THE KORA AS A HINDU CASTE
THEIR SOCIAL MOBILITY MOVEMENTS AND THE
IMPACT OF RECENT POLITICAL PROCESSES
THE KORA AS A HINDU CASTE:

It appears that the Kora, an eastern offshoot of the Munda of Ranchi, migrated into Barabhum Pargannah from Chotonagpur plateau around the middle or the last quarter of 18th Century i.e. about one hundred and fifty to two hundred years ago. We find the Kora at present as a group within the threshold of Hinduism forgetting their original mother tongue which Grierson had referred to as 'Kora' language under the Mundari family of languages and leaving a fair portion of their traditional social customs. Moreover, we find that some of the Hindu religious ideas have penetrated into Kora rituals and belief. In social rank, they are now classed with the other 'lowest' castes just above the groups of untouchables.

This process of Hinduization is going on among the Kora for a long time. In reviewing the social aspects of this group in Bankura, Risley remarked:

"........... the marriage custom of the Kora corresponds precisely with the Bagdis with the curious difference that vermilion is applied to the bride's forehead with the handle of the cutter (chimta) ............."

He also added about the Manbhum Kora:

"The Eastern Kora follows the regular Hindu rituals .......... In the matters of religion Kora affect to be orthodox Hindu, wor-
shipping the regular gods and calling themselves as Saktas or Vaisnavas, according as they decline to the cult of Kali, Durga and Manasa, or to that of Radha and Krishna ............ The social position of the Kora is very low and they are usually classed with the Bagdi, Bauri, Buna and other dwellers on the confines of Hinduism" (Risley: 1891, 506-507).

During 1965-68 when I studied the Kora, it was observed that the Kora had moved further in the direction of Hinduization since the time of Risley. We find them at present under the influence of the ethical and partly puritanical theology and world view of the upper caste Hindus. The wandering sadhus serve as mediators for percolating the Hindu concepts to the Kora through their message. Following Ghuryé, we may designate the Kora as a "tribal class of Hindu society, suggesting thereby that they retained much more of the tribal creeds and organizations than many of the castes of Hindu society, yet in reality they are backward Hindus" (Ghurye: 1943).

Totemic associations of some of the major clans like the Hembrum, Khisar, Khuntru are totally forgotten. Moreover, we find the Kora to be served by the Barber, Washerman in their rites of passage. They take initiation from the Vaisnava Guru (religious preceptors) and a 'fallen' class of Brahmins officiates in their marriages. As already mentioned that the Kora are provided with a more or less specified britti of earth-cutting and a specific ritual role as found in the case of bandh-biha (marriage of tanks). There is also no ambiguity about the fact that the Kora of 1968 regard themselves as a Hindu caste and are regarded so by the various traditional Hindu castes living in the area. Of course in social rank, they are grouped with other 'low' Hindu castes just above the 'lowest' castes of untouchables like the Bauri, Muchi, Dom, Sahis. But the Kora are found to rate themselves a bit higher and rank themselves on equal status of the Beney (sellers of spices and grocery articles) and the Moira (the sweetmeat sellers), the two established Hindu castes. In this connection, they firmly point
out that they are definitely above those 'low' or 'lowest' groups who do not have access to the services of Barber, Washerman, Vaisnava or the Brahman priests like them (Kora) (for detailed caste-ranking - Ref. Chapter-X).

I have shown in Chapter-X that beginning with their own group, the Kora range the various ethnic groups at different points of socio-cultural distance from them. Starting with the closest groups, they may be classed as follows:— (1) Orang Mudi, Santal, Bhumij, Bauri, Silkata Hari, artisan groups, Barber, Washerman, Midwife and the like; (2) Mahato, Gorain (oil pressers), Gop (milkmen); (3) Brahmin, Vaisnava; (4) 'Bangali' castes, 'Bihari' castes, Baniya, Marwari and the like.

In spite of their aspiration for higher status in the regional caste hierarchy, the Kora are in comparative isolation from the sophisticated Hinduism, through their economic backwardness, social segregation and a general lack of direct access to literate Hindu Tradition. Certain symbolic traits of the Kora do not support their above-mentioned aspiration and pull down their claim to the level of 'very low' castes. Amongst these, the social drinking of liquor, taking of chicken, beef, pork, group-dancing by women, widow-remarriage and junior leviration, non-sanskritic clan names etc. may be mentioned. The Kora share a good deal of the gay sensuality with the other tribals of the area; but this, again, is slightly toned down by a concern to appear good in the eyes of the upper caste Hindus. The zest for mixed dancing, drinking and festivity has been opposed by the reformist mobility movements, discussed in the following pages. Although a good deal of premarital sex life is tolerated, there is also a considerable overt concern about the chastity of the female folk.

