

# Education and Patterns of Marriage System: A Micro Study on the Birhors in Hazaribag District, Jharkhand

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## Abstract

The Birhors, one of the most primitive tribes of Hazaribagh in Jharkhand states, are nomadic hunters, food gatherers and rope makers. In Jharkhand, Birhor are found in different places like Palamu, Garhwa, Singhbhum, Giridih, Lohardaga, Ranchi, Hazaribagh, and Gumla. Linguistically they belong to Astro- Asiatic Mundari group and have their own dialect.

The Birhors tribe of Jharkhand consider themselves as the descendants of the Sun. The word Birhor means man of jungles. They are fully depended on natural environment. Their economy is still traditional and mainly based on forest. Forest plays a vital role in their life. Birhor collect a number of fruits, wood, vegetable etc. from the forests. Rope and rope made articles are also the important primary occupations of the Birhor. They have great specialization in making ropes from different types of bark of creepers and trees. Hunting and trapping of animals and birds are considered as their food. Sometimes they sell these articles at the local hatts (market) for earning money. They also gather roots, shoots, leaves, fruits and other forest products from the forest. As a result all the traditional settlements of the Birhors are found near forests.

The standard of education of the Birhor is very low. Generally they are illiterate. At present we see the 'First Generation Learner'. Most of the girls initially attend the school and reach up to the stage of primary level. They are reluctant to continue their high school education as the school is far away from the home and parents do not wish to send them to school. In Birhor communities' marriage is an important institution. Basically child marriage is practiced in their society where the age of the bride varies from 12 to 14 years and that of the bridegroom from 15 to 17 years of age. Majority of the girls' marriage take place at the age of 12 to 13 years. As a result they are married before their puberty. The socio – economic condition of the Birhors has improved a little. This paper has tried to find out the relationship between early marriage and low education of the Birhors of Jharkhand.

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**Keywords:** Patterns of Marriage System of Birhor, Educational Status of Birhor, Age at marriage, Child Marriage

## Introduction

The Birhor, one of the most primitive tribes of Hazaribag in Jharkhand state, are nomadic hunters, food gatherers and rope makers. The Word Birhor is made of two

Mundari words - bir and hor. Bir means Jungle (forest) and Hor means man. So it means mans of jangle. They belong to Mundari family. They are also famous for hunting and rope making from indigenous fibers of trees and creepers known as chop. Linguistically they belong to Astro- Asiatic Mundari group. The Birhor always like to settle not far away from the villages of peasants because they sell their rope and forest products to the villagers and market which is called ‘Hatt’.

Birhor are basically hunters and food gatherers. Their economy is still traditional and mainly based on forest. Forest plays a vital role in their life. Birhor collect a number of fruits, wood, vegetable etc from the forests. Rope and rope made articles are also the important primary occupations of the Birhor. They have great specialization in making ropes from different types of bark of creepers and trees. The Birhor has supernatural beliefs on different types of trees or animals. The Birhor religion presents a mixture of animism, animatism, naturalism, worship and belief in Bhuta-Preta and witchcraft. They beliefs there are different type of sprits which have enormous effect in their day to day life.

The Birhor settlement is known as tanda which consists of at least half a dozen huts. The huts are of a conical shape. They are erected with the help of leaves and branches. The settled Birhor have erected house with the help of mud wall, bamboo and wood thatched with handmade tiles. Birhors’ house name is Kumbha.

**Table 1:** Clan of the Respondents

Sl No.	Clan	Frequency	Percentage(%)
1.	Mahali	45	30.00
2.	Hemrome	18	12.00
3.	Mudi	60	40.00
4.	Maghaya	27	18.00
Total		150	100.00

Among the Birhor tribe, clan generally known is ‘Killi’ which is the most important kin group. It is an exogamous group, through the rule of exogamy is not maintained in all the cases. In this study there are four clans are found in the Birhor tribe, these are Maghaiya, Mudi, Mahali and Hembram but according to Roy (1925) there are thirty seven (37) clans among the Birhor in Jharkhand (Manna, 2000).

