
**Role of Different NGOs in the Tribal Development
in Purulia District of West Bengal: A Study**

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Abstract: *In recent years, the issues concerning tribal development approaches, policies and strategies, and the role of several Non-Governmental Organizations and Voluntary Organizations in the tribal development initiatives has become increasingly significant in the history of tribal studies throughout the world. Broadly speaking, NGOs or VOs are non-profit organizations that function independently of any government. Many of those organizations have achieved great success in awakening and empowering the tribals in different inaccessible and rugged areas. The deprived, exploited and disoriented tribal people have benefited immensely from the relentless humanitarian activities of those organization. In Purulia district of West Bengal, different NGOs have been working extensively for the welfare of the marginalized indigenous people, including the Santhals and Birhors, which should be specifically mentioned. Despite many difficulties and hindrances, they are working hard and moving forward to achieve their goal, that have become a beacon of hope for the destitute people of the district, especially in the tribal concentrated areas.*

Keywords: *Awakening, Empowering, Exploited, Inaccessible, Indigenous People Marginalized.*

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Introduction

Historically, different ‘Non-Governmental Organizations’(NGOs) or ‘Voluntary Organizations’ (VOs) have become increasingly significant as very crucial grass-root level agencies of social mobilization and development of the deprived sections of our society, especially the tribals. For enhancing the reach of different government development schemes, plans and projects and filling the gaps in the service deficit in inaccessible and rugged tribal areas, their excellent role has indeed been recognized in ideological, practical and universal ways. Many renowned NGOs and VOs are often involved and funded in the implementation of several tribal development schemes undertaken by the Central and the State Governments.

In Purulia district, different NGOs and VOs have been working extensively in the function areas of education, health and nutrition, women and child development, spreading socio-cultural- environmental awareness, vocational training, etc. for the welfare of the marginalized indigenous people, including the Santhals and Birhors, which should be specifically mentioned. The present study mainly deals with the role of different NGOs in the tribal development in Purulia District.

Objectives

The major objectives of the present study are:

1. To review the existing approaches, strategies and priorities, and the on-going programmes of different NGOs and VOs for the welfare of different ST communities, including the Santhal and Birhor of Purulia district.
2. To highlight various tribal development initiatives of those NGOs and VOs.
3. To assess the effectiveness of those development activities on the tribals under study.
4. To suggest some remedial measures that will surely be fruitful to fulfill the great humanitarian goal of tribal development of those NGOs and VOs in the district.

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Research Methodology

The present study is mainly based on historical methodology. Both the primary and secondary sources have been analyzed. For collecting necessary data, a direct participatory method has been followed. Furthermore, extensive field surveys, structured and unstructured interviews of the concerned indigenous people, intellectuals and authorities of several government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), observations and group discussions have been consulted. Different Census and Five-Year Plan reports, government reports, monographs and gazetteers have been used. On the other hand, various texts, magazines, research bulletins, journals, articles, news papers and periodicals gathered from different libraries, archives, museums and internet have also been followed. The collected data and sources have been analyzed and then treated through descriptive historical method for achieving the solution of the study.

Area and the People under Study

Purulia, the westernmost district of the Indian State of West Bengal, truly occupies a unique position in the ethnographic map of the entire State for having a variety of ethnic communities. According to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, as amended up-to-date, in the State of West Bengal, a total of forty ethnic groups have so far been notified as ‘Scheduled Tribes’(STs).¹Purulia is the third tribal concentrated district in the entire state after Jalpaiguri and Medinipur. It is really the sweet home to different tribal communities. The major tribal groups in the district are: Santhal, Bhumij, Kora, Munda, Mahali, Oraon, Sabar, Lodha / Kheria, Lohra, Chik Baraik, Gorait, Birhor, etc. According to the Census of 2011, in Purulia district, 5,40,652 people belong to the Scheduled Tribes, which is 18.45% of the total population of the district and 10.21% of the total ST population of the entire state.² In the district, the Santhal is the most and the Birhor is one of the least populated ethnic groups. The demographic profile of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Purulia district, including the Santhal and the Birhor with comparison to the total

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population of the district during the last four Census periods (Census 1981,1991, 2001 and 2011) is clearly shown in the following Table No. 1.