It will be quite interesting to point out here that some of the Kora informants give us a peculiar idea about the different segments of the "Mudi" society in which they also include the clean castes of Moira (sweetmeat sellers) and Beney (Gandho banik) and arrange them in a hierarchic order in terms of social status. According to them, there are five sub-divisions among the Mudi such as (from the lowest to the highest) : Beney Mudi, Moira Mudi,
Orang Mudi, Kora Mudi, and Konai Mudi. The lowest group, the Beney Mudi are the sellers of spices and grocery materials. A Kora woman does not take water and cooked food in their hands. According to the Kora Mudi respondents these Beney Mudis pretend to be of the 'gentry' (Bangali Babu) class but their social customs are not good enough. They keep concubines from the groups of untouchables and take food together. The next group, the Moira Mudi are the sweetmeat sellers. They are also of low status, although the Kora take cooked food and water from them. When a Moira remains busy with the cultivation of his own field he invariably engages his wife to the sale-counter of his sweetmeat shop. So by breaking the system of purdah, a Moira woman comes out to sell the sweetmeats to the general public of various castes which is absolutely derogatory for the member of a 'good' caste. The Kora Mudi regard the Orang Mudi as approximately of same status. The Kora do not accept anything in the hands of the Orang and reciprocally the Orang do not accept cooked food from a Kora. But in one respect, the Orang may be placed higher than the Kora, for, Orang Mudi do not accept cooked food and water in the hands of any other castes, even the Brahmins. "If an Orang be invited in the house of lat (very rich man), he will not accept any food over there". Of course, the Kora do accept food in the hands of 'clean' (suddha) castes. Konai Mudi, the highest group, who live in the bordering area of Bihar and West Bengal, are regarded by the Kora as a 'very clean' caste. They do not cultivate their own field like the Brahmins of this area. Their social customs are supposed to be all suddha (clean) and the images of Hindu gods and goddesses can be found in their houses.

Of these five groups, I was not able to get any information regarding the Konai Mudi even after enquiring about it in various places and from different informants of a number of castes. It is indeed interesting to note that the Kora conceptualize the well-established and relatively prosperous Hindu groups like the Kora and the Gandho banik (Beney) under the general category of 'Mudis'. What is more interesting is that, these groups are placed by them in a lower status than the Kora and the Orang Mudi. It should be pointed out that the Moira and Beney do not believe in any common affiliation with the Kora and the Orang except for the nomenclature
'Mudi' which some Hindus affix after caste-names to indicate their occupation. These groups consider both the Kora and the Orang as very low untouchables. There is no doubt that the Kora are fully aware of their low status and their rationalization in terms of an inverse order of the reality of stratification is just an effort to attain a make-believe status. This gives us definite hints of the aspirations of the Kora to come within the Hindu social system and to crave for high status. Such inversion of hierarchy has been noted in the case of the Kharia vis-a-vis the Brahmin in this area*. 

The socio-ritual status of the Kora in the ethnic background of Barabhum comes out into relief when we compare them with the partially hunting and food-gathering groups like the Kharia and the Pahira on one hand and the Bhumij and the Mahato, the dominant agricultural groups, on the other. Both the Kharia and the Pahira do not have direct access to the services of the ritual specialists and have a feeble contact with the way of life and ethical codes of the Hindu neighbours. They retain the age-old traditional customs quite tenaciously and have a very simple notions about the regional caste-hierarchy. Moreover, they do not have a specified britti and a ritual act (bandh-biha) like the Kora. The Kora may be placed definitely higher than the Kharia and the Pahira in social ranking, in the above context. Backed by their larger, concentrated numerical strength and comparatively larger land-holdings and more or less secured economic position, the Bhumij and the Mahato have come more close to the threshold of Hinduism. In this matter, it had not been difficult for these powerful land-holding groups to enlist the support of a section of the established Hindu castes. Both in terms of numerical strength and economic position, the Kora could not meet the Hindu system from such a strong homebase. As such, they fall slightly

