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# **CULTURAL OSCILLATION**

( A Study on Patua Culture )

**BINOY BHATTACHARJEE**



**NAYA PROKASH**

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**DATA ENTERED**

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TO  
MY PARENTS  
SAROJINI  
AND  
RAMESH CHANDRA

1999



# **C O N T E N T S**

**Preface**

**Foreword by Nihar Ranjan Ray**

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## P R E F A C E

The idea of a systematic study of the Patua Community occurred to me after I had been in contact with them for sometime during another research project not specifically connected with the Patuas. There were two things which stirred my curiosity about the Patuas. First, their intermediary social position between Hindu and Muslim and second, aggressive assertion by one group that they were Muslim and not Hindu and equally aggressive assertion by the other group that they were Hindu and not Muslim. And of course the fact there was little previous sociological study of the Patua Community was also an incentive.

In course of the work I received generous help from more persons than I can possibly name here to acknowledge my debt to them. The most numerous group among them must remain anonymous. I mean my Patua friends scattered all over West Bengal and some other parts of India and also many non-Patua villagers, most of them poor, who gave me shelter, hospitality, information and other help during my field-work. A few get mentioned in the body of the book, but the larger number remained unnamed. To all of them I acknowledge my debt. I include in this also those Patuas who offered resistance to my attempts to elicit information because such resistance itself was a factor in the composition of the Community's total mentality which was under study.

Of the benefactors whom I can name here my thought goes first to those who are no longer alive : Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, Professor J. B. S. Haldane, National Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and Professor M. N. Basu, Head of the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University. My debt to Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose is incalculable. He was my teacher, *guru* and he guided me over two decades taking a keen interest in all my works including the present study. I had my first experience as a research worker in a project which was sponsored and financed by Professor Haldane and it was a work

under this project which first brought me into contact with the Patua Community. To me, Professor Haldane's memory is an ever-sacred memory of inspiration. I acknowledge my debt to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee for his invaluable suggestion regarding the origin and history of the Patuas and their language. Professor M. N. Basu's affectionate guidance, constant vigilance and encouragement have sustained me throughout this work.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Surajit Chandra Sinha, erstwhile Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati, who helped in formulating the problem and whose wise counsel has always been available to me.

I must acknowledge my gratitude to Shri Barindra Mitra, a doyen of publishers of Calcutta, for taking the risk of publishing this book. My thanks are due to all the members of Naya Prokash for taking sincere interest in the publication of this book. Thanks are also due to Swati Bhattacharyya, for preparing the index, Sukur Ali of Sriniketan and Linda Mayur of Oxford University for going through the entire manuscript.

I must express my gratitude to Shri Monoranjan Guha, ex-editor of *Hindusthan Standard* and vigil without whom the book might not have been completed.

Finally, I must record my deep sense of gratitude to Professor Niharranjan Ray, the eminent culturologist of India, who despite his heavy preoccupations went through the whole manuscript and wrote the Foreword of this book.

Visva-Bharati  
Sriniketan

Binoy Bhattacharjee

## FOREWORD

This is perhaps for the first time that I have come across a serious, in-depth, anthropological study of the *Chitrakaras*, popularly known as *Patuas* ( scroll-painters and exhibitors of scroll-paintings ), an occupational group known for long as occupying an intermediate position between the low-grade, traditional Hindu artisan castes and the Muslim artisan groups of similar social standing. Even to this day these *Chitrakara* or *Patua* families are distributed over a wide area of West Bengal in the districts of Midnapore, Birbhum, Purulia, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Nadiya, Howrah, Hugli and Calcutta.

Years ago, inspired by the late Professor Haldane and guided by the late Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, Dr. Binoy Bhattacharjee now of Palli Charcha Kendra ( the Centre for Rural Studies ) of Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, took upon himself to study this widely spread out occupational group of people. Over long years and on repeated visits he studied these families, their origin and history, their distribution, their economic life and material culture, their social structure and social life, and all these following accepted norms and methods of anthropological investigation. Here is thus a most dependable and most up-to-date anthropological monograph on a very peculiar but interesting occupational group of West Bengal. The story presents features of our cultural life at the grass-root level which were hitherto unnoticed and raises crucial questions in regard to problems of acculturation and assimilation.

It is to the credit of Dr. Bhattacharjee that he took courage to dig deep to the roots of the most crucial of them and came out with an answer of his own. In the last chapter of this monograph he poses this question as he sees it, explains it in its historical and intellectual context and presents a hypothesis. Personally I feel convinced that the social situation in which the *Patuas* of West Bengal find themselves, cannot be

explained either by the hypothesis of acculturation or by that of assimilation, but can perhaps be better understood by that of oscillation as presented by Dr. Bhattacharjee.

Since Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, an esteemed colleague and personal friend of mine initiated this study I consider it a privilege to have been asked to write a Foreword to this monograph. I am doing it with pleasure and with a sense of gratification.

I welcome the publication of this monograph.

Calcutta,  
17th August, 1980

**Niharranjan Ray**



# INTRODUCTION

In the years 1954-55 Professor J. B. S. Haldane sponsored a study on caste. As a participant in that study under the guidance of Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, I was especially concerned with the problem of rehabilitation of the castes displaced from their traditional occupations in the district of Midnapur, West Bengal. It was in the course of this enquiry that I first came across the Patuas in Kumirmara and Nankarchak villages under Nandigram police station. Like Dule Bagdis and Karan-gas the Patuas had also been displaced from their traditional occupations—scroll painting, exhibiting scrolls accompanied with songs and idol making. Their position was midway between Hindu and Muslim, though as an attempt towards their integration into the Hindu community a purification rite had been organised in 1948 by the Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti and the Bharat Sevasram Sangha. Later on, during a village study in the year 1965 I came in contact with the Patuas of the village Pankurhans, police station Nanoor, in the district of Birbhum. On enquiry I found that their social position was in between the Hindus and the Muslims. In reply to my questions they did not show any inclination towards Hinduism although the married women put vermilion on their foreheads and in the parting of their hair and wore conchshell bangles according to Hindu custom. Again, in 1967, during a village study I came across the Patuas of the village Purandarpur in the district of Birbhum. When I asked about their social position they aggressively replied that they were Muslims and had never been Hindu. Further enquiry revealed that almost all of them had two names—one Hindu and the other Muslim. The person who gave aggressive replies to my questions had registered his name as Digvijay Chitrakar, son of Janhu Chitrakar in the school register, but now he was using a Muslim name, Digri-baux, son of Janai Patua. In order to probe into the problem of the crisis in their cultural identity, I visited Patua localities of

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different districts of West Bengal, and found that the entire Patua Community was split on the question of whether to side with the Hindus or the Muslims.

