



Research Paper

Absorption of Rituals and Festivals by Kora Tribe from Caste People: An anthropological study

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Abstract:

The Kora (also known as Kuda, Kura, Kaora, Dhangar and Dhanger) are an ethnic group found in the Indian states of West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand. The Kora-Tribe is lesser known tribe in West Bengal. Tribe Kora are lesser studied by the social scientists compared to the other more familiar tribes like Santal, Oraon, Munda etc. in West Bengal, despite being the fourth largest tribe in the state. In many areas Kora tribe retained their own language and culture but in other areas they assimilated with the local dominant Hindu tradition which became an interesting mosaic for study. Though they are tribe, they are assimilated with Hindu caste people in respect of material culture, social culture food habit instead of dependency on nature. The present study tried to find out how the Kora Tribe of Dhalla village assimilating themselves with the local Hindu people in terms of their Rituals and Festivals.

Literature review: In West Bengal Koras are migrated from their original home land Bihar and found to maintain their existence in the threshold of Hinduism. They develop stable dependent economic ties and culture contact with the Hindus. (Paul (Mitra), 2017). In case of 'Kora' tribe, there have been some recent changes due to modernization, globalization, urbanization, industrial development, agricultural improvement, introduction of Panchayati Raj, Integrated Tribal Development Project and adoption of Tribal sub plan approach. (Samanta, 2015).

Key words: Kora, Rituals and Festivals, Dhalla village, Absorption, Hindu caste.

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I. Introduction:

The Kora people of Dhalla village are residing in Birbhum district of West Bengal. Their main occupation is related to earthwork (like digging well, pond, road construction and agriculture labour works). Most of the Kora families depend on labour works on agricultural land. Therefore, they practice cultivation like that of expert neighboring agriculturist tribal communities and peasant like Hindu. Being a tribe they are more alike to the Hindu community in terms of rituals and festivals as they are absorbing Hindu culture.

Methodologies: The study is basically an ethnographic study. The community was extensively studied by observation, interview, and case study methods. The data were collected from all types of people of the villagers. The study is based on primary data of the village people and some secondary data of the population profile.

Location of the village: The Dhalla village is located at Dhalla Post Office of Bilati Gram Panchayat of Illambazar Block and Police Station of Bolpur Sub Division, Birbhum district.

The nearest railway station, which the villagers mostly use, is Bolpur Railway station. It is about 20 km (approx.) away from the village. But sometimes, they use Panagarh Railway station, which is 25 k.m. (approx.) away from the village and over the Illambazar- Panagarh road. Besides these, the village also has access to the bus routes from the Illambazar-Bolpur main road. The etymological meaning of Kora is Mundari word 'earthworks'.

According to Dr. Risley (1894) possibly the Kora tribe was originated from Mundari word for earthworks "Koda". The Kora of Dhalla village speak Bengali as well as their own tribal kora language which belongs to