*The Kharia of Modhupur, P.S. Chandil of Pargannah Barabhum narrated an interesting story of how the sacred thread of the Sabar priest, who was their forefathers, was stolen by a treacherous Brahmin at the time of his bathing in a pond near to Jagannath Temple at Puri. They remarked that by losing the sacred thread, not only they have been lowered in social status, but they have also lost their priestly rights and privileges. According to them the Brahmins were formerly within the lowest caste-groups and did

As mentioned in Chapter-VIII that the moral connotation of supernaturalism with the concepts of sin, heaven, hell is present to some extent among the literate Kora. Of course, the supernaturally oriented moral life supported by puritanical concepts of ascetism and renunciation is of little practical value to an average Kora. They continue to worship many of their traditional gods and goddesses such as deities of mountain, sacred grove and so on. But they feel that the worshipping of these deities of their own, do not have the same prestige as worshipping of gods and goddesses of the Great Hindu Tradition. Though the Kora are found to participate in all important Hindu festivals and to follow Hindu pantheon to some extent, they are quite ignorant about the moral qualities of these gods and goddesses. Some of the Kora respondents express vague and contradictory attributes of these Hindu deities. Sinha has pointed out an almost similar case with the Bhumi, a more Hinduized group of this region (Sinha: 1953).

SOCIAL MOBILITY MOVEMENT:

Although the Kora of South Manbhum do not organize that sort of corporate social movements to improve their caste status like those of the Bhumi, the Mahato and even that of the Santal, as mentioned earlier, yet they have made some positive moves in this direction. It was first initiated by a few literate leaders of the group. They formed a reformistic society, "Adim Nudi Swajatiya Samaj Sanskar Panchayet", in the year 1345 B.S. (about 30 years not have the right of worshipping the gods. They have acquired this right by stealing the sacred thread from the Sabar priest. The Kharia placed the Brahmin just above the group of untouchables in the table of caste-hierarchy of the region and did not accept cooked food and water from their hands (Banerjee: 1959, 96).
ago). The members (of course from the Kora community) have to take the following oath at the time of getting its membership. It has been found written in the printed Cash-Receipt Book of this society in the following form:-

"Ami amader samajer bhitar je sakal kuachar, kubyobazar achen tar janna angikar karitechi je, Samaj Sanskar Panchayet padey ami nijukta rohilam. Ami samajer sevak haiya karja siddhi koria thakibo. Tar janney ami char ane paisa diya chek loilam. Swajatiya samajer jeno mongal kamana koria thaki".

(I am hereby taking the oath that I shall stand against all the evil customs of our society from now onwards. Being a member of this society I shall serve my fellowmen. For that reason, I am paying an amount of annas four. I wish best for this community.)

The first Convenor-cum-Secretary of this reformistic society is Kalipada Mudi, aged about 70 of the village of Kristanagar under Patamda Police Station (Singhbhum, Bihar), whom I have met quite frequently for gathering information on the mobility movements. Those who helped Kalipada Mudi in forming such a society in Manbhum are Sujan Mudi (of Kuchi village, P.S. Patamda), Jugal Mudi (of Bela-dih, P.S. Patamda), Rati Mudi (of Bahubera, P.S. Patamda), Monu Mudi (of Phuljharna, P.S. Patamda), Nanda Mudi (of Latpada, P.S. Barabazar), Sricharan Mudi (of Metala, P.S. Barabazar), Biru Mudi (of the village of Akar, P.S. Jamtoria) and Karuna Mudi (of Makla, P.S. Bandayan). They got quite a good deal of response from their fellowmen even in the first year of inception of this society. The total members, as could be gathered from the membership register, during 1345-47 B.S. were 437, hailing from 5 Police Station areas, namely, Patamda, Barabazar, Bandayan, Jamtoria, Manbazar. It is admitted by Kalipada Mudi that the credit of enlisting such a good number of members from such a backward community goes entirely to the Kora personalities mentioned above. They worked for days and nights to convince these
illiterate people. They, at the initial phase, took these five-fold programmes:

(1) To send more children to the schools.

(2) To give up excessive drinking of liquor and group-dancing, widow-remarriage and outside community marriage.

(3) To give up the habit of eating beef, pork and chicken.

(4) Female folk should not go out without putting vermilion on their forehead.

(5) Female inmates of the house should not accompany the bridegroom to the house of the bride at the time of marriage.