According to the *Brahmavaivarta-Purana* the Chitrakars or Patuas belong to the Nabasayak group of castes in the Hindu social organisation (the nine-artisan-caste group of Bengal), their traditional occupations were scroll painting and singing songs describing the scrolls and idol making. For a long time they have occupied an intermediary position between the Hindus and the Muslims. In 1901 L. S. S. O'Malley described the social position of the Jadu Patuas, a branch of the Patua Community, as "occupying a place midway between Hinduism and Mohammedanism. They are the descendants of a Mohammedan fakir by a low caste Hindu woman. They believe in Allah but worship Kali, Manasa Devi and other deities of the Hindu Pantheon. Hindu priests sometimes officiate when they pay their homage to Kali. They practise circumcision and bury their dead. On the other hand many of them kill animals as the Hindus do by severing the head from the body, and shave their beards. Many again bear Hindu names and married women mark the parting of their hair with vermillion. Some also abstain from beef. They have a kaji who officiates at their marriages but not necessarily at their burial services ; by profession they are brass workers and make trinkets, gongs, weights, etc., of that metal ; some again are mendicants ; they draw pictures of persons recently dead and exhibit them to the bereaved relatives who give them presents".

In the census report of 1901, the Patuas or Chitrakars were recorded under the title "Castes and sub-castes of the Hindus". In the 1951 census report on Tribes and Castes of West Bengal the Patuas were recorded under the title "Artisan Castes belonging to Naba-Sayak". The Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti circulated a leaflet (Appendix 5) urging the Patua people to enroll themselves as Hindus during the census operation in 1951. They held several public meetings about this ; but their attempt failed in many districts. I met a good number of Patuas who

were confused about the question of their social position. Psychologically the entire Community is oscillating over the question of whether to side with the Hindus or with the Muslims. The aggressive tone of their professed attitudes on this question and the difference between such profession and their actual social position, their restlessness, some of their clandestine occupations and vague knowledge about their past evoked certain questions in my mind. The questions are : whether a community suffers from schizophrenia at the time of breaking ties with the parent society ; whether the Patuas are proselytised or becoming Islamised through the process of acculturation ; why do the Patuas swing between Hinduism and Islam ? I decided to concentrate on the problem of the oscillation of the Patuas between the two dominant cultural groups.

The Patuas or the Chitrakars are a well-known Community in Bengal, particularly for their distinctive style and technique in paintings. A few exhibitions of the scroll paintings of Patuas were held in Calcutta and at Santiniketan. The first public exhibition in March 1932 was organised by the late Guru Sadaya Dutta, the then District Magistrate of Birbhum. This folk art exhibition was financed by the Indian Society of Oriental Art. In that exhibition the scrolls were demonstrated along with associated mythological songs. Later on, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose praised the style of painting of the Patuas, and Pats were exhibited during the Santiniketan Mela in 1934. The internationally known artist late Jamini Roy held the Patua style of painting in high esteem. In spite of appreciation of their paintings, there has been no enquiry about the life of the Patuas as a Community. No light was thrown on the life pattern of the Patuas except for a few lines in the 1901 Bengal Census Report and in 1951 census report of Tribes and Castes in West Bengal. Calcutta University published a book on Patua Sangit, collected by Guru Sadaya Dutta, in 1939. The book contains twenty-nine songs and seven paintings with an introductory note by Dutta. Dinesh Chandra Sen in his book *Brihatbanga* (1935) and Ashok Mitra in his book *Bharater Chitrakala* (1957) contributed many pages on the Patuas' art and their esteemed place in the field of

art in Bengal as well as in India but there was nothing about the Patuas' life and culture in these books.

So, this is the first attempt towards a scientific study of the Patua social life and culture. Keeping in mind the responsibility of such a pioneering study I have tried to make my field work as prolonged and as intensive as possible. I have tried as a conscientious student of Anthropology to come into the closest possible relation with the Community. For a period of four years I repeatedly visited the Patua villages in Birbhum district. Since 1954, I have also visited Patua villages, though not all, in the districts of Midnapur, 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Howrah, Hooghly, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Nadia and Purulia in West Bengal. As a result I have amassed a huge quantity of data of which a portion is utilised in the present study encompassing only the life cycle, annual cycle, economic life, material culture to some extent, inheritance, demography, language and the problem of intercultural oscillations of the Patuas of Birbhum.

### **Approach Methodology**

Melville J. Herskovits considers that "Two principal objectives have characteristically marked the work of scientists. The first is to obtain, by means of a well-defined and constantly sharpened methodology and in terms of clearly stated hypotheses, the facts concerning the phenomenon under study, and to order these facts so as to reveal their nature, functioning and dynamic qualities. The second objective is to derive from the ordering of the facts, in the light of the stated hypotheses, those generalizations, sometimes called 'laws' that expressed the broad principles under which the phenomenon as observed are to be accounted for." Throughout the present study I have tried to keep up an awareness of these two objectives.

Methods followed in this study are not limited to the conventional ones applied in Anthropology. I have had recourse to other techniques also to combat the problem of the Patuas' habit of concealing facts from all outsiders. As there was no ethnographic record and census of the Patua population, I had to collect quantitative data.

At the outset of the work I visited each house in every Patua village in the district of Birbhum. It was not easy to spot the Patua habitations as these are very small in number and sometimes the Patuas live a clandestine life. To overcome this difficulty I established personal friendships with two Patuas and gradually acquired a large number of good friends in the Community. One of them was an ambitious leader of the Patua Community and I took advantage of this in order to get a list of Patua villages. I then drew genealogical tables tracing the marital relationships as well as their locations. The genealogical tables helped me to establish rapport as in any new village I could call people by name, and bring information about their relatives in other villages. It served two purposes : first, the initial inhibition was lessened ; second, they thought that I had already collected much information about them, and therefore there was no use of concealing facts from me. In this way the more villages I visited the more secrets were disclosed to me.