### Research Design

This study is proposed to bring under the spotlight the educational status and age at marriage of Birhor. For this study Jharkhand state will be selected. From Jharkhand, the Birhor of Hazaribag district has been selected. In Hazaribag district five Blocks are selected i.e. Churchu, Mufasin, Barhi, Katkamsandi and Dumron. From this five blocks seven villages (Churchu, Jhumri Mahua, Demotarn, Kewal, Katkamsandi, Kandsar and Sijhua) and total 150 sample households is considered for the study. All the data have been collected through direct interview method.

Data have been collected through participate observation, direct interview method and also focused group discussions to know their socio - economic background as well as their age at marriage and educational status.

**Table 2:** Sample Villages of Birhor of Jharkhand

Name of the Block	Name of the G.P	Name of the Villages	Total Household	Total Sample Household
Churchu	Churchu	Churchu	20	16
	Balsagra	Jhumri Mahua	10	06
Muffasin	Morangi	Demotarn	31	26
Barhi	Khodahar	Kewal	50	47
Katkamsandi	Katkamsandi	Katkamsandi	15	10
	Kandsar	Kandsar	34	30
Dumron	Ichak	Sijhua	20	15
Total			180	150

Above table represent that Block, Panchayat and Village basis total household and sample household.

**Data Collection** - Quantitative research techniques were used for data collection. Fully structured questionnaire was used as the qualitative tool and in depth interview and non participant observation was used as the Qualitative tool in the study. The data were collected from June, 2012 to July, 2012.

### **Socio – Economic Background**

Besides rope making, hunting or trapping is also important source of livelihood. They hunt by nets and they also trapped pig, rabbit, squirrel, rat etc. After the hunting they sell this animal in the neighboring market. For livelihood, the Birhors have traditionally depended on nature, and more particularly on the nearby forests. As a result all the traditional settlements of the Birhors were found near forests. However, massive deforestation due to the expansion of human population and developmental activities, the traditional sources of livelihood for the Birhors have become scarce. Yet, due to the non availability of alternative means of livelihood, the Birhors are still compelled to struggle (non viciously) with other local communities and people to utilize the little resources they can get from the jungles.

Above table represent socio – economic profile of the Birhor. Different parameter like age, education, husband’s occupation, family income, family size, family type etc. revealed socio – economic profile of Birhor.

Collection of Forest Products and other useful items from nearby areas is the prime source of livelihood for the Birhors. Food items, medicine, firewood, fodder, leaves, firewood and branches to make the kumbhas etc are the chief articles collected by the Birhors. All the men and women and even (non kid) capable children contribute

**Table 3:** Socio – Economic Profile of the Respondents

Age(Year)	Below19	19-23	24-28	29–33	34–38	39–43	Above 43	Total
	10(6.67)	15 (10.00)	26(17.33)	23(15.33)	22(14.67)	08(5.34)	46(30.66)	150 (100.00)
Education	Illiterate 150(100.00)	Total 150(100.00)						
Husband'sOccupation	Agriculture	Driver	Labour	Service	Hunting & Gathering	No Occupation	Total	
Family Income (Rs.)	36 (24.00) 0 - 1000	17 (11.33) 1001-4000	12 (8.00) Above 4000	01 (0.67) Total	70 (46.67)	14 (9.33)	150 (100.00)	
Family Size	121 (80.67) 1 -3	29 (19.33) 4 – 6	0 More than 7	150(100.00) Total				
Family Type	80 (53.34) Nuclear Family	68 (45.33) Joint Family	02 (1.33) Extend Family	150 (100.00) Total Family				
	146 (97.34)	02 (1.33)	02(1.33)	150(100.00)				

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

towards this activity. However, most of the gathering is done by the females, especially from the areas surrounding the tanda or the nearby forests, or when they accompany the men to the far off jungles.