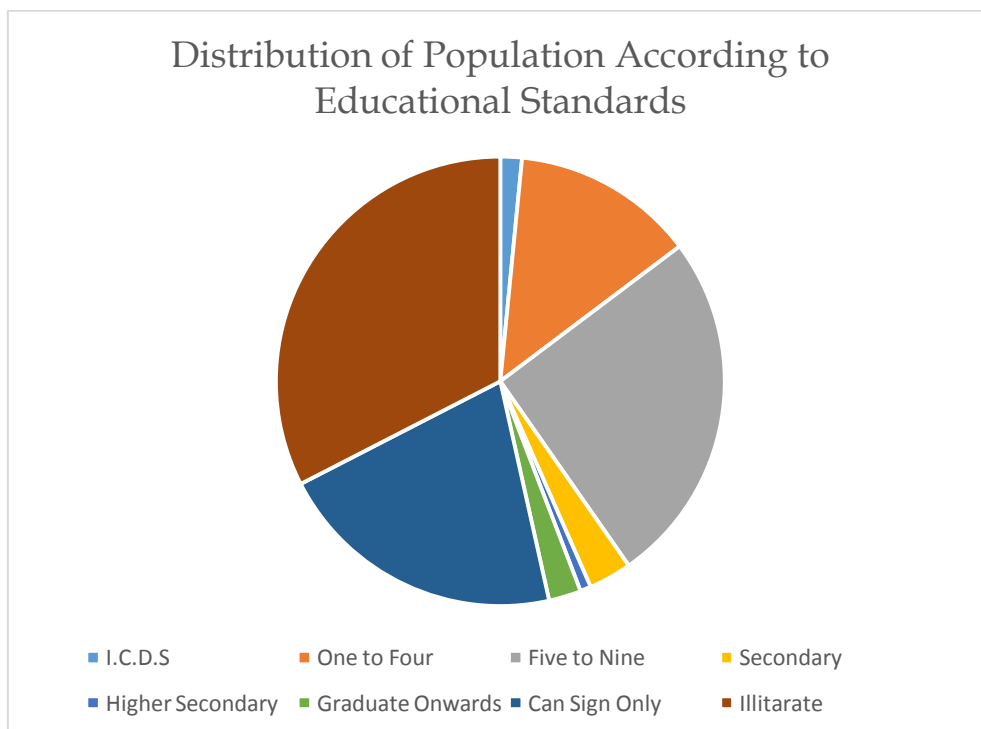
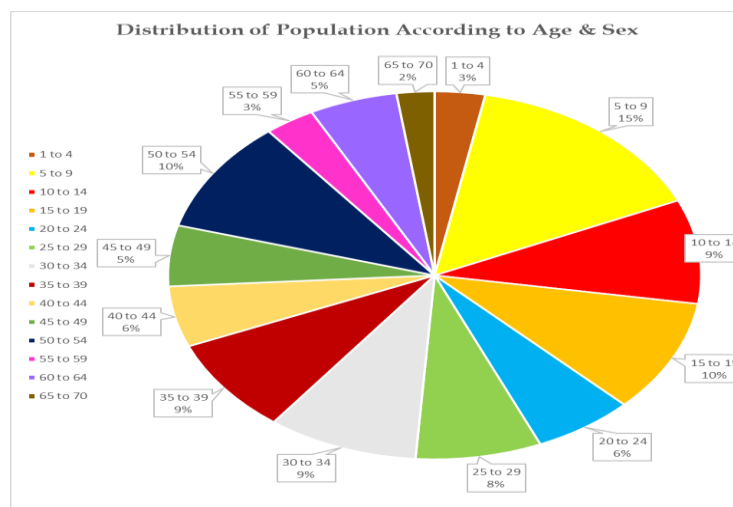
the Mundari family. Kora follows more Hindu culture than tribal culture. The Kora families are nuclear in structure and patrilineal and patrilocal. They cremate their dead in case of natural death and burial in cases of unnatural deaths.

II. Discussion:

A ritual is a set of acts comprising gestures, words, and objects that are done in a separate location and in a specific order. Community or group of people including a religious community resembles their traditions through rituals and festivals. Rituals and festivals are common in every known human society, and they comprise not only organised religions and cults worship rites and sacraments but also rites of passage, atonement, and purification. The term “*ritual*” has been defined in various ways in the field of ritual studies. The English word ritual derives from the Latin *ritualis*, “that which pertains to rite (*ritus*)”. Rituals and Festivals carry cultural tradition of a community or way of life of a community

Population Structure of the People:

Demographic profile of Kora of Dhalla village: According to the study total number of Kora population in the village is 131 (100%) out of which 67 (51.13%) are male and 64 (48.84%) are female.



Rituals and Festivals of Kora: Though Koras of Dhalla village are tribal community, they resemble their rituals and festivals with general caste people. The Koras of the village are absorbing the rituals and festivals of caste people.