The data on life cycle and annual cycle were collected by narrative and case study methods. For verification of the evidence I depended much upon personal observation and actual performances. I attended all the Muslim and Hindu festivals to observe the Patua behaviour during Hindu or Muslim festivals. It gave me an opportunity to check on their narration and to note discrepancies between narration and actual performance. For example, one informant told me that he took beef during the Id festival but on the day of the Id festival, I found, he sacrificed a chicken. Asked to explain the discrepancy, he stated that as a Muslim there was no bar against his taking beef but actually he was unable to take it because of a feeling of physical repulsion. He hoped his sons would be able to take beef and relish it as a true Muslim.

In all cases I relied most on case study and for accuracy I collected information from several persons, including the Hindu priest and the Muslim kaji, on the same topic. I also collected information from several villages with a view to cross-checking or for noting variations, if any, on the same topic.

In the list of things to be observed I included wall decorations, such as calender-pictures, framed pictures, etc., and transistor radios. The more Islamised Patuas decorate their room walls with pictures of Mecca and Madina or with some Islamic legendary or mythical pictures ; the less Islamised houses have both Hindu and Muslim pictures and the Hinduised Patuas decorate their walls with pictures of Benaras and Hindu gods and goddesses. To get an idea of their psychological bent whenever I saw a transistor radio in any Patua house I would ask the owner casually to switch on the radio as if I wanted it for my own relaxation and I found the transistor was tuned in to Dacca, the erstwhile capital of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), if it was the house of a more Islamised Patua whereas in a Hinduised Patua house the transistor was tuned into the Calcutta Station. This helped me to understand the attitude of the Patuas and I could formulate my approach towards them accordingly. As a Brahmin by birth, I was familiar with Hindu legends and myths and had some knowledge of Hindu scriptures. In order to do field work in a mixed community like the Patuas I read the holy Koran and the Hadis, got myself acquainted with the technical terms of Islamic rites and rituals and had a fair collection of myths and legends from Islamic texts and from a Maulvi. I used to carry with me books on Patua songs, the holy Koran, Namaj Siksha and such like which impressed the Islamised among the Patuas and made them feel that I was free from Hindu prejudices. It helped to establish a bond of sympathy between us and in measuring the depth of Hinduisation or Islamisation of the Patuas. Thus formed in my mind a vivid picture of the Patua Community which helped in framing a clear hypothesis.

The greatest difficulty I had to face in collecting data was the tendency—one might even say determination—of the informants to suppress facts. I have worked in many other communities but never before had to face such a difficulty of wresting the truth out of such hushed-up facts and misleading statements. An example of the kind of difficulty faced may be cited here. I had heard the name of Sukuruddin Patua everywhere in Birbhum as a famous painter. I went to his



home in the village Itaguria on 26-6-70. In reply to my questions about their caste, Sukuruddin and his wife told me that they were never Hindus nor anyone of their forefathers knew scroll painting or idol making. Sukuruddin was the most well-off among the Patuas of the village. For my field work in that village I hired his ante room and stayed there for seven days. Sri Benoy Ghosh, a well-known author in Sociology and Anthropology, had given a full description of his meeting and dialogue with Sukuruddin, in 1954, who then called himself Sudarshan Chitrakar. Sudarshan Chitrakar narrated to Sri Ghosh how the Patua community lost their occupation and how closely they were related with the Hindus in the past. He also narrated to Sri Ghosh the methods and techniques of scroll painting. After I had developed friendship with Sukuruddin and his family, I one day disclosed that I knew his Hindu name was Sudarshan and I had seen his scrolls. He was a little abashed and told me that now he had become a Muslim and cannot go back to Hinduism and that was the reason why he had suppressed this fact from me. In a later period on 23-5-72 he invited me to attend his grand-daughter's marriage ceremony. I observed that they hired a band party with flutes and drums and beat drums as done in Hindu marriages and ceremonially went to a Bagdi's (a low-caste Hindu) house on the eve of the marriage ceremony to fetch 'Kashar'. When the Muslim kaji arrived, the men put caps on their heads and performed namaj and the band party (the members of the party were Bayen—a low-caste Hindu) was sent away from the site of the marriage. The band party was again called back as soon as the Muslim kaji left the place. This shows how the Patuas are trying to hide their actual behaviour. In his previous statements Sukuruddin had emphatically denied any connexion with the Hindus but his grand-daughter's marriage ceremony presented a clear picture of their mixed behaviour. On the next day, accompanying the bridegroom as a member of the bride's party, I went to the village Kanachi. I stayed there for five days. During my stay I learnt from the local Muslims that the Patuas of this village have become Islamised. But there was no social intercourse between the Muslims and the

Patuas as the latter were 'unclean, nomadic people'. The present Patua neighbourhood in the village was known as Bede Danga which is still now referred as Bede pond and Bede land. Sudarshan *alias* Sukuruddin was originally inhabitant of the village Kanachi. He had sold his land and gone to Itaguria. As I developed intimacy with Sukuruddin's family I took the opportunity of asking him about his past life in Kanachi. He told me that the Patuas were like wanderers. They cannot stay in one village for a long time. They will seek out some new place near some pond and date-palm trees. They live on varied occupations like snake-charming, abracadabra, mattress making from the leaf of date-palm tree, scroll painting, etc. Gradually they adopted idol making too. They were known as Bede as well because of their wandering habit. This shows how difficult it was to get correct information from them. Of course, now, after close acquaintance and friendship, the Patuas of Birbhum no longer try to conceal anything from me. They have divulged to me even their secret language to a great extent.

The Patuas being a complex community who are passing through a transitional phase are always eager to pass off their desired behaviour as their actual behaviour. To circumvent this I had to depend overwhelmingly on my personal observation, staying for longer periods in Patua villages and in Patua houses. Some of the Patuas are very aggressively reticent and secretive about themselves, some are docile and apparently willing to speak but would cleverly evade questions. In order to overcome this difficulty I invited a number of them and made them welcome at my residence, of course one at a time. I also offered help to some Patuas in getting admission to schools and colleges and secured some jobs for them. Those who were thus benefitted became more intimate and frank with me and told me a lot of things about their ceremonial drinking, community council and secret occupations like snake-charming, their abracadabra of *jalpara* and *tuktak*, practice as medicine women for illegal termination of pregnancies and for removing cataracts, performing with monkeys and bears, etc. After getting these hints it was easier for me to verify the statements

in the villages and also to probe deeper into the Patuas' life style, past and present. The data thus collected strengthened my conjecture and helped to build up a hypothesis on cultural oscillation.

