



Tribal religious beliefs and practices: an anthropological study on Kora-Mudi tribe

Parikshit Chakraborty

Anthropological Survey of India, Ranchi Field Station, Kadru, Ranchi-834002, Jharkhand, India
parikshitachakraborty1@gmail.com

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Abstract

Religious beliefs and practices have long partial human perceptions from ancient time to present day into tribal world. However, rituals have significant aspects in every religion, and there has beliefs which being the secondary traits. Therefore, rituals performed by the sacred specialists in every religion. Although, Kora's continue their religious belief under the threshold of Hinduism; but they also practice spiritual belief, that means the Kora tribal people has the faith in spirits in their way of life that occupy natural things and occurrences. Moreover, the Kora people practice their traditional worshipping. However, the author of the present paper try to demonstrates a prominent role in religious beliefs and practices and it's also provides cultural depth of Kora tribes of Purulia district of West Bengal, India. Therefore, the study indicates that most of the worships has been done for the material gain for him or for his family; additionally the study also provides that ritual practice among the Kora tribal is the vis-a-vis religious beliefs which concerning the blessings of God in aggressive ambiances of life.

Keywords: Religious beliefs, ancient time, tribal world, sacred specialists, hostile ambiances.

Introduction

The beliefs and practices of each and every society of the world have manifested through celebration of ritual and ceremonies, while, Tylor 1871, 'Animism' is the common phenomenon among the tribes¹. Therefore, the religious beliefs and its performances among the tribals consist with their life cycle rites, communal rites and worship practices along with their ancestral worship practices followed by their different totems and taboos. Religion, as a social singularity and it's challenging to explain. Tribal people belief in Gods and Goddesses, witchcraft, magic and disaster is attributed to displeasure and malicious acts of the supernatural forces, malevolent spirits. Tribal ritual associated with birth, death and marriage which performed by priests, who own certain magical power which connect with the Gods and spirits for their interference and blessing. However, religious beliefs and practices play an important role in the tribal myth. Their religious belief arranged on nature and the creativity unless the Gods are first placated and the signs.

However, in 1963, Paul Bohannan stated that maybe presently no particular subject matter present where anthropology concerns itself nowadays the literature is superior than religion, particularly, the Tribal Religion². After that, in 1964, Max Weber wrote, "The Sociology of Religion" where he stated that 'religion' "can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study"³. Major sociologists and social anthropologists such as Malinowski 1974, Durkheim 1976 and Weber 1904, define 'religion' is a process of beliefs and morals and following the

concerning issues which is a fundamental part of human culture and human society⁴⁻⁶. Although, anthropological approaches of tribal religion and admiration of understandings it through the customs of beliefs and practices in natural objectives which associated to the social parts of a society and culture.

However, beliefs in religious and its practices are significant and perhaps devoted structures of spiritual societies. Moreover, beliefs in religious have been rich in the literature of Anthropology. Despite the fact that, Evans-Pritchard 1956 studying Nuer in Sudan and stated that the people of Nuer offer bloody sacrifices to God because of the dangers which menace people on account of crime. Sacrifice is the most usual and significant act of Nuer religion⁷. However, eminent sociologist Emile Durkheim 1950s a significant studies on religion i.e. "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life" which established the interrelationship among religious beliefs and practices of a society or a culture which forms as a religion⁸. At this point, Durkheim explored religion through a comprehensive study, which to be the most primitive religion in existence among the Australian totemism. Therefore, Durkheim pointed that all human societies are separated into the contrasting territories of 'sacred' and 'profane'⁸.

Moreover, country like India has the different religion as well as the indigenous ethnic community where the different indigenous ethnic people belong in different religion with beliefs in various God, Goddess and supernatural powers. Apart from this, in different indigenous ethnic community has the beliefs in the supernatural powers which almost universal in worldwide.

However, Huber 2005, stated that the beliefs in religion and its practices has the influence of different issues which includes the free spirit and well-being behavior of a individuals⁹⁻¹¹. However, the tribal people make an effort to close relationship with the religious powers and or supernatural powers by regulatory with the spirit and soul which fascinating the performance and focusing the religious powers and or supernatural powers. However, religion is an important fragment of the establishment of a society which allowing all the members to live together in systematic communal way. Therefore, may be in society, rituals as the expression of religion. Thus, in the year 1959 Radcliffe Brown said, *“Rituals have a useful function in ordering society and this function is the essential and ultimate reason for their existence”*¹².