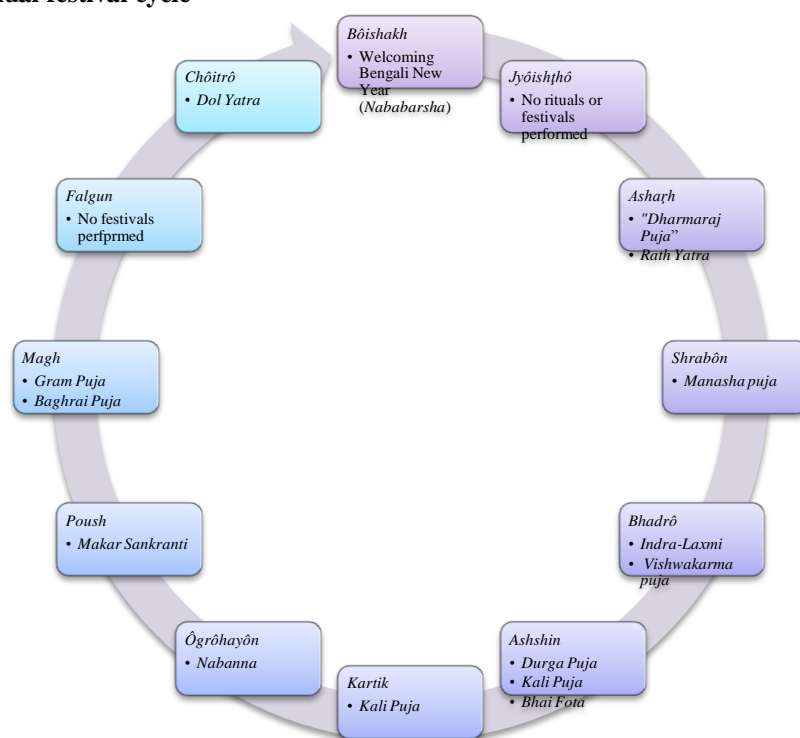
Major Worshipped Deities

In the village of Dhalla, the Kora peoples mainly worship the Hindu god and goddess-like Shiva, Laxmi, Durga, etc. Still, some of the worshipped deities among the Kora peoples aren't common to Hindu gods and goddesses. The Kora peoples worshipped the unique deities are Dharmaraj, Indra-Laxmi, and Baghrai Puja.

Table representing the yearly cycle of the rituals and festivals performed by the Kora peoples

No.	Bengali Calendar	English Calendar	Rituals & Festivals Perform
1.	<i>Bôishakh</i>	April-May	Welcoming Bengali New Year (<i>Nababarsha</i>)
2.	<i>Jyôishthô</i>	May-June	-
3.	<i>Ashaṛḥ</i>	June-July	At the beginning of this month, “ <i>Dharmaraj puja</i> ” took place. Other than this, they also celebrate the “ <i>Rath-Yatra</i> ” this month.
4.	<i>Shrabôn</i>	July-August	The worship of Hindu goddess <i>Maa Manasha</i> takes place this month
5.	<i>Bhadrô</i>	August- September	<i>Indra-Laxmi & Vishwakarma puja</i> took place this month
6.	<i>Ashshin</i>	September- October	<i>Durga puja, as well as Kali Puja</i> , is performed this month. After Kali puja, the Kora peoples also perform <i>Bhai-Fota</i> this month.
7.	<i>Kartik</i>	October- November	This month they perform another <i>Kali-puja</i> in “ <i>Kali Tala</i> ” in the village.
8.	<i>Ôgrôhayôn</i>	November- December	<i>Nabanna</i> performs this month as the new crops are cultivated.
9.	<i>Poush</i>	December- January	They also celebrate the <i>Makar Sankranti</i> in the month of Poush. They make Pitha and draw artworks in the courtyard of the house.
10.	<i>Magh</i>	January- February	<i>Gram Puja & Baghrai Puja</i> took place this month.
11.	<i>Falgun</i>	February- March	-
12.	<i>Chôitrô</i>	March- April	Celebrate <i>Doljatra</i> (Holi) this month.

Annual festival cycle



Details of the festivals performed by the Kora peoples

Nababarsha

In the month of *Bôishakh*, the Kora peoples of this village celebrate the 1st Day of *Bôishakh* by welcoming the New Year. They wish everyone (including other communities like Santals, Bauris, Lohars, etc.) in the village of Dhalla by saying “*Subho Nababarsha*”. The head of every family tries to give new clothes to every family member and visit the nearby fair.

Dharmaraj Puja

At the beginning of *Asharh* month of the Bengali calendar, the Kora people worship *Dharmaraj*, which they call “*Dharma Puja*”. At the north end of the village, there is a place called *Dharmasthan* (Temple). There is a cement-made slab present at the *Dharmasthan* & over the slab, three main stone is placed. No one of them knows the origin of that Puja, and generations do this after generations. While the *Morol* (Village head) of that village told me that his father told him a fairy tale of 3 brothers on white horseback who were protecting the whole village from intruders, the 3 brothers are remembered as *Dharmaraj* according to that story. The Puja takes place for 4 days in the *Asharh* month.

Rath Yatra

They celebrate Rath yatra in their house by making ‘*Pithe*’ with ‘*Chaler guro*’ (rice flour) and ‘*Gur*’ (jaggery). They also eat fruits like mango and jackfruit. They went to Illambazar to witness Rath. No animal is sacrificed in this festival, and in this village, there is no big festival only; they celebrate it in their house.