Although the Patuas are found in many districts of West Bengal, viz., Midnapur, 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Hooghly, Burdwan, Manbhum, Murshidabad and Birbhum, I decided to take up Birbhum for the following reasons :—

i) Birbhum or Beerbhum has accommodated a large number of ethnic groups of India and almost all sects of religious groups of both Hinduism and Islam as well as people of primitive faith. Thus, the district Birbhum provides a suitable area for the Social Scientists to make exploratory studies. It may be relevant here to quote from the Census (1961) :

“The Western frontier of Bengal, historically known as Western Radha lies along the intermediate country between the lofty plateau of Central India and the Ganga valley. It has plenty of scenic grandeur, fragmentary ridges and long wavy down and it also forms her ethnical frontier. It had seen much and suffered much in course of the imperial progress, the Muslim ascendancy in Bengal and change of power to foreign rulers. But it is unfortunate that no systematic account of a region with such cultural and ethnic background written prior to the nineteenth century is readily available to us.”

ii) Birbhum has the largest Patua population.

iii) Of all districts the Patuas of Birbhum are the most famous for their scrolls.

iv) At least some records from the observations of the late Guru Sadaya Dutta in 1930-32 and Sri Benoy Ghosh in 1952-54 on the Patuas are available which may be used as bench-mark data.

v) I have been residing in this district for the last twelve years and I am adequately acquainted with the local people through village studies and studies in small communities in this region. It would be convenient for me to observe the Patuas in their activities throughout the year.

As there was no demographic and anthropological study on this Community, it was decided to cover all the 38 Patua villages in this district. Accordingly, census along with other socio-economic information were collected from all these villages. For the purpose of intensive study the following villages were selected for specific reasons, e.g. Kalitha (J.L. No. 73), Bonta (J.L. No. 168) and Sardha (J.L. No. 82), were selected because these villages are situated far off from the district headquarter Suri. Village Pachchiara (J.L. No. 168) and Kanachi (J.L. No. 38) were selected because the Patuas live as the nearest neighbours of the Muslims in these villages. The Patuas of Pachchiara and Kanachi are also considered as the highly Islamised Patuas. The village Pankurhans (J.L. No. 68) and Benuria (J.L. No. 54) were selected because they are inhabited by another sub-caste, namely Mal Patua. Panuria (J.L. No. 125), Purandarpur (J.L. No. 63) and Itaguria (J.L. No. 21) were selected because of the nearness to the district headquarter Suri.

The lack of systematic account makes the research work difficult, strenuous and time-consuming no doubt but it makes the research work more challenging and interesting, too.

## ORIGIN AND HISTORY

The caste name Chitrakar or Patua is derived from their occupation, namely, scroll-painting and scroll-exhibiting and in common parlance, in Bengal, the Chitrakars or the Patuas have become synonymous. But scroll-painting, though it is regarded as the caste calling of the Patuas, is not a monopoly of theirs, nor is idol-making.

In the past scroll-exhibiting accompanied with verse recital of the stories depicted on the scrolls was common in many countries of the world. Descriptions of Tibetan, Nepalese, Chinese, Japanese, Burmese and Italian scrolls for instance are plentiful in literature and in museums. At present the other groups are engaged in scroll-painting. For example, in the village Hatserandi, district Birbhum the Sutradhars draw Durga images on scrolls and many of the Fauzdars of Bishnupur, district Bankura earn their livelihood by scroll-painting. Idol-making is done not only by the Acharyas or Sutradhars or Kumbhakars but nowadays by many formally trained artists of any caste. At the same time the Chitrakars or the Patuas themselves do not depend solely on scroll-painting for their livelihood. More elaborate discussion about their occupations is to be found in the chapter on the economic life. Although the Patuas have a number of occupations, they claim scroll-painting, scroll-exhibiting and idol-making as their traditional caste occupations. Due to the lack of records the history of the Patuas has to be reconstructed from field data, available legends and references of the scroll-painters in ancient Sanskrit-literature.

Professor Deva Prasad Ghosh, ex-curator, Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta University, mentioned in a talk at Bangiya Sahitya Parishad on 4 May, 1971 that references to Chitrakars are available in old Buddhist literature. The great poet Kalidas incidentally mentioned the name Chitrakars and the exhibition of scrolls in his dramas *Abhijnan Sakuntalam* and *Malabikag-nimitram*. According to historians these dramas were written in the 5th century. The poet Banbhattacha wrote his famous drama *Harsha-Charita* early in the 7th century. He utilised the Chitrakar with his yama pata to create the dramatic effect before the death of Prabhakar Bardhan, father of Harsha Bardhan. In the 8th century Bishakhadutta also mentioned in his *Mudra Rakshas* that a Chitrakar came to the statesman Chanakya, of legendary fame in Pataliputra, after collecting secret information from different parts of the Mauryan Empire. Scroll is referred to in the *Uttara-Ramacharita* of Bhababhuti also (8th century). The *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, written probably in the middle of the 13th century, dealt with their origin, occupation, caste affiliation, etc., and mentioned that they had only recently been expelled (i.e., the 13th century) from the recognised Naba Sayaka caste group. These were supposed to have originated from the union of Visva-Karma, the celestial architect with Ghritachi, the celestial nymph (apsara). Originally nine castes of the group, namely Malakar, Karmakar, Kangsakar, Sankhakar, Kumbhakar, Tantubya, Sutradhar, Swarnakar and Chitrakar used to enjoy the same rank in the social hierarchy. But the Chitrakars lost their rank and were ousted from the Naba Sayaka group for their deviation from tradition in their paintings. The exact words of the Purana are as follows :

व्यतिक्रमेण चित्राणां सद्यश्चित्त्रकरस्तथा ।

पतितो ब्रह्मशापेन ब्राह्मणानाञ्च कोपतः ॥

[ Chitrakars for drawing paintings untraditionally have just been expelled (degraded) from society by the angry Brahmins. ]

The leaflets published by the Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti and the Bharat Sevak Sangha also quoted this verse from the Purana to prove that originally the Chitrakars were a clean

caste within the Hindu social organisation but due to their own fault they lost caste-status and were ordered by the Brahmans to be regarded as 'Mlechcha' meaning Muslim. Later on being partially pardoned they assumed a position midway between the Hindu and the Muslims. Besides these references in literature there are many legends current among the Patuas regarding their origin and later fall in social position.