However, India has the different ethnic community and Kora ethnic community is one of them. However, the Kora is also known as Kora-Mudi tribe in western parts of Bengal, apart from this the Kora-Mudi is a minute tribe which distributed in the eastern India. In West Bengal Kora found approx. 3% out of the total tribal population. However, the Kora tribal community maintains their existence as well as the religious practices in the threshold of Hinduism. Therefore, in the year 1891 H.H. Risley specifically pointed out that the Kora tribe has been fully influenced by the Hindu religion; thus, Risley said, Kora religion stay under the ‘Hindu orthodox’ and the practices of collective mobility which outstanding to extensive assimilation with the Hindu religion and achieving the situation which static to the Kora¹³. Therefore, Risley in his ‘Castes and Tribes of Bengal’ states that,

*“In matters of religion, Koras effect to be orthodox Hindus, worshipping the regular gods and calling themselves Shaktas or Vaishnabas accordingly, as they incline to the cult of Kali, Durga, Manasa or to that of Radha or Krishna, Manasa, the heavenly patroness of Snakes and Bhadu whom goats, fowls, pigeons, rice, sugar and plantain are offered on no fixed dates, and are divided between the worshippers and the deogharia Brahmansvillage gods. In Manbhum, the Koras do not employ a Brahman.....”*¹³.

Moreover, the present study has been made an effort to understanding the religious belief and practices of the Kora-Mudi tribe who lives in Naudiha village under Raghampur Gram Panchayat of Purulia district, West Bengal. Thus, the author attempt to identify the beliefs in religious and worship and rituals practices to regulate the spirit and soul which maintain the harmonious relationship among themselves. The study may be simplified to recognize their religious views and beliefs and how they practice their religious worships.

Methodology

For the present study the author select Naudhia village under Raghampur Gram Panchayat of Purulia district, West Bengal. However, author of the present paper intense to specific indigenous group i.e. Kora-Mudi from Mudi para hamlet in the

Naudiha. Therefore, for the collection of data, the researcher has been used of interview technique with the help of unstructured questionnaire schedules. However, Focus Group Discussions; Observation; Case Study; Case History method were also be taken.

Kora Religious Beliefs

Kora religious beliefs are absolutely influenced of Hindu religion whereas; Kora is one of the tribal groups in India. However, during studied times it found that the Kora people had been simultaneously beliefs Hindu god and goddess and natural worships. Though, the sacred spot of Koras are conspicuously absent. Moreover, Paul 2004, pointed that Kora people beliefs undressed pieces of stones are generally considered as the resting place of certain deities where propitiation is being done which is the existences of ancestral sprits as they beliefs¹⁴. One the other hand, Kora people keep the figures or pictures of some deities into their living room. They also believed in Sharul worshipped which animal sacrifices worship. Therefore, Kora peoples religious beliefs divided into two types. The types are given below:

Table-1: Religious Beliefs.

Traditional Religious	Hindu Religious
Sahrul	Manasa
Tusu	Sitala
Jantal	Siva
Muth	Kali
Gram bandh puia	Saraswati
Bonga-Buru	
Soso-Giddi	

Moreover, in the village, some small constructed in the form of memorials has been noticed into the Kora houses that refers they also believed in soul.

Religious Practices

The Koras of Naudiha village practices their religious beliefs in two forms which are their traditional religious practices another one is Hindu religious practices which completely dominated by Hindu religion. However, Kora religion which is their traditional religion based on the animistic belief.

Traditional Religious: All religious performs be made of spiritual defiance concerning the religious beliefs. The religious practices are the expressions of beliefs and anterior meaning which habitually termed as their traditional myths. However, sacrificed to the divinities had been different which are

traditional. Therefore, for different divinity the Kora people sacrificed various types animal which to be made to complete their traditional worship. The different types of traditional worship which practiced by Kora tribal people are describing in below:

Sahrul: One of the most important traditional religious practices of the Koras is Sahrul which also known as *Maghi puja* because Sahrul puja held in the month of Magh. Sahrul practices by Koras of Naudiha at the community level. This traditional religious practice with the help of a priest. However, in Naudiha village the Kora people sacrifice a goat in the than for '*garam deity*'. The sacrifice done for the welfare of the Kora inhabitants, in the evening of the Maghi Purnima day.