Table No: 1

Demographic profile of the STs, Santhals and Birhors in Purulia District

Total Population	1981 Census	1991 Census	2001 Census	2011 Census
District	18,53,801	22,24,577	25,36,516	29,30,115
STs	3,48,375	4,27,766	4,63,452	5,40,652
Santhals	2,24,097	2,74,539	3,03,321	3,39,094
Birhors	198	271	249	288

Sources: 1. Census of India, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011, Government of India,

2. District Census Handbook: Purulia, 2011, Government of West Bengal, pp. 39, 45.

As per the Census of 2011, out of a total population of 29,30,115 in Purulia district, 5,40,652 (18.45%) are STs. Among the STs, the Santhal is the major tribal community comprising 62.72% of the total tribal population and 11.57% of the total district population. On the other hand, the Birhor community, which constitutes only 0.05% of the total tribal population and 0.01% of the total district population, has been identified as the only ‘Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group’ (PVTG) in the district. Both communities have been living here in almost the same geo-natural environment with their incredible ethnic identity and socio-cultural and economic traits.

In search of an accurate assessment of the role of different Non-Governmental Organizations and Voluntary Organizations in the tribal development in Purulia district, 15 Santhal dominated villages in different parts of 13 blocks, and all the 5 Birhor concentrated villages in 3 blocks of the district had been selected for field surveys. Extensive field investigations were done for about fifteen months in five terms between October, 2018 and December, 2019 in different seasons of a year. Different types of conventional tools like interviews, group discussions and observations with the concerned tribal people, intellectuals and authorities of various educational institutions and government and Non-Governmental Organizations in the area under study were used for the collection of necessary data. Both structured and unstructured interviews had been conducted on the spot from people of different age, sex, educational and economic background in different contexts. To achieve the real goal of the study, special emphasis was given on interviewing the respondents about their socio-

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economic and cultural awareness. The sex-wise composition of the respondents is shown in Table No. 2.

Table No: 2
Sex-wise Composition of the Respondents

Category	No. of Respondents		Percentage	
	Santhals	Birhors	Santhals	Birhors
Male	345	182	53.08	47.77
Female	305	199	46.92	52.23
Total	650	381	100.0	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2018-2019.

The above Table shows that a total number of 650 Santhal and 381 Birhor persons have been investigated. During the investigations, a structured questionnaire was placed before each of them regarding their age, sex, educational, occupational and asset position, total earning, level of poverty, cultural cognizance, etc. The results of the questions regarding the aforesaid issues have definitely determined the direction and pace of our current study.

Role of Different NGOs in Tribal Development

There are many NGOs and VOs working for the well-being of different tribal communities in Purulia district. They have been continuously creating awareness about persistent problems of the indigenous people in the district and also acting as agents of their all-round change. All the necessary information in this regard has been gleaned from both the authorities of the concerned organizations as well as the comprehensive field investigations in the tribal villages surveyed.

1. Bharat Sevashram Sangha

The Bharat Sevashram Sangha, a spiritual brotherhood organization of monks and selfless workers devoted to the service of humanity and peace spread across India and even many places abroad, was founded in the year 1917 by the illustrious patriot saint Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavanandaji Maharaj. It is a philanthropic, charitable and generous organization registered

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under Act XXI of 1860 with head office in Kolkata as well as regional office at East Lake Road, Purulia. Its principal objectives are to help the distressed, to nurse the sick, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked and to promote educational facilities, especially among the depressed classes, including the tribals.³

With the ultimate goal of building a strong Indian nationality, the Bharat Sevashram Sangha has been conducting its multifarious activities in the fields of educational and medical services, eradication of untouchability, socio-cultural awakening, rural advancement, social welfare, tribal development, etc. Under the management of the Sangha, 'Pranabananda Shishu Tirtha', a Co-educational School (since 1995) from classes pre-primary to VII with more than 1,100 students, including 128 Scheduled Tribe students; 'Pranabananda Chhatrabas', a Hostel (since 2002) for 100 Scheduled Tribe boys; and 'Pranabananda Computer Training Centre' (since 2003) for tribal youth, have been continuing their services at Raghunathpur campus. At Ajodhya campus, a tribal Hostel (since 2016) for 50 Scheduled Tribe boys; and 'Pranabananda Vidyamandir', a Coaching Centre (since 2017) with 56 students from classes I to IV, including 23 Scheduled Tribe boys and 27 Scheduled Tribe girls, have been working intensively for the widespread expansion of education in those tribal inhabited areas.⁴ So, the relentless humanitarian activities of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha have become a beacon of hope for the powerless and miserable people of Purulia district, especially in the backward tribal areas.