According to the most widely current legend, the Patuas were expelled from the Hindu social organisation as the punishment for a sacrilegious act, namely, polluting the brush with which a picture of Lord Mahadeva was drawn. I collected this story from Midnapur in 1954 and subsequently also from all other districts mentioned earlier. The late Gurusadya Dutta also collected the same story with little differences in wording from Chhabilal Chitrakar of the village Panuria in 1930. The story goes as follows :

Once upon a time a Patua was drawing a portrait of Mahadeva without his consent and it so happened that just then Mahadeva was coming along that way. Fearing Mahadeva's anger which was sure to be aroused by the picture, the Patua, tried to hide his guilt by putting his brush inside his mouth. Thus the brush with which the scroll's picture had been drawn became polluted. Mahadeva, being a god, of course, understood everything and became all the more annoyed to see his misbehaviour. In his anger he then cursed the entire Patua (Chitrakar) community 'From today you will become Mlechcha (Muslim)'.—Then all members of the community came out with loud lamentations, fell at Mahadeva's feet and repeatedly begged his forgiveness. They implored the god to tell them how they could henceforth earn the livelihood by now Mahadeva's anger was cooled down and the god declared that henceforth the Patuas would be neither Hindu nor Muslim, they would follow the customs of Muslims, but earn their livelihood by painting and making images of Hindu gods and goddesses.

However, this is not the only legend current at the present time about the origin of the Patuas and their position in the community.

Panchkari Chitrakar (60) of the village Bagdola narrated this story :

Once Ballal Sen, the King of Bengal, set a Swarnakar (Goldsmith), a Sutradhar (Carpenter) and a Chitrakar (Scroll-Painter) each a job to be finished in a very short time. None of these three could do it. The angry king then declared their whole communities as outcaste. The Swarnakars and the Sutradhars continued their Hindu customs and though degraded in status remained Hindu. The Patuas continued their Hindu profession, i.e. scroll-painting and idol-making but took to Muslim customs, thus occupying a position which is neither Hindu nor Muslim.

Samadish Patua of Purandarpur said that they were Hindus. During the period of the Muslim Nawabs a levy called 'jizya' was imposed upon the Hindus. To escape this repressive tax the Patuas along with many other poor low-caste Hindus became Muslims. The other castes were assimilated in the Muslim community but the Patuas could not be so assimilated as they had to continue their profession among the Hindus. That is why the Patuas could not be absorbed either by the Hindus or by the Muslims and assumed a social position in between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Banku Patua of the village Sardha said that the Patuas became Muslims to get protection from the Nawabs against the attacks of Marhatta plunderers—the Bargis. The Patuas are docile by nature. They became Muslims in the hope that the Muslim rulers would protect them. Thus the Patuas remained in a midway between Hinduism and Mohammadanism.

Majid Patua, originally of the village Pachthubi of Murshidabad district and now settled in Sardha, Birbhum narrated this legend :

There was a sage, part of whose daily routine was to cut into pieces two cows belonging to his two sons and afterwards, with the help of his magical power to revive them. One day after the cows had been dismembered the sage's elder son hid a piece of meat and a bone inside a heap of cowdung. When the sage revived the cows, he found that the lowest rib of the left side and a portion of flesh near waist were missing from the elder son's cow. When the sage demanded to know what



had happened to the missing parts of the cow, the elder son confessed that he had hidden them. When he was ordered by the sage to produce them, the son went and found that the bone had turned into an onion and the meat into a garlic. So he could not carry out his father's order. The sage then cursed him in anger 'Since you have a craving for beef you will become a yaban (Muslim) from this day'. The Patuas are descendants of this elder son and from that day onward they became Muslims and the descendants of the younger son remained Hindus.

With the increasing Islamisation of the Patuas the legends are changing also. Pashupati Patua of the village Daurka told me 'We were never Hindus, we were Muslims. We came to this area from our ancestral homeland which was a desert. We came in contact with the Hindus and imbibing Hindu customs, deviated from the path ordained by Hazrat Mahammad. For this reason we were expelled from the Muslim community. Now the Patuas are trying to give up Hindu customs in order to be regarded as true Muslims.'

This myth in the Brahmapurana about the Patuas' origin and their relegation to the position of outcastes is nothing but to rationalize their intermediary position after the Muslims came into political power. There is no reference of Chitrakars in any scriptural writing relating to the Hindu caste-structure and occupations earlier than the Brahmapurana of the mid-13th century. The themes of the scrolls are mostly mythological stories or legends connected with some prophet or saint. The Tibetan and Burmese scrolls for instance depict the life of Gautama Buddha as mentioned earlier. In Bengal most of the themes are derived from 'Mangala Kavya or the Ramayana or the Mahabharata'. Some scrolls depict the supernatural stories about Muslim Pirs. Few scrolls on the life of Jesus Christ known as 'Khristo pat' have been found in Midnapur. But there are some secular scrolls, too. I witnessed an Italian film which was based on the story of Wolf and Scilla exhibited through a scroll in a village fair. A similar versical story entitled 'Manohar Fansira' was collected by me from a Chitrakar of the village Kumirmara, district Midnapur—a story of love and jealousy,

plunder and peace, cruelty and kindness. The origin and distribution of scroll in the context of the diffusion of a world-wide cultural trait would be an interesting topic for research, which, however, is beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice it to note that exhibition of scroll-painting accompanied with versical narration or songs was an institution that existed in ancient India. But there is not sufficient data to arrive at any conclusion about questions like (1) Was this profession the monopoly of one particular caste or not or (2) Were the Patuas or the Chitrakars of Bengal responsible for all such activities in India or (3) Do the Chitrakars, the Patuas, the Chitrakathis, the Chitralkhis found in different parts of India belonged to one ethnic group which has branched and spread in various directions from one habitat? A solution of these questions can be attempted through a comprehensive investigation project including a physical anthropological study. There has been no such study of this group.

In this context some ethnic links have been postulated however with Chitrakars in South India and Orissa. There is a brief remark occurring in 'Tribes and Castes of West Bengal':— "There is striking ethnical similarity between the Chitrakars of South India and Bengal. But the social position of the Chitrakars of Bengal is much lower than that of the Chitrakars of South India as the latter now belong to the Aryya Kshatriya Varna of Chandra Vansa."