This localised reformist movement soon took a larger shape in the form of Desh Panchayet mobility movements initiated by a more organised and larger body of Mudi Jatiya Manbhum and Hazari-bagh Jela Desh Panchayet. It was established in the year 1349-50 B.S. The head office of this bigger Panchayet was set up at Chandipur, P.S. Chandankiware (Dhanbad) of former Manbhum district. It took its final form around 1353 B.S. The first elected office bearers were:

President - Shri Shriram Mudi
Village: Hura, P.S. Hura,
Dist. Purulia.

Secretary - Shri Gour Mudi
Village: Jabjabigora, P.S. Hura,
Dist. Purulia.

Assistant Secretary - Shri Prahallad Mudi
Village: Risana, P.S.
Dist. Purulia.

Convenor - Shri Kalipada Mudi
Village: Kristanagar, P.S. Patamda,
Dist. Singhbhum.

Recorder - (1) Shri Radhanath Mudi
Village: Chandipur,
P.S. Chandankewari.

These officials are the top-most persons in command of the organization.
This Desh Panchayet organization of Hazaribagh and Manbhum district has its jurisdiction over ten Anchal areas, namely, Raghunathpur, Jaipur, Chandankewari, Para, Purulia, Puncha, Hura, Arsha, Petrabaidh, Nirsha. Each Anchal roughly corresponding to a Police Station area, has its own headmen in the form of Anchal Prodhan and Upa Anchal Prodhan. These officials are held responsible for the matters of their respective Anchals. Again under an Anchal, several Chatais are there. Each Chatai unit has its own officials, namely, the Majhi or Chatai Prodhan and Paramanik. It has already been mentioned that the Barabazar Chatai has its jurisdiction over a number eighteen villages in the neighbourhood including, of course, the three villages under study. Ratan Mudi of Sankhari and Monglu Mudi of Karmabera are found to officiate as Majhi or Chatai Prodhan and Paramanik respectively of this Chatai division. They conduct the bandh-biha of the region and also looked after the maintenance of social norm amongst its members. Each Chatai was again, in its turn, divided into the units of three villages, which are in the charge of guards. Any instruction from the Desh Panchayet level were usually communicated through the Anchal Prodhan, Chatai Prodhan and the guard to the common members of this organization. Serious offences, from the level of the guard were also referred to the higher authorities through the same channel.

I could gather from the printed hand-bills that six meetings of the Desh Panchayet organizations were held up to now. The first of such meetings was held in Belai-dih in the year 1350 B.S. and then subsequent meetings were held in Koira-dih (Purulia), Kusumkiwari, Chandipur, and twice in Barabazar between 1357 B.S. to 1358 B.S. The last of the Desh Panchayet was held at Patamda. Since then the activity of this organization had been restricted mainly to paper-works.

A synopsis of the printed proceedings of different meetings is given hereunder:

1. Drinking of wine and taking of chicken should be given up.
2. One cannot re-marry during the lifetime of his first wife and the vice-versa.

3. Evil social customs present in the Kora marriage should be stopped.

4. Re-marriage is permissible for young girls, that also only once.

5. No one can go outside without wife.

6. Both boys and girls should be sent to school. Illiterate boys cannot marry.

7. No one should engage cows in drawing ploughs.

8. One should not keep his elder brother's wife or marry her.

9. Poultry farming with chicken should be stopped.

10. One should not take cooked food in the hands of unknown persons or 'low' caste-groups.

11. The female folk should put on veil before the senior inmates of the house as well as before the outsiders.

12. During the period of mourning, one should not take fish or meat.

13. Meat of slain (jabai) and dead animals is strictly forbidden.

14. In all rites of passage, the services of Brahmin priests and Vaisnava Guru should be taken.

15. If any one takes away other's wife, he should be socially boycotted.

16. If the girl goes out at her own initiative, her parents will be held responsible and they are liable to perform purificatory rites for her evil. She should be considered as socially 'fallen'.

According to written resolutions taken in these meetings, if any one is found to disobey the above codes of the Panchayet or
violate the social norms, he is liable to be punished accordingly and even to a fine extending up to Rs.100/-. The Desh Panchayet officials and its members tried their utmost to pursue the reformist moves for the better livings of this backward community. They also received written assurance and physical help from the Rajput Zamindary lineages of the area, namely, Barabhum and Kashipur Rajas to maintain the above-mentioned social disciplines. According to some Kora respondents, the close vigilance of the caste leaders and the active support of the Rajput Chiefs have actually enabled them to bring down the frequency of the cases of 'evil' social deeds to a considerable extent for a brief span of one and a half decade or so since its inception. Some of the caste leaders admit that the people refrained from violating the ethical codes of the society largely due to fear of the royal power rather than for their self-conscious efforts.