2. Kalyan

Kalyan, a distinguished district level Non-Governmental Organization in Purulia district, has emerged as a multidisciplinary comprehensive rural development agency registered under the Societies' Registration Act, 1961 and affiliated to 'Ramkrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad', Narendrapur, Kolkata. Since its inception in 1980, the organization has been involved in sustainable rural development activities aimed at empowering the underprivileged for prosperity, especially in tribal populated areas of the district. Kalyan with its headquarters at Vivekananda Nagar, Purulia, has initiated different types of development projects and programmes in various fields like health, education, socio-cultural awareness, agriculture and vocational training over the years to promote the downtrodden rural community.⁵

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The 'Krishi Vigyan Kendra', a distinguished Farm Science Centre at village Jahajpur, has been functioning extensively in agricultural development through providing training, counselling and on-farm testing in rural areas under the management of Kalyan since 1992. The 'Jan Sikshan Sansthan', an institute of people's education at Vivekanandanagar and sponsored by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, basically focuses on skill development, competence building and awareness generation, especially to the adult illiterates, neo-literates, SCs, STs and women under the aegis of Kalyan since the year 2002. In addition to these, Kalyan also conducts Vocational Training, Adolescent Intervention Programme, Family Counselling, Coaching Centres and other sustainable integrated development activities in rural Purulia.⁶

3. Centre for Environmental and Socio-economic Regeneration (CESR)

Centre for Environmental and Socio-economic Regeneration is a prominent NGO working for environment protection and socio-economic development of different backward communities, including several tribal folk of Purulia, Bankura and Medinipur districts of West Bengal since its inception in 1993. It is registered under Societies' Registration Act in 1993 with registered office in 127/1A, Hazra Road, Kolkata and the project office at Dulmi, Purulia. The primary aim of this NGO is to create an enabling environment where people, especially from various disadvantaged and marginalized communities can participate in development process with equity and provoke overall wellbeing of masses by restoring and sustaining the foundation of productive natural resources.⁷

To enroll the dropout and out of school Scheduled Tribe children and provide them supplementary education, the CESR has been conducting a total of 14 'Supplementary Education Centres' at the hilly terrain region of Ajodhya hills, where at present a total of 776 Scheduled Tribe students (most of them belong to the Santhal community) are getting the opportunity of high quality modern education under the 'Supplementary Education Project' (SEP). Through the 'IIMPACT⁸ – CESR Girl Child Education Project', the CESR have provided huge educational opportunities to 1,790 girl students, of whom almost 75% are STs from 75 educational centres across Purulia-I and Bandwan blocks during the year 2017-18. It is also working to reduce child

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marriage and increase enrollment of adolescent boys and girls of age-group 10 to 19 years in Barabazar block and Purulia municipality under the 'Adolescent Intervention Programme' (AIP). This NGO has also been providing educational services through the 'e-Vidyaloka' and 'Internet Sathi Projects'; different Social, Environmental Protection and Health Awareness Generation Camps; Tree Plantation and Animal Resource Development Training Programmes in different blocks of the district, especially in the tribal concentrated areas.⁹

4. Manbhum Ananda Ashram Nityananda Trust (MANT)

Manbhum Ananda Ashram Nityananda Trust founded in 1960, is a registered NGO under the Act XXI of 1860 aimed at saving lives by empowering several marginalized sections of the society with the registered office at the village Laulara, Purulia, West Bengal. Since its inception, it has been working in the fields of basic education, social awareness, community media, health improvement and livelihood development of the weaker communities, particularly the tribals from ten most deprived districts of West Bengal, including Purulia.¹⁰

This NGO provided medical services, including referral service, etc. to the solitary Birhors of Purulia district from 2009 to 2011 under the 'Mobile Medical Unit for the Birhors Project' approved by the Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal. It is now working to provide Mobile Medical Camps with free medicines in several tribal dominated villages of 3 blocks: Jhalda-II, Manbazar-II and Bandwan appointed by the Department of Health and Family welfare, Government of West Bengal. It has also been conducting Social Awareness Generation Programmes in 20 Santhal concentrated villages in Puncha and Manbazar-I blocks. Moreover, different programmes like Tobacco Control, Community Media and Cultural Events are being conducted by the MANT in those two blocks of the district mentioned earlier.¹¹