Some artistic similarities may be noted with the Chitrakars of Bengal and Orissa. The Chitrakars of Bengal and Orissa draw a picture panel of Lord Jagannath, Balaram and their sister Subhadra at the end of the main theme of the scroll and ends their recitals with the devotional utterance of 'Jai Jagannath'. I have heard them whenever referring to Jagannath, with the words 'Jai Jagannath' (victory of Jagannath). There is a similarity in the lines of drawing as well as colour scheme between the Orissan scrolls and the Birbhum (Bengal) scrolls. This similarity in their works and the ritualistic devotional utterance of 'Jai Jagannath' suggests that there might be a common ancestral link between the Chitrakar of Birbhum (Bengal) and Orissa.

Somatoscopically the Patuas bear the appearance of the lower castes like Bauri and Bagdis of Bengal. Herbert Risley (1915) pointed out that these lower castes have had tribal origins. Other tribal cultural traits such as taking liquor on ceremonial occasion, the custom of paying bride's price, etc., are also found. Burial is also practiced by many tribals in India. The Patua political organisation and penology bear the traces of tribal culture. "We cannot live in one place. Our habit is to move from one place to another. I heard from my grandfather that we were nomads, (Jajabar) used to settle by the side of a pond and where there were Palm trees. Our occupations were mat-making out of Palmyra leaf, and various types of juggling, abracadabra including petty thefts. We are also known as Bedia (nomads)".... This was from Raghu Patua of the village Bagdola. Raghu Patua is the grandson of Satish Patua and nephew of Bhakti Patua who were Patua leaders not only of Birbhum district but of the whole of West Bengal.

Taken together the foregoing facts and legends about the origin and history of the Patuas point to a tribal entity in the long past and although their ancestral homeland cannot be clearly traced out it was possibly somewhere in the Chota Nagpur area of Malpaharia (the Patuas are called Paharimal by the Hindus of Frontier Bengal) that they entered Bengal and gradually came in contact with the Hindus. It was due to this contact that they adopted scroll-painting and later on idol-making for which they found a market among the Hindus. These new occupations were in addition to their original occupations abracadabra, snake-charming, juggling, etc.,—which they retained. With the advent of the Muslim rule in Bengal they swung towards Islam in search of security and made scrolls depicting miracles of Muslim Pirs which came to be known as 'Gazir Pat' and 'Mohammed Mangal'. They received the patronage of the Muslim rulers. They adopted Muslim names and cultural traits. But acculturation is a long process and cultural assimilation is a still longer process. The decline of Muslim power in Bengal came before the Patuas' acculturation was complete. Muslim patronage having lost its value, they

now swung back towards the Hindus. The Hindus while patronising the Patuas' scroll shows and recital of Hindu mythological subjects they did not allow any kind of social intercourse with them and kept them at a distance as outcaste because of their Islamised traits. So they assumed a kind of eclectic social position reflected in the first myth (Brahmavaibarta Purana) regarding the Patuas' origin and intermediary outcaste social position.

The second myth reflects conditions in favour of an increasing tendency towards Islamisation. They were looked down upon by the high-caste Hindus. Their market was shrinking among the Hindus as other caste entered the field of idol-making. Scroll shows and recitals was no longer remunerative. They had to sing songs for about half an hour but received very little for this labour. They had to look out for new types of occupations such as mason's work, house painting, carding (sana), etc. In all these occupations training could be had from the Muslims. The social change towards Islam naturally gained momentum with this change in the occupational sphere. The pro-Muslim trend is reflected in the myth in which the Hindu muni cuts cows and the elder son becomes a Muslim. Beef eating is considered as the critical trait that distinguishes a Muslim from a Hindu.

After the outbreak of the Hindu-Muslim riots and with the advent of Independence there was again a swing away from Islam towards Hinduism. This time the movement was more organised and took a socio-political shape. Leaflets and booklets (Appendix—I) were printed to prove that the Patuas had previously held the position of a higher caste in the Hindu social organisation to which they should be restored. Public meetings in support of this movement were organised in all districts (Appendix—II). The Bangia Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti issued circulars, some of these in verse, urging the community to change their pattern of life, to give up Islamic traits and to adopt Hinduised traits (Appendix—III). Nevertheless, the Hindu priests particularly in rural areas, declined to serve the Patuas and before long the swing of the Pendulum was again towards Islam. An organised movement towards Islam

started in 1952 under the leadership of Bhakti Patua of the village Ayas (J.L.No.89). Under the spur of this movement the Patuas began to give up Hindu traits of culture and look down upon idol-making and scroll-painting as much as upon snake-charming and juggling.

In the third myth the Patua desire for identification with the Muslims is explicit. It wants to prove that the Patuas originally belonged to the Muslim community and later on they were degraded because of their adoption of Hindu traits.

The oscillation of Patua myths is comparable to what we find in the Asidwal myths of the Tsimshian tribe of the Pacific coast, South of Alaska.

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## PATUAS : PAST AND PRESENT DISTRIBUTION

Due to the absence of records mentioned earlier, it is very difficult to provide accurate data on the distribution of the Patua population in India. From my long association with the Patuas, I estimate that Patua population in West Bengal numbers about 5,000. A detailed account of the Patua population in Birbhum district is given in the tables on Demography.

There is no record of the Patuas or the Chitrakars in Sir Herbert Risley's monumental work 'The people of India (1915)'. The name of Patwa-caste of embroiderers is found there and it is very difficult to ascertain its relationship, if any, with the Patuas. Dalton's Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal (1872), W. W. Hunter's Annals of Rural Bengal and 'A Statistical Account of Bengal (1876) and Hutton's Caste in India (1946) are supposed to be the major sources of information about caste-and-occupation-wise distribution of the population of India. None of these outstanding books contain any account of the Chitrakars or the Patuas. But references to Bede or Bediya and Mal are found in all these books. From the present study it is quite clear that Bede or Bediya and Mals are at present two of the many sub-castes of the Patuas. Occupational similarity among them is noticed even today. Buchanan Francis of course mentions the name of Chitrakars under the heading of artisan castes in his book 'An Account of district of Bihar and Patna'. The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal-Census 1951 'contains the line': "The Chitrakars of South

India and Rajasthan—enjoy a comparatively higher social positions. The Chitrakathis (Chitrakars) of Maharashtra somatoscopically resemble the Chitrakar of Bengal.” Srimati Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, ex-Director of All India Handicrafts Board told me that Chitrakars in rural areas of Rajasthan, Madras and Gujarat also draw pictures on scrolls and sing songs from house to house to earn their livelihood. There are many places with the prefix ‘Patua’, e.g., Patuatola Lane in Calcutta (only two Patua families are still residing in the area) or Patuakhali in Bangladesh. References to the practice of exhibiting scrolls are also found in ancient Sanskrit literature.