From a torn out diary-register of the reformist society, it is gathered that a number of 89 cases referred to Barabazar Chatai during 1354 to 1356 B.S. Amongst these only 7 cases had been sent up to the higher authorities for trial and the rest 82 cases were taken up by the Chatai Prodhan. In 21 cases the caste leaders took the help of Barabhum Rajas in controlling unruly offenders. Most of these cases were certain grave concerns involving illicit sex-relations excepting 7 cases of macchi-pat, 3 cases of killing cattle, 9 cases of engaging cows in drawing ploughs. Illicit sex-relations (70 cases) can be classified into following categories:

(i) A Kora male with a female of non-Kora castes like Bauri, Dom, Hari - 4 cases;
(ii) A Kora female with a non-Kora male - 11 cases;
(iii) A Kora married male involving with the wife of other Kora - 32 cases;
(iv) A Kora married male with an unmarried Kora female - 13 cases;
(v) Between unmarried Kora boys and girls - 5 cases;
(vi) One case of clan-endogamy and (vii) 4 cases of junior leviration (marrying deceased husband's younger brother).

The offenders in these cases, were punished at the different caste-meetings held for settling the disputes where both the parties were present. Getting information from the guard, the Chatai Prodhan and other caste leaders attended these meetings. Besides social ex-communication, a fine ranging from Rs.5/- to Rs.50/- were levied upon the offenders in such cases, depending upon the seriousness of
their offences. Excepting the 21 cases in which the help of Barabhum Raja was sought, the offenders of all other cases openly admitted their faults and paid the levied fine to the Panchayet ungrudgingly.

It was admitted by the caste leaders that for the last 10 years or so, Kudia Jatiya Manbhum-Hazaribagh Panchayet do not have much activities owing to lack of economic incentives from the Rajas of Barabhum and Kashipur. Non-cooperative attitudes from their own fellowmen are also responsible for the further disintegration of it. Moreover, they decline to pay the nominal annual subscription of annas four in view of false excuse for their increasing economic crisis.

The Kora of 1968 are not found to follow the ethical codes of their reformist society rigidly. Even then, according to the versions of the Kora leaders, the following good effects can be noticed at present:— (i) Female relatives do not accompany the bridegroom to the marriage booth; (ii) Before the end of the mourning period, the relatives of the dead do not take fish or meat; (iii) They take non-vegetarian diet after the purificatory bath; (iv) During the mourning period they take arua rice (unboiled) without salt; (v) The married females put on vermilion mark at the parting line of hair on the forehead and wear iron-bangle (kharu) and conchshell bangle (sankha) as the symbolic mark of marriedhood like the married women of high caste Hindus; (vi) Some of the Kora boys and girls are at present going to schools. Boys, after passing lower primary standard take admission in Higher Secondary schools; (vii) Now-a-days, the Brahmin and Vaisnava officiate in the marriage and post-funeral rites of the Kora; (viii) Kora women have stopped smoking and also drinking liquor; (ix) They no more practise group-dancing, widow-remarriage and junior leviration.