### Pattern of Marriage System

The Birhor believe that marriage is significant for the satisfaction of sex hunger and reproduction of children. It is also valuable for the continuation of ethnicity from one generation to the other. Naturally marriage within the same clan is prohibited but now-a-days their rule of exogamy is not followed. Birhor families are patriarchal and patrilineal. Their household unit is often referred as 'Orha'. After marriage the newly married couple form another Orha or separate Orha. The Birhor follow the rule of tribe endogamy and clan endogamy.

Marriage is one of the important social institutions and it is a means of establishing a new family through which society perpetuates. It is the basis of elementary family and a new relationship or alliance is forged between two families in its ultimate course. After marriage economic partnership is formed between the husband and wife in a family. When a Birhor crosses adolescence and becomes adult (read marriageable), it is the responsibility of the father to get his son or daughter married. The opinion of the mother about a suitable match is significant and the mother may herself suggest the right choice.

**Table 4:** Age at Marriage of the Respondents

Sl.No.	Age at Marriage(Year)	Birhor (No)(%)
1.	Below-14	02 (1.33)
2.	14-18	97 (64.67)
3.	19-23	48 (32.00)
4.	24-28	03 (2.00)
5.	29-33	0
6.	Above-33	0
Total		150 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Table 4 depicts that age at marriage of the respondents. Birhors maximum (64.67%) age at marriage is 14 – 18 yrs.

The negotiations are traditionally carried by the father or uncle of both the parties. Though in the same tanda the mother also may talk to the woman of the other family with whom relationship is sought. But even when the women of both the families may agree completely, the formal stamp is put by the male members of both the families. Theoretically, a male may continue to live in the same house and ask his wife to leave, if such a situation may arise. Though no such case was either seen or witnessed. However, the wife will necessarily have to leave the matrimonial house

if she decides to marry or stay with another person. This is because the house is supposed to belong to the husband in a patriarchal society. Further, in cases of separation, the children would necessarily be with the father, if he is capable and willing to maintain. There is no formal provision for divorce. But separation and desertion do happen though are not much prevalent.

The opinion of neither the boy nor the girl is sought before fixing the marriage. However, no effort is made to keep the negotiations secret, and the boy or girl against the relationship may sound their protest, which may or may not be heeded. Though Birhors say that they would not marry their children (either boy or girl) if the protest is vehement or reasonable enough. But as a matter of fact, usually neither the boy nor the girl protests, except in rarest of rare cases.

However, on occasions the boys or the girls may have a “choice” of their own or a preference for a marriage partner, and may divulge this to their elders usually through their mothers. The Boy’s view is likely to be more respected (if possible), as compared to the girl’s preference. However, the girls are more thoughtful in exposing their choice mostly due to the reasons of modesty.

In the Birhor communities marriage is the important institution. Basically child marriage is practiced in their society where the age of the bride varies from 12-15 and that of the bridegroom from 15-18. But sometimes adult marriage also practiced in this community. Although some marriage unions are settled at the developed age (15-20) when girls attain puberty which known as ‘*Bekar*’. The common way of acquiring a groom in the Birhor is by bride price. When the child attains the marriage age, i.e., between 15 to 25 years, it becomes the responsibility of the father get his son or daughter married. But, it is the custom that the father of the boy has to approach the father of the girl when the father of the girl agrees, the father of the boy settles about the bride price. Society provides no restriction to negotiate marriage among the kin groups. Bride price is the system which prevails in their society. Generally after selection of the bride and bridegroom from both the parties before marriage, the bridegroom’s parents talk to the bride parents to fix up the bride price which varies from Rs.35 to Rs. 42 only. The bride price is paid in cash and in kind. The bride price in kind varies from current price rate. The bride price in kind includes clothes for the bride, bridegroom, bride’s parents, bride’s brothers and sisters. Rice, goat or rice, Pulse and Vegetables are given for the community feast on the occasion of marriage. Additionally some chicken or goat and some daru could also be gifted. It is however, not absolutely necessary to demand or pay any certain amount as the gift for the bride. In Kandsar, one of the Birhor claimed that the custom of dowry (where valuables and money is paid by the girls family to the boy’s family), prevalent amongst the other communities of the region, has begun being noticed by the Birhor as well. Possibly, this has kept the Bride price low till date. It may be compromised to any degree by mutual agreement between the two sides, and depends much on the economic condition of the two families, specially the boy and his family. But generally, no price is paid for the bride if she is a widow or a deserted woman.