Tusu: Another most important traditional religious is *Tusu* which practices by the Koras of Naudiha village. The *Tusu* festival held each year in January month and the day is known as Makara Sankranti that means the last day of *Pausha* (Bengali Months). *Tusu* puja is performed with the uses of Rice cakes. In the *Tusu* festival the Kora females sing, the *Tusu* songs which till the end of the celebration. It is mainly celebrated by the female members in the river or tank. The *Tusu* song is dynamic in nature which performed by the female members of the Kora community. The song is: "*Aachire pachire padma/ Padma bai aar photena/ Tusur hate jora Padma/ Bhramar boi aar base na/ Aamader Tusur ekti chhaitya/ Kultale bai khele itai/ Kon satiner dhula dila/ Dhular baron gela nai/ Cykele charia babu/ biri-ocisar dharaya/ Khete khete yachhe babu/ Ekebare yamalaya/ Khatrari lal mati/ Bitichhanar kate jhami/ Jhanti patar Titir samal/ Madia tai chamke daraya.*"

Janthal: The *Janthal* ritual is a sign of the welcome thanks to the deity for good harvest. This ritual starts before harvesting time. The *Janthal* practiced by the priest worships where the deity '*Garam Thakur*' sacrificing fowl and putting its blood at the seat of the deity (*than*). The *Janthal* ritual is connected with agriculture therefore, the festival or ritual known as pre-agricultural ritual.

Muth: *Muth* ritual is the earlier rituals of the seeding operation which practiced by the Koras. For this ritual the cultivator Kora people carried a trickle of paddy which interacts with the ploughed field. However, Kora people had not taken the risks of without practiced the *Muth* ritual, that starting to the seeding process into the paddy field. In the rituals day, when the bullocks are washing then the vermilion symbols are perfectly on their body and the plough. The *Muth* ritual practiced for the expectation of excessive crop therefore *Muth* is also a pre-agricultural ritual among the Kora tribal community.

Gram bandh puja: The '*grambandh puja*' is celebrated at the clan level of Kora tribal community at once time in year, usually in a month of Boisakh. Significant value is the caring of the clan members from occurrence of chicken pox. The *grambandh puja* accomplished by the deity of the village. However, in this worship a goat had been sacrificed at the *gram than*.

Bonga-Buru: The '*bonga-Buru*' worship is also known as hill spirit worship. This worship is another essential festival of Kora tribe which also their traditional worship. The Bonga-Buru festival usually happened on the day of Chaitra sankranti. Moreover, this worship is also a natural believe system where the Kora people believe that their descendants or ancestors who lived in the hill. Therefore, as gave the respect to their ancestors, the Kora people celebrated the Bonga-Buru festival. Though, in this festival the sacrificed a black cock because if the ancestor had any evil soul then after sacrificed a black cock the evil soul leave the ancestors. After that the ancestors protect the Koras.

Soso-Giddi: Soso-Giddi is a traditional agricultural worship which also animal spirits worship of Koras at Naudiha village. In worship time the priest adore all the animals' spirits and try to connect with the paddy field.

Because if all the animals' spirits are connect with the paddy field then never any animal does not harm to crop in the field. Therefore, the animal spirit worship is accomplished just before sowing seed which held on month of Jaystha. As per the Kora tribe, the Kora religion originated from the Munda religion therefore, essential fact is presence of the Munda people throughout the worship. However, if, the Munda does not live in the nearby village then priest society select a Munda from own Kora society.

Hindu Religious: In Naudiha village under Raghobpur Gram Panchayat, Kora tribal people also performed the hindu worship. The Kora people one of the tribal community but their coherence had come under the fold of Hinduism as it is say Risley in '*Castes and Tribes of Bengal*'¹³. However, the Kora of Naudiha village has the beliefs on Hindu worship which maybe the acculturation and thus they accepted the Hindu worship which typically clarified that the Kora of the studied village almost adopted the Hindu religion. Thus, it creates bottomless consciousness to ahead the idyllic their customary spiritual faith or their own traditional religious system. Although, the Kora people in Naudiha village practiced some Hindu worship personally and some worship celebrated communally. The different types of Hindu worship which practiced by Kora tribal people are describing in below:

Manasa: Manasa puja is one of the Hindu worship which practiced by the Kora to be the guiding divinity of the snakes. The worshipped accomplished by a Brahman priest with sweets, fruits and unboiled milk, where milk offering to the snake during the worship. Offering the milk to the snake had believed among the Koras that some time snakes come and drink the milk during the worship time. The worship practiced on the day of the *Nag panchami* in the month of Shraavan. However, some of the Kora family male duck sacrifice in the village than therefore, the Manasa puja known as Dak puja among the Kora. More or less all the Kora families in the village, a cactus plant, locally called '*Fani-Manasa*' or '*Manasa Gach*' are cultivated within the homestead land with care.