Manasha Puja

In the month of *Shrabôn*, “*Manasha Puja*” occurs. However, it is not celebrated by every villager and is not as big as *Dharmaraj Puja*. The Puja took place in the same place called *Dharmasthan*. Some of the villagers worship Maa Manasha in the daily evening, but they perform it wonderfully at this time of the year. They offer fruits and milk to the goddess. They worship it because they think it will protect them from the snakes. Many of the villagers went to the field and had a risk of a snake attack. Many villagers came and offered Puja, but there was no priest in this Puja. No animal sacrifice takes place during this Puja.

Indra-Laxmi Puja

The Indra-Laxmi puja is one of the exclusive festivals this village’s Kora peoples only perform. This Puja takes place in the month of *Bhadro*. One of our informants stated that during this festival, only the people of the Kora community could join, see, and perform during this festival. It is also said that no widow can join in this festival. On this day, both the males and females who want to engage in this Puja keep fasting for the whole day. Then the male members who got engaged in this Puja went to the forest to collect some tree branches. All the Kora men who want to be engaged in this go together in the forest.

Durga Puja

Durga Pooja took place in the month of *Ashshin*. There is a Durga mandap on the front side of the village if someone is coming from the south direction. Here the Durga puja took place. The Kora people are not directly connected with this Puja, but they also came. Brahmin, who is called from outside, came and performed the Puja and worshipped goddess Durga for 5 days. The Kora people usually go to the Durga mandap and offer Puja to the goddess. There is no caste or class division seen in this Puja. Anyone can come and offer Puja to the goddess Durga. However, they execute a Durga puja ceremony linked to Durga puja’s schedule in the Kora people’s homes. The Kora people (especially females) went to the pond, took a pot of water, and took it to the house. They placed mango leaves (3) on the top of the pot. They kept it until the ‘*Bisarjan*’ took place..

Kali Puja

In the month of *Ashshin*, there is no kali puja in this village, but they go to Illambazar as there is a fair, and that is how they celebrate Kali Puja. But In the month of Kartik, a kali puja took place in this village. There is a Kali temple in the village on the northeast corner of the village, on the informant’s house side. People of this village also called it ‘*Shyama puja*’. A priest came and performed the ritual. It is only a one-day puja. There is no caste or class division took seen. No animals were sacrificed in this Puja.

Vaifota

In the Vaifota, the rules are similar to those of the Hindus. The sister went to her father’s house (if she is married), or the sister stayed in the house (if she is not married) and gave “*Fota*” to her brother with Kajal, Chandan, Ghee, Doi, and wished for a good and healthy life ahead.

Nabanna

In the month of *Ôgrôhayôn*, “*Nabanna*” occurs. It is celebrated when the new paddy comes into the house (the paddy of monsoon months). They took ‘*Chaler Guro*’, ‘*Akher Rosh*’, ‘*Khejur Gur*’ and mixed them well and made a soft texture, and then they offered 5 types of fruit, ‘*Narkel Naru*’, a branch of a mango tree to the goddess. Some houses also offer the new rice to the ‘*Dharmaraj*’, ‘*Durga mandap*’. **Makar Sankranti**

Gram Puja

On the first day of Magh, a puja takes place, which is ‘*Grampuja*’. In this Puja, they worshipped ‘*Dharmaraj*’. The Puja took place at the border or outside the village’s border. In this Puja, female village members can’t participate, as the male members completely do it. At first, on the morning of the Day of the Puja, the senior members of this village bought cock. They bought it from the local market. **Baghrai puja**

Other rituals performed

Supernatural beliefs

The people of this village believe in supernatural things. Many of them thought that when someone died in the village, their soul roamed around the village, and at that time, they thought the soul could harm them, so they

stayed in the room after the sun went down. Sometimes they also believe that it is very risky to have a soul on the shoulder if you go to the funeral place at night. And they also believe that many souls live mainly in the tree. **Conclusion: Being a tribe the Kora people of the Dhalla village are very much similar to general Hindu castes people; because daily labour is the main occupation of the Kora of the Dhalla village. As the Hindu caste people of the area is agricultural land holder and the Kora is very much dependent on the land and the Hindu caste people for their jobs, Kora follows the rituals and festivals of general Hindu. The way of life of the Kora is much similar to Hindu caste people in terms of rituals and festivals.**

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