Clearly, there is no restriction on the remarriage of a deserted male or female or of the widow or the widow.

When the father of the boy accepts the demand of the father of the girl, the marriage is declared settled. Now no other families make an attempt to reach for the marriage proposal with that girl. When the bride price is paid, the date of marriage is decided with the help of the naya or the Tanda head. The date of marriage is kept within a month. After the fixation of marriage date the bride and the groom have to follow a number of taboos related to food, visit, bath, dress etc. The parents of the bride and the groom also observe a number of taboos. The fathers of the bride and the groom, invites their paternal, maternal relatives to participate in the marriage of their son and daughter. The invitation follows the reciprocal exchange of visit, service, gift and presentation.

The marriage ceremony takes place in the bride's house or near temple. They wear ornaments in wrist, finger, feet, neck and ear. The ornaments are made up of brass, bronze, steel, glass, thread, shell, seeds etc. The bride and bridegroom take seats and the bridegroom to apply vermillion mixed with oil on the forehead of the bride with the right hand. In the next morning chicken and rice-beer which are received from the bridegroom's house are distributed among the participants. The muri and chicken are served to the newlywed couple. They enjoy the day with great pleasure. After marriage the bridegroom brings the bride to his father's house. In the morning, the vidai of the bride and the groom is done in new dresses with some money and daily use materials. When they reach the tanda (village) then the Naya worships the spirits and deities of marai for the well being of the newly married couple. After the marriage, the couple departs with the bridegroom's parties for the husband's household. There the girl stays for some days and then the couple visits the parents of the girl and stays there for a few days. The family of the girl may negotiate with the husband to leave the girl for some time. But this is not insisted upon. They may also suggest that the couple settle down at the tanda of the girl's parents. If the couple agrees, the girl's family helps the couple to build a kumbha. But usually, the girls settle down at the tanda of her husband.

It is said that marriages are made in heaven. But now still have to go about finding a mate. Finding one is simple in Indian societies. Either the marriage is fixed by parents or it is a love marriage agreed upon by both the individuals. But amongst tribal people, there are some interesting customs and practices. Some have adopted the custom of mutual agreement by the two families and many have their own custom. Like in the epics, Mahavarata and Ramayana a trial is given to some suitors. There is a saying that when you educate a woman you educate a nation. Educated women are more likely to have a say in decision-making regarding the size of their families and the spacing of their children. They are also likely to be more informed and knowledgeable about contraception and the health care needs of their children. Child marriage was widely prevalent among the Hindus and Tribal as parents wanted their daughters to marry early so they could protect their virginity and purity. Existing

gender norms on the roles of girls focus mainly on marriage, and as such it becomes acceptable to remove girls from school for marriage. In some cases girls are not even allowed to go to school at all, because an education is perceived as unnecessary for becoming wives or mothers. In many tribal societies, literacy may also be correlated with fertility. For this reasons, the literacy rate for scheduled tribe women is generally quite low. The sexual and reproductive health of married girls is notably poorer than that of their unmarried counterparts. Girls and women who marry early and with little or no schooling often have limited awareness of their rights and lack the knowledge and confidence to negotiate safer sex.