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5. Purulia Dharti Marshal Society

The NGO named Purulia Dharti Marshal Society at village Jahajpur, block Joypur, district Purulia, with its head office at the village of Bhalidungri, block Arsha, district Purulia, continues its services in the fields of education, social awareness, health care, orphanage, environmental awareness, etc. to local poor and destitute tribals. Founded in 2012, this NGO is registered under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act of 1961. Mr. Naren Hansda, a famous Jhumur artist, social worker and the founding secretary of this NGO, established the 'Sido-Kanhu Mission' (SKM) at the footstep of the Bhalidungri hill in Arsha block in 2012 for promoting innovative education among the helpless tribal children in the remote tribal areas of the district.¹²

At present a total of 205 Scheduled Tribe students, including 102 boys and 103 girls are studying in three Primary Schools situated at village Bhalidungri under Arsha block, village Baruyakocha under Jhalda-I block and village Naoyagarh of Jhalda-I block under the guidance of the SKM. The tribal students of the SKM at Bhalidungri come from different neighbouring tribal inhabited villages such as Kamajara, Harda, Gurradih, Chakedabad, Shalgadumdumi, etc. A few tribal students and three homeless women have been given the opportunity to reside there. The ST students of those schools are being educated accordingly to different values alongside primary education and their traditional Santali rituals of archery, singing, music and dancing. The real vision of the 'Sido-Kanhu Mission' (SKM) is explicitly revealed by seeing a very short notice at the entrance of the Mission: "If we forget our own mother tongue and our culture, they have immense danger ahead."¹³ The ultimate reality is beautifully captured through the word.

6. Jadugora Adibasi Gram Bikash Kendra

Jadugora Adibasi Gram Bikash Kendra, a leading NGO of Purulia district, has included tribal welfare into its versatile programmes from the village Jadugora under Baghmundi block. Since its inception in 1993, the NGO has adopted socio-economic upliftment of the tribals and enhance

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their self-reliance and self-confidence as its goal. It has been working in the fields of education, social awareness, health awareness, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc. with and on behalf of the backward tribals of the hilly areas of Ajodhya.¹⁴

During the session 2017-18, a total of 180 Scheduled Tribe students, including 170 Santhal students from classes pre-primary to IV used to study in the Co-educational School named 'Vidyasagar Shishu Siksha Niketan' which was founded in the year 2005 under the aforesaid NGO. Among those students, 90 got the hostel facility in the same session. Apart from spreading education, this NGO is also trying cordially to propagate social as well as health awareness and to promote agriculture and animal husbandry among the backward Scheduled Tribe communities of that hilly region.¹⁵

7. Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha (PBVM)

Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha, Purulia Branch, an eminent Voluntary/Social Organization, has been performing various considerable humanitarian activities, especially for the backward tribal people in different blocks of the district. It is a registered organization attached with 'All India People's Science Network' (AIPSN) with its registered head office in Kolkata and regional office at East Lake Road, Purulia. The major objectives of the organization are to eradicate all forms of prejudices, improve the health status of the poor, develop socio-economic condition of the needy, and also maintain a pollution free, vibrant and healthy environment. To fulfill those objectives, it has been adopting and implementing different initiatives, particularly in various tribal populated villages of the district.¹⁶

The PBVM has been conducting various anti-superstition (like anti-witch, anti-ghost, etc.) as well as science awareness campaigns in different Santhal and Birhor inhabited villages under Bagmundi, Balarampur, Barabazar, Manbazar and Jhalda-I blocks for a long time. Furthermore, the indigenous people from several villages of Puncha, Kenda, Barabazar and Manbazar-I blocks are also receiving various health care, educational and economic development assistance services from this social organization. Paschim Banga Vigyan Mancha (Purulia Branch) is now actively carrying out different mass movements to protect the environment by uniting people from all

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walks of life, including the tribals in Balarampur, Neturia, Baghmundi and Manbazar-II blocks of the district.¹⁷

8. Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)