In spite of abstention from social drinking of liquor and taking of beef and pork and avoidance of certain traditional social customs as mentioned above by the literate section of the Kora, it can be easily marked that the major bulk of them are not main-
taining all the recommendations of their Reformistic Society rigidly. This remark holds true for the last two points mentioned above. There may be slight decline in the female habit of drinking and smoking but it has not totally stopped. So also is the case with their traditional sex-behaviour. All other changes in the social life as referred to by the Kora leaders have crepted in the Kora society. These might have the symbolic value to achieve a consolidated position in Hindu caste system, and the general mass of the Kora are found to follow them encouragingly. They also felt proud in disclosing the amended social customs in imitation of the local high caste Hindus. These customs are easy to imitate and, moreover, they do not have to lose or sacrifice much in amending these aspects of their social life. But such deep-rooted habits and customs like smoking and drinking of liquor, group-dancing by women, widow-remarriage, junior leviration and unrestricted premarital and extra-marital sex indulgence which are not prohibited. Of course, at present they do not distil liquor at home. They felt shy in admitting unrestricted sex indulgences present in their society. The moral value for chastity even now-a-days has practically no value in the Kora society. Women do not participate in group-dancing in the presence of the outsiders. But they did participate when I was very much acquainted with these families. I had to offer them drinks several evenings for their mixed dancing performances. Even then, they strongly opposed when I tried to take photographic snaps of their dances. The Kora families which I studied, had their respective Vaisnava Guru from whom they took diksha or sacred initiation and they always made it a point to employ Brahmin (though of the 'fallen' category) in marriage and funeral ceremony. Vaisnava Gurus also paid occasional visits to these Kora hamlets for getting alms. Thus it can be marked that though the undercurrent of the process of Hinduization was present among the Kora far back since Risley's time, it takes an organized form only during recent years. They feel encouraged and prepare ground for such mobility movements by seeing the more advanced groups like the Bhumi, the Mahato and also the Santal of the area who own the major bulk of the cultivable lands and control the local economy and are more Hinduized. A loosely organized desire is generated in the tribe, whereby the Kora look themselves up to the other lower groups of the area who are denied the service of the Brahmin, Vaisnava or Barber. In
fulfilment of this desire for having a stable caste status, they have started imitating certain Brahmanical ritual symbols having some prestige value. Even then, they cannot be able to give up certain symbolic tribal traits which actually go against their above-mentioned aspiration and pulled down their claim to the level of very 'low' castes. As already mentioned, we can count among these, the social drinking of liquor, taking of beef, pork and chicken, group-dancing by women, widow-remarriage, junior leviration and the like. These traditional customs are so deeply entrenched in the minds of these people that the mobility movement of this nature has not been able to sweep them out altogether. Moreover, their lack of political and economic control in this area as well as their dispersedly distributed scanty population may also be responsible for the half-hearted response to such social movements initiated by the minor literate section of the tribe who get the taste of the theology and world view of the upper caste Hindu.

A recent trend can be marked that this literate section finds it more convenient to leave the bulk of their Kora brethren behind and to aspire for recognition as Hindus. They try to intensify 'sanskritizing' their ways of life. They are found to follow the prescriptive directives of Samaj Sanskar Panchayet quite rigidly. They give more emphasis in sending their children to school and try to consolidate their economic position by accumulating more land and by doing white collar jobs. Thus we can notice such a cleavage in the Kora society in matter of social mobility.

THE IMPACT OF SADHUS:

It is also interesting to note that we had found a Kora converted to sadhu*. Although we could gather only one single case in the three villages under study, still it may be quite useful from the purpose of our study. Ghasiram Kora of the village of Sankhari took initiation (diksha) from a Bengalee sadhu, Shri Atalbehari

*A religious preceptor who has cut-off all connections with the earthly affair and leads a holy life by singing devotional songs.
Thakur (Vaisnava) about 15 years ago. The Guru hails from Jhalda (about 35 miles away). Atalbehari has asked him to wear kanthi (necklace of beads made from sacred basil wood) and to keep beard. According to the advice of the Guru, Ghasiram wears dhoti without kachha and refrains from killing animals. For him, there is no restriction on food. He has practically kept himself aloof from all earthly affairs. He used to live on alms from his fellow villagers although he owns a small plot of cultivable land. Ghasiram is married and he has a small family comprising his wife and a young child. He confesses one very secret thing of his life to me. His Guru has also ordered him to practise the art of withholding discharge of semen at the time of sexual intercourse. Loss of semen means the loss of potency. Dr. Sinha found large scale practice of similar nature among the Bhumij of this region under the influence of the Vaisnava (Sinha: 1961, 1965). Ghasiram admits that he is trying hard to learn this art of withholding semen but he has not so far been able to master it. Ghasiram usually sings his self-composed songs which are mainly dedicated songs. The Kora of this village and also of neighbouring villages have high respect for Ghasiram. The Brahmins of the village used to invite Ghasiram in Hari-mela functions for his devotional songs. Free translation of a typical devotional song is given below:—

"The only way to overcome the worries and anxieties of this earth is to sing the name of Lord Hari. How long Thou (Lord Hari) keep me in this unclean ocean. I want to get rid of it. Please allow me a place under your feet where I will sing only your name. Please allow me to enjoy the joy of freedom above the earthly sufferings ............."

Ghasiram has some reformistic ideas also to bring up this 'fallen' Kora group. He was, at one time, an active member of the reformistic Kora Samaj Sanskar Panchayet. In fact he had composed a number of such songs to inspire his Kora brethren and to condemn all social evils of their society.
"You should not be busy with wine, meat and women; God has sent you to do something. You have some important duties to complete during your lifetime. Don’t run after maya; think about paralok (other world); time is still there; give up these ill-habits; take the name of Lord Hari at every morning and evening; that will lead you towards light".