Most of the villages are still now deprived of the light of education. Among the Birhor the practice of child marriage is prevalent. Majority of girls are given in marriage at the age under 18. As a result in many cases they are married before their puberty. In many cases it is observed that due to their low age of marriage the die of child birth or their babies die due to malnutrition. Still now in period of pregnancy or before pregnancy the women should follow many restriction or superstition. They tie joributi both for male or female child. They wet the root at night in water and drink it in the morning. They take 'Premjori' for male child and 'Hathjori' for female child. They also used joributi as a contra septic object. Most of the Birhor are not aware of family planning because they are not made aware of family planning.

**Educational Status of Birhor**

Among the Birhor people the standard of education too is very low. In short they may be called illiterate. At present those who go to school are the 'First Generation Learner'. Most of the girls read up to the stage of primary level. There reluctant to getting themselves admitted into high school is due to the fact that the school is far away from the home and parents do not wish to sent them to schools.

**Table 5:** Educational Status of Bihors

SexEducation	Male	Female
Illiterate	120 (46.33)	144 (57.83)
Just write name	13 (5.02)	14 (5.62)
No admission in school	53 (20.46)	46 (18.47)
I-IV	52 (20.08)	32 (12.85)
V-X	21 (8.11)	13 (5.23)
Total	259 (100.00)	249 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

**Table 6:** Relation between age at marriage and education among the married woman

Age (Yrs.) at Marriage Education	12 & below	13-15	16-18	Above 18
Illiterate	34 (87.18)	72 (88.89)	34 (55.06)	01(50.00)
Reade & Write	5 (12.82)	09 (11.11)	06 (28.09)	0
I – IV	0	0	02 (4.76)	0
V – X	0	0	0	1 (50.00)
Secondary	0	0	0	0
H.S & Above	0	0	0	0
Total	39 (100.0)	81 (100.00)	42 (100.00)	2 (100.00)

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

Table 5 & 6 indicates that educational profile of the Birhors. Table 5 specially depicts that educational status of all sample population of Birhors and table 6 represent relationship between age at marriage among the married women and their education.

For poor education or deprived education, one of the important causes is child marriage or early marriage. Here mention how to child marriage affect the education system of the Birhor.

- Girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory period before marriage or at the point of union and transfer to the marital home, which affects their ability to access the benefits of education.
- Early marriage or marriage of school-aged girls was considered the main barrier to achieving universal primary education.
- Early and forced marriage often marks the end of a girl's schooling and the beginning of a life at home. She will have few opportunities to find work, and if she does, her lack of education means it will be poorly paid, making it almost impossible to break free from poverty.
- Early and forced marriage limits a girl's opportunity to go to school or benefit from alternative or vocational education. In turn, the children of mothers with low levels of education are less likely to be educated themselves.
- Early and forced marriage has a significant impact on a girl's reproductive and maternal health. A girl in her teens is twice as likely to die in childbirth as a woman in her twenties. If she gives birth before the age of 15, her risk is five times higher.

### Conclusion

Education is the main key of success and marriage is the way to make a family. Education makes people shed off the evil thoughts and bring prosperity to the nation as a whole by overcoming poverty, increasing income, improving health and reducing

family size and marriage is the unification of two families which makes a superior society. It is believed that if a mother is educated, then the children will automatically be educated.

The economic conditions of the most of the respondents are bad. They are the backward classes of the society. Most of the Birhor women are married in low age. They are isolated from the mainstream people. The educational condition of the respondents are very much poor, all respondents are illiterate. But all over sample population some Bihors are literate and maximum are 'First Generation Learner'.

India's backwardness is partly dependent on its illiteracy. The Bulk of its populations are still in the dark. After independence many positive measures have been taken for their betterment, Tribal Welfare Department and NGO have been taken very vital steps for their development but till today many such attempts have not shown effective effort. Illiteracy is one of the important causes for Birhor backwardness. Only education and economic security can improve their socio-economic condition and real enlightenment of Birhor. If their educational level is improved by Government policy then it is expected their socio – economic condition and life pattern is better in future.

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