas.
- ii. Imparting educational training to educated scheduled tribe people.
- iii. Tribal youth to take up teaching .
- iv. Promoting residential schools.
- v. Introducing incentive schemes.
- vi. Opening of non formal education centres and

vii. Curricular for tribal students at all stages of education to create awareness (Sahu, 2015).

The new education system is neither the construct of the local culture or influenced by local culture nor practically controlled at the local level in the true sense of the term, in spite of number of state induced experiments in the recent past such as Panchayati Raj institution, Education Guarantee Scheme, Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, Mid- day meal, Parents-Teachers Association, free book and uniform, modern infrastructural facilities in schools & so on. Today there are 08 Central Govt. Schemes to popularize literacy and education among tribes. These are - scheme for construction of hostels for ST girls & boys, scheme for the establishment of Ashram Schools in Tribal Sub- Plan areas, Post Matric Scholarship Scheme (PMS), Book Banks, up gradation of merit, National Overseas Scheme for higher studies Abroad, Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship (RGNF), scheme for top class education for ST students and vocational Training in tribal areas (VTC) (Annual report 2009-2010, ministry of Tribal Affairs). But critically speaking there is only limited scope and space for the local requirements and features in the course content of the on-going education system. So far as quality of learning is concerned, it is far from satisfaction. More than 80 percent tribal people expressed their views in a negative manner. They were in the opinion that the earlier education was better in comparison to the quality of today's education. Today teachers are not faithful, class II standard students of the earliest days and class X standard students of today are equal. Today schools, teachers, infrastructural facility, incentives etc. have increased but quality of teaching has deteriorated. Today teachers are more qualified but they do not have interest in teaching. They are simply doing their jobs in the mechanical manner (Chaudhary, 2012 B).

### **Conclusion**

The educational development of Birhor tribe has been initiated immediately after getting independence. Lots of money had been spent over the achievement of educational goal but yet it has not yielded satisfactory results. It seems that the Birhor still have to go a long way to come up to the at least average level in the field of education. A fresh look will be favourable for this tribe which will be based on the enthusiastic step taken by Prof. Chaturbhuj Sahu approach because the Birhor are leading an isolated life and away from the formal way of educating their children. No doubt the Birhor are trying to adopt the educational system but the acute poverty situation make them handicapped. Moreover the successive failure of government development have broken their backbone and rethrown to the same ugly situation they have become very serious about the government proposal. They are blaming the government for adopting the prostitution as a source of livelihood.

Which is again educational diversion of the children belonging 5- 14 years of age groups.

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