Sitala: Sitala worship practiced in many rural parts of Bengal and which also is old folk deity in rural Bengal. However, the Kora people practiced the Sitala festival and Saturdays and Tuesdays are auspicious days for the worship. Therefore, except these two days the Kora people practiced the worship. Among the Kora people have a faith or myth that Sitala Devi is in charge of the pox and if the Sitala devi becomes angry or the worship not appropriately then pox affects all the members of that particular house. Therefore, all the Kora people participate happily and a Brahman priest completes the worship. Moreover, Kora people called as it is as 'Mayer Daya' and they maintain some taboos such as to keep the house clean and sprinkled with holy water from the Ganga, avoided oil or soap during affected time, never ate fish like *Kai*, *Magur* and *Singi* because as the Kora people considered as the carriers of the and the *Mayer Daya* and the taboos known as 'Mayer Niyam' among Kora people.

Siva: God Siva is the greatest god that's why he also known as Mahadeva. Additionally god siva also considered as the all destroyer. The Kora people of the village had been performed the worshipped for altered forms of agony such as liver pain, gout, cardiac and several kind of sore ailments. Because the siva had the supremacy to cure from such sore ailments. During worship time unboiled milk, water of green coconut, leaves of bel has been used. The worship of siva practiced in every Kora family with the help of a priest. Therefore, in every Kora house had a black stone which known as phallic symbol or linga of god siva. In several cases, some of adult Kora people hanging a stone chip tied by a red waist on the body of a banyan tree or *Bath Gachh* near the *gram than* and after the success of his or wishes the Kora family practice the siva worship in a decorative way as he/ she promised.

Kali: Kali is a goddess of power but in Kora society they practices it because believe she is be responsible for causing different types of fever, bloodshed and accidents. If we practice this worship then maybe she control it and safe us. 'Mata Kali' locally called it and she is black complexioned with three wide-open eyes, and her feet resting on the Mahadev Siva. She has four hands where she carries dissimilar ammos such as axe, spear, amputated human head and human head with dripping blood. The worship practiced by a Brahman priest on new moon day in the month of *Boishakh*. However, Kora people practice this worship occasionally once time in a calendar year and they sacrificed black male goat to *Mata Kali*. Goat sacrificed by a special killer. Apart from this, the noticeable fact is few of the Kora people practiced the worship of Raksha Kali. But fact is the Raksha Kali worship is not a communal worship, thus only two people practiced this worship in their household premises who had the better economic condition.

Saraswati: One of the hindu goddess 'Saraswati' worship has been practiced by the Kora people in Naudiha village. Usually Kora youth practice this worship for the improvement of their education. The worship practiced by a Brahman priest on the day of *shree panchami* in the month of *Magh*. All the Kora

households pay rupees as contribution for the worship. The school going children and youth boys and girls arranged all the essential ingredients.

Conclusion

The Kora religious belief and practices encompasses their Religion. However, the study stated that the Kora of Naudiha village worshipping their own traditional religious along with worshipping of Hindu gods and goddess. At the same time the present study stated that Bonga-Buru festival and Soso-Giddi festival reminds the animistic belief of Kora tribe and relationship with their traditional religious system which also pointed out Paul 2004 on her study¹⁴. On the other hand, Sasa-giddi puja presently moved with a devotion to Hindu religion which as the sign or evidence of vis-a-vis of the two different religious group who lived in a close proximity sing a long time. Additionally, Tusu is post harvesting festival and which have communal cultural pattern because now-a-days about tribal and nontribal communities of Naudiha village had been practice the Tusu festival. However, the practicing of Tusu festival is different into various tribal and nontribal communities.

However, as Risley stated in 'Castes and Tribes of Bengal' that the Koras religion is under the Hindu orthodox here, the study also same thing pointed out through this study where, the Kora people find their own custom to belief and practices Hindu worship in a proper way where, a sacred specialist who worships Siva, Kali, Manasa and Shitala in communal place like *Garam Than*¹³. However, the Kora people continue a duel world – one to belief of Hindu gods and goddess existing with their traditional religious system. And another one is practicing of their traditional religious system and including of Hindu deities. Therefore, the Kora people in Naudiha village practicing a perpendicular association among Hindu religion and their own traditional religion, which may be vis-a-vis of the both Kora and Hindu religious worships which, concerning the blessings of God and the witness of the combination of these two.

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