From these data it can be presumed that the Chitrakars or Patuas are distributed almost all over India. In Bengal this community earned fame for the artistic work in spite of their ambiguous religious and social position. L.S.S.O. Malley gave a description of the Jadu Patuas in the Bengal Census Report, 1901. He wrote : ‘They (The Jadu Patuas) are found only in this (Birbhum) district.’ Jadu Patuas have been recorded as a minor caste under castes and sub-castes in the 1901 Census. Although there is no difference in socio-religious practices and social position or even in physical features, between the Patuas and Jadu Patuas, the Patuas of Birbhum emphatically denied any relationship with the Jadu Patuas. One informant said that in the past probably the two were one and the same caste. I also feel that Patuas and Jadu Patuas originated from the same stem. The Jadu Patuas specialised in exploiting the Santali people in this area and earned a bad reputation for this. They are not found nowadays in any village in Birbhum. As reported, they now live in the jungle areas of Santal Parganas and in few remote villages in Burdwan, Bankura and Purulia. I requested many persons in this district particularly in Santal villages to inform me about the Jadu Patuas. At last on receipt of information I met a group in Bolpur area under a tree before day-break. They had halted under a mango tree for the night and left the place early in the morning. These Jadu Patuas denied any relationship with the Patuas. At present they have become an endogamous community having a position

in between Hindu and Muslim. Their nomadic habit is obvious as they change their location frequently.

I have excluded the Jadu Patuas from the present study as both Jadu Patuas and the Patuas claim they are not related though they have a somewhat similar eclectic socio-religious position.

## DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

As there was no study on the Patua population, the Census Reports and the District Gazetteers are silent on it. The present study, which included a house to house census recorded of the Patua population in the district of Birbhum, is the first of its kind. The enumeration of population could not be made on a particular date but had to be spread over two years as this was a single-handed operation. The enumeration, also was not continuous but punctuated due to political disturbances when I could not enter some villages for some months. The enumeration was taken on the following counts—language, sex, age, place of birth, civil condition, age at the time of marriage, education and occupation over three generations and religion. The rise and fall of the population could not be shown due to the lack of any earlier data.

From the study of the Patua family size in Birbhum, cursory visits to Patua habitations in other districts of West Bengal and from the records of the Bangia Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti at Kalighat in Calcutta, it can be estimated that the Patua population in West Bengal would be approximately 5,000. The number of total Patua population in the district of Birbhum is 1,168. This consists of 248 households spread over 39 villages.

Gurusadaya Dutta, in his book, mentioned the name of Dadpur. In the Census 1951 (Tribes and Castes of West Bengal) Dadpur (J.L. No. 188 under Mayureswar Police Station) and Brahmandihi (J.L. No. 7 under Nanoor Police Station) are shown as Patua villages. But I did not find any Patua in these villages. Gurusadaya Dutta also mentioned the name of Rusumjatra but the name of the village is Kusumjatra (J.L. No. 154, Police Station Sainthia). The mistake was due to local pronunciation. Kusum is pronounced as Rusum by illiterate folk.



The Patuas migrate from one place to another in quick succession. Absence of Patuas in the villages of Dadpur and Brahmandihi is probably due to their migration to some other place. There are only one or two families in one village but I saw many houses in a dilapidated condition and villagers reported that the Patuas had migrated elsewhere. This is an indication that the existing families also would migrate to some other village very soon. This tendency of frequent migration is probably a relic of their nomadic past.

Almost all the Patuas of Birbhum reported their religion as Muslim in the census schedule. This follows the recent movement towards Islamisation. A few Patuas of Ahmedpur and Kirnagar enrolled themselves as Hindus. The data on religion-wise distribution of Patua population is given below :

*Distribution of Population by Religion*

Hindu		Muslim	
Total	%	Total	%
48	4.11	1120	95.89

The level of education is low with illiteracy at 52.31% for males and 87.58% for females.

**Villagewise distribution of Patua population  
in the District of Birbhum**

Police Station	Village	J.L. No.	H.H. No.	Population		
				Male	Female	Total
Nanoor	Bagbara (Mouza Belhati)	48	2	4	4	8
	Pakurhans	68	13	23	31	54
	Khujutipara	127	8	18	19	37
	Jalandi	86	3	7	6	13
	Santra	122	3	9	8	17
	Kirnagar	20	4	7	9	16
	Total :		33	68	77	145

Police Station	Village	J.L. No	H.H. No.	Population		
				Male	Female	Total
Mayureswar	Samachar	40	2	5	7	12
	Tarachi	39	4	9	7	16
	Sibagram	147	18	51	40	91
	Talaon	37	1	2	3	5
	Maurapur	71	1	1	4	5
	Kanachi	38	5	11	15	26
	Satpalsa	192	6	17	13	30
	Malanchi	52	2	8	6	14
	Madian	3	6	21	18	39
	Total :		45	125	113	238
Suri	Panuria	125	13	30	30	60
	Itagoria	21	20	50	48	98
	Purandarpur	63	6	8	17	25
	Total :		39	88	95	183
Bolpur	Itanda	155	5	12	10	22
	Binuria	54	5	10	8	18
	Total :		10	22	18	40
Dubrajpur Sainthia	Pachhiara	168	23	59	61	120
	Jiui	121	1	2	2	4
	Digha	194	9	22	26	48
	Panrui	187	1	3	2	5
	Bagdola	19	4	11	7	18
	Bhramarkol	145	6	13	14	27
	Ahmadpur	154	7	20	12	32
	Total :		28	71	63	134
Rampurhat	Basoa	137	8	23	17	40
	Ayas	89	7	19	9	28
	Chandpara	184	9	27	24	51
	Sahapur	120	5	10	9	19
	Bonta	168	11	23	23	46
	Total :		40	102	82	184
Nalhati	Jhaupara	35	7	15	11	26
	Kalitha	73	8	20	15	35
	Sardha	82	7	16	15	31
	Total :		22	51	41	92
Labhpur	Danrka	136	6	14	11	25
	Labhpur	101	1	3	1	4
	Total :		7	17	12	29
Murarai	Bhogpur	129	1	1	2	3
District	Total		248	604	564	1168