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

In November, 1956, the then district of Manbhum was divided and about three-fourths portion of it had merged with Purulia district of West Bengal and the rest went in Singhbhum district of Bihar. Since then the political situation of this area are subjected to constant change. Lok Sevak Sangha becomes powerful in Purulia district where the Kora mostly live.

In 1952, 1957, 1962 elections, the nominees of Lok Sevak Sangha were returned both in State Legislation and in Parliament. In the State level, they became the members of the opposition party when the Congress was in power and formed the State Ministry. In 1967, however, Lok Sevak Sangha joined with a number of leftist parties to form the United Front who subsequently formed the Ministry as the majority group. After running the Government for about eight months, this Ministry was dissolved and the newly formed Progressive Democratic Front, backed by the Congress took over the charge of the Government for only 3 months. Then came the President’s Rule.

The Kora are not much interested in these political changes. When they are asked about the different political parties, the Kora excepting the literate section, could hardly furnish any definite idea about them. They cast their votes in different elections in favour of the candidates recommended by the Brahmins of the village. In all matters, they use to take the advice of Sambhu Mahanti, an
influential member of the zamindar (Brahmin) family. In 1952 and 1957 they cast their votes in favour of Ishan Mahanti of Barra village (Congress). But in 1962 they supported Padak Mahato (Lok Sevak Sangha) according to the advice of Sambhu Mahanti.

Thus we find that the political opinion of the Kora is absolutely guided by the local influential Brahmins. They are not much concerned about casting their votes. They were offered a feast on the day of casting votes by the above-mentioned parties and were taken to the polling booth. However, the pre-election campaign lectures of the political parties have made the Kora at least vaguely aware of their importance in the elections. They know that every adult person has a vote. However, to a Kora, it makes no difference if their supported candidate wins in the election contest or not. "They are bhadra-lok (gentry) who do not have any sympathy for the poor people like us. They all talk big things before the election to win over the votes. But after the election, if a Kora goes to them for any kind of help they do not even recognise them" - a few Kora informants remarked like this. Some Kora also told me that they are not going to cast votes in the coming election (1967) even on the request of Sambhu Babu.

Even then, a small minority of progressive Kora are found to be quite conscious about election and they took keen interest in all the general elections. I have the opportunity to meet some of them who worked for the different parties in pre-election campaigns. I have met five such persons, four of whom support the Congress Party and the other is an active member of the Communist Party of India. They are quite aware that their supported parties do not have much hold in the local area and will ultimately be defeated in the hands of Lok Sevak Sangha. It is admitted by them that from the core of their heart, they do not support any of these political parties. They work during pre-election campaigns for certain monetary gain or for some sort of physical benefit. The Congress Party gives maximum economic incentive to the outside workers. Moreover, it is known to all of them that the Congress Party, though it does not have much hold here, is in power in majority of the States and at Centre. Their contacts with the Congress leaders may give them benefits in the long run.
Now let us summarize our findings in this Chapter in the following lines:

In spite of their obvious origin from a tribal stock, the Kora of 1968 have been found within the threshold of Hinduism. They have moved even further in the direction of Hinduization since the time of Risley. They have totally forgotten their mother tongue which Grierson had referred to as 'Kora' under the great 'Mundari' family of languages. They have given up some of the age-old traditional social customs. Totemic associations of some of the major clans have also forgotten. We find at least a minority literate section of them under the influence of the ethical theology and world view of the upper caste Hindus. The Kora as an ethnic group are provided with a more or less specified britti of earthwork. Now-a-days they get the ritual services of Brahmin priest, Vaisnava preceptor, barber, washerman, midwife etc., although of 'degraded' (nichu) classes in all of their rites of passage. There are clear indications that the Hindu religious ideas have penetrated into their religion. What is more interesting that in spite of their very low status in the regional caste-hierarchy, and obvious origin from a tribal base, a specific ritual role has been assigned to them by the upper Hindu castes in the area. It is the ritual act of bandh-biha or the marriage of the newly excavated tanks, entrusted upon the Kora.

In spite of their aspiration for higher status in the regional caste-hierarchy, the Kora as a group are somewhat isolated from the sophisticated Hinduism, through their economic backwardness, social segregation and a general lack of direct access to literate Hindu Tradition. Certain symbolic traits of the Kora do not support their above-mentioned aspiration and pull down their claim to the level of 'very low' castes. Amongst these, mention may be made of social drinking of liquor, taking of chicken, beef, pork, group-dancing by women, widow-remarriage, junior leviration, sorrorate, non-sanskritic clan-names etc. In fact, they are grouped with other 'low' castes just above the group of untouchables.