Professional Assistance for Development Action, a renowned national level Civil Society Organization, basically focuses on grassroots upliftment of different deprived communities. Founded in 1983 and registered under the Societies' Registration Act XXI of 1860, it has expanded its activities in 7 states in India, including West Bengal, with its head office at Noida, Uttar Pradesh. In Purulia district, PRADAN is currently working in four blocks – Baghmundi, Barabazar, Jhalda-I and Jhalda-II in the fields of natural resource management-based livelihoods promotion, SHG-based community mobilization and women empowerment.¹⁸

This organization has participated in the 'Usharmukti Project' in collaboration with the Panchayati Raj Department under Government of West Bengal, the Bharat Rural Livelihood Foundation and the MGNREGS to bring back greenery in the bosom of nature in Purulia district by making water reservoirs in the rough and hilly areas of the district. The project has continued to provide job opportunities, especially to the tribals as well as paved the way for their livelihood development through gardening, fish farming, animal husbandry, etc. It has also extended a big helping hand, especially for the rural indigenous women through 'Self-Help Groups' in different villages of Jhalda-I and Jhalda-II blocks under the 'Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI) Project' by providing scope of income enhancement, livestock rearing, etc.¹⁹

9. Development Research Communication and Service Centre (DRCSC)

Development Research Communication and Service Centre, a noted national level registered NGO with its head office at Kosaba, Kolkata and regional office at village Kroshjuri of Kashipur block, Purulia, has been operating different activities for tribal development since 1982 aiming at sustainable and peaceful future free from poverty, hunger and environmental degradation. It has been conducting a vital project called 'Climate Change and Adaptation' supported by NABARD

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at Kashipur block, through which seeds and seedlings have been provided to 1,500 Scheduled Tribe households. 18,455 Scheduled Tribe households from Hura, Para, Pancha, Joypur and Purulia-II blocks have benefited by this NGO through getting water conservation and livelihood support under the 'Usharmukti Project' during the financial year 2017-18. This NGO has also been imparting various agricultural trainings to the farmers of tribal inhabited Kashipur and Hura blocks of the district.²⁰

The other Non-Governmental Organizations or Voluntary Organizations that deserve much mention in connection of tribal development initiatives in Purulia district are : (i) Ramkrishna Mission Vidyapith at Vivekanandanagar under Purulia-II block, in the fields of hostel facilities and training of Scheduled Tribe students in arts and crafts, medical relief centre, etc.; (ii) Tagore Society for Rural Development (TSRD), a noted civil society organization at village Bari under Manbazar-I block, in the areas of community organization, women empowerment, environment and livelihood development, etc.; (iii) Majjihira National Basic Educational Institute (MNBEI) at village Majjihira of Manbazar-I block, in the spheres of education and social inclusion; (iv) Santiban Rural Innovation and Supporting Vocational Institute (SRISVI) at Manbazar-I block, in the field of education with hostel facilities; (v) Jamgoria Sevabrata (JS) at Manbazar-I block, for the promotion of Self-Help Groups, natural resource management, agriculture, livelihood, etc; and (vi) Bhatbandh Mahila Samity (BMS) at Purulia-I block, in the spheres of self-employment training, environment awareness campaign; etc.²¹

Conclusion

Thus, the relentless humanitarian activities of the above-mentioned organizations have become a beacon of hope for the helpless and destitute people of Purulia district, especially in the tribal concentrated areas. However, during our in-depth discussions and interviews with the authorities of those concerned organizations about their tribal development plans and programmes, many of their difficulties and hindrances have been clearly revealed. Lack of funds and skilled manpower, remoteness of their operational areas, uncertainty of stuff, conservatism and indifference of the concerned tribals, etc. are, of course, some of the notable ones.

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The hope, however, is that those NGOs/VOs are working hard and moving forward to achieve their goals with a strong mindset of not giving up. From the experiences of interacting with the Santhals and Birhors surveyed during our extensive field investigations, it can firmly be said that many of them have benefited and are benefiting in various ways by the multifaceted programmes of those organizations. Hence, we all wish that all kinds of government cooperation, support and help of people from all walks of life, and above all, the dedicated participation of the concerned aboriginals in various development programmes will certainly fulfill the great humanitarian goal of tribal development of those NGOs/VOs in Purulia district in the best possible way.

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4. Ibid., p. 45.
5. Annual Report: 2017–18, Kalyan (an N.G.O), Purulia, pp. 1–3.
6. Ibid., pp. 10 –19, 29 –30.
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