A recent trend has been marked among the Kora to rationalize
their low position by inverting the status of the well-established and relatively prosperous Hindu groups like the Moira (sweetmeat sellers) and Gandho banik (sellers of spices and grocery materials). Such rationalization in terms of inverse order of reality of stratification is just an effort to attain a make-belief status. A similar craving for high status by the inversion of hierarchy has also been marked in the case of the Kharia vis-a-vis the Brahmin in the area (Banerjee: 1959).

Although the Kora of Pargannah Barabhum do not organize that sort of corporate mobility movement to improve their caste status like those of the powerful land-holding groups like the Bhumij, Mahato or the Santal, yet they have made some positive moves in this direction. It was first initiated by a few literate persons of the group and they formed a reformistic society like Adim Mudi Swajatiya Samaj Sanskar Panchayet around 1345 B.S. i.e. about 30 years back. This localized movement soon took a larger shape in the form of Desh Panchayet mobility movements initiated by a more organized and larger body of Mudi Jatiya Manbhum and Hazaribagh Jela Desh Panchayet around 1349-50 B.S. Here also the literate section of the tribe took the leadership. This bigger reformistic society had chalked a detailed programme to condemn all social customs which are not 'good' in they eyes of the Hindu and to recommend a number of Hindu socio-cultural traits in the form of written resolutions taken in different caste meetings. They went further to punish the offenders who would violate the specified codes of the reformistic society. In this matter the caste-leaders received the physical and economical assistance and active support of the Rajas (chieftains) of Barabhum and Kashipur.

With the disintegration of feudal estates of Barabhum and Kashipur, the chieftains have lost the former control over the people which, in turn, not allowing them to give that much of attention on the internal affairs of individual groups in the area. According to the caste-leaders, this above important political change along with the non-cooperative attitudes of the fellowmen are responsible to restrict the activities of their reformistic society mainly on papers in recent years. Moreover,
their lack of political and economic control in the area as well as their dispersedly distributed very small numerical strength may also be responsible for the half-hearted appeal of such social movements, initiated by the literate section of the tribe who have comparatively closer contact of the theology and world view of the upper caste Hindu.

A recent trend can be marked that progressive literate section finds it more convenient to leave the bulk of their Kora brethren behind and to aspire for recognition as Hindus. They try to intensify 'sanskritization' in their ways of life. They are found to follow the directions of Samaj Sanskar Panchayat quite rigidly. They give more emphasis in sending their children to school and try to consolidate their economic position by accumulating more land and by doing white collar jobs.

It is also interesting to note that the impact of Sadhus on the life of the Kora has already crept in. After taking sacred initiation (diksha) from the Vaishnava religious preceptor, a fraction of the Kora community has started a holy life by refraining themselves from killing of animals and by keeping themselves aloof from all earthly affairs. They sing nam-sas of Lord Hari to get mukti (freedom) from the earthly sufferings. According to the advice of the guru, they practice the art of withholding the discharge of semen at the time of sexual intercourse.

The Kora of Barabhum are not very much concerned with the political situation or the recent political changes of the State of West Bengal. The political opinion of the Kora is entirely guided by the local influential peoples of other castes. They are not very much eager even to cast their votes. To a Kora, it makes no difference if his supported candidate wins in the election contest or not as it does not help him in any way. Yet, the pre-election campaigns of different political parties have made the Kora quite conscious about their importance as voters. Even then,
a few progressive Kora are found to work for different political parties for certain monetary gain or for some sort of physical benefit.

If one goes to a Kora village of Barabhum at present, he can feel a state of fatigue which is quite apparent from their modes of behaviour and their present way of thinking, in spite of their aspirations and mobility movements to achieve a high status in Hindu social system. They have come to realize that even if they get a corporate status in the regional caste-hierarchy, that will not help them in their present state of economic hardship. As they have not gain much and they stand on the same footing where they were, prior to such prolonged mobility movements to come within the threshold of Hinduism, they are found in a state of psychological depression and feel fatigued. Moreover, most of them are found to lead a life of 'hand-to-mouth' existence by earning their livelihood in exchange of hard manual labour. They get hardly any spare time to think over such things which do not offer them any material gain.