Average size of Household = 4.71

### Patua population by sex and educational status

Educational Status	Male		Female		Total		Remarks
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Illiterate	272	52.31	409	87.58	681	69.00	
Able to read and write	88	16.92	18	3.85	106	10.74	
Up to Primary	72	13.85	29	6.21	101	10.23	
Up to Middle/Junior High Standard	15	2.88	4	0.86	19	1.92	(1 M.E. Pry. + Trd.)
Up to High School	30	5.77	—	—	30	3.04	
Matriculate/ School Final	5	0.96	—	—	5	0.51	
Intermediate	1	0.19	—	—	1	0.10	
Graduate	2	0.39	—	—	2	0.20	(1 B.A. (Hons.) B.Ed. 1 B.Sc.)
<i>Student</i>							
1. Primary	20	3.85	6	1.28	26	2.64	
M.E./Madrasa	3	0.57	—	—	3	0.30	
High School	7	1.35	1	0.22	8	0.81	
Higher Secondary School	4	0.77	—	—	4	0.41	
B.A.	1	0.19	—	—	1	0.10	
	35	6.73	7	1.50	42	4.26	
Grand Total :	520	100.00	467	100.00	987*	100.00	

+ Middle English, Primary Training.

\* Age-group up to 6 years have been excluded from the total population in this table.

## ECONOMIC LIFE

An attempt is made in this chapter to give a detailed account of the Patua's occupations on the basis of data collected from all the Patua habitations, covering every Patua family in the district of Birbhum. The data was collected from the heads of families through the structured schedule canvassed among the leaders of the community, old men and women and also from educated young men, some of whom were especially helpful in securing information about clandestine occupations. The interview method was supplemented by personal observation during my stays with Patua families.

As already mentioned in the chapter on demography, the total number of households in Birbhum is 248 and the total population is 1168. Besides the 248 heads of families there are other members (232) who are engaged in different occupations. Hence the total work force numbers 480. These workers are not fixed in any particular primary caste occupation like the Hindus of the area, or the other communities such as Muslims, Koras or Santals. Individual workers may also have more than one occupation, though generally not more than two.

The author of the article 'The Chitrakars or Patuas (Painters)' included in 'Tribes and Castes of West Bengal' census, 1951, enumerates the occupations of the Patuas as follows :

- (1) Main craft pursued by men :
  - (a) Painting in miniature on cloth or paper, and scroll-painting on paper only.
  - (b) Earthen (sunbaked and reinforced) image-making.

- (c) Decoration on walls with painting and engraving on walls in stucco (found only in the district of Birbhum).
- (2) Main craft pursued by women :
  - (a) Earthen doll and toy-making (both baked and sunbaked) from solid clay by hand modelling or from clay-sheets cast in terracotta moulds.
  - (b) Painting on ceremonial pottery (Ghata Chitra) or on wooden seats (Piri Chitra,) both supplied to them by traditional potters and carpenters respectively.
- (3) Subsidiary crafts pursued by men :
  - (a) Snake-charming (found only among a few families at Ayas and other villages of Birbhum)
  - (b) Fireworks (found at Beliaghata, and eastern suburb of Calcutta)
  - (c) Tinkari (found at Madhabitolla of Katwa etc).

From my observations and the data collected during the fieldwork, it seems that the above list calls for some supplementation and correction. Firstly snake-charming was never a subsidiary occupation, this will be discussed below.

Secondly, it is very difficult to categorise the occupations on the basis of sex as Patua women are engaged in various activities along with the men and there was no taboo on women taking up any work. There are some activities in which women specialise e.g. illegal abortions, peddling of cheap cosmetics and fancy goods among women of other communities and magical curing of female diseases particularly those connected with menstruation. There were some elderly women in the villages Benuria, Pankurhans, Bonta, Shibagram and Chandpara who were supposed to be expert in the use of occult methods of bewitching or otherwise influencing people. They were also believed to be expert in extracting venom from snakes. However, apart from these both sexes may do any job and men do the jobs above classified as female occupations, e.g., Ghata Chitra and Piri Chitra.

The old men and women stay at home and work at mat-making. The children, except for those who may be attending school, accompany their fathers or mothers, or some stay

behind trapping birds or looking after cattle. Very few Patua children are found loitering in the village.

In recent times due both to economic changes and the oscillations between the Hindu and Muslim cultures outlined in the previous chapter, there have been changes in the occupation structure of the Patuas. In order to show these more clearly I have classified the occupations into 3 categories.

1. The occupations commonly recognised as the traditional or caste occupation.
2. Occupations commonly practised in rural areas by both the Hindu and the Muslim community.
3. Modern occupations, i.e., occupations which have recently emerged in the rural areas with the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation.

The data was collected from the heads of 248 households and data on their father's and grandfather's occupations also. Data on other members of the ascending generations was not collected.

The significant data on the ascending generations in the female line were unobtainable because of the Patuas' extreme inhibition (with Islamisation) about divulging their women's occupations. Thus the dynamics of female occupation patterns cannot be considered here. A summary of the results may be seen in Table (Page 25).

This table provides a clear picture of the steady decline in caste occupations over three generations (72·51%-68·91%-51·59%). There were rises in rural occupations (18·49%-20·33%-32·77%) and modern occupation (2·67%-7·41%-13·74%). In the traditional occupations there has been a spectacular decrease in the occupations of idol-making, scroll-painting and snake-charming. There was however a rise in the number of peddlars, mat-makers and cowleeches. Amongst the modern occupations there has been a rise especially in the number of masons.

1. Traditional rural occupations.
- 1.1 Scroll-painting and making of idols.

As mentioned in the chapter 'Origin and History' the caste name Chitrakar or Patua is due to the general notion among

the public that scroll-painting, with the allied occupation of scroll exhibiting accompanied by musical narration is the caste occupation of the Patuas. Making idols of Hindu gods and goddesses is also considered a traditional calling. The report on 'The Artisans of West Bengal and their Craft' when referring to the Patuas says 'Their main and most important profession is to show or exhibit their scrolls (Chitradarshan Vidya) drawn like a 'film strip' sometimes 30 to 50 ft. long'. Nowadays the participation in these activities has declined (idol-making 11.19%-9.18%-5.92% scroll-painting and exhibiting (28.96%-22.73%-14.17%).

The occupation of singing songs in praise of Durga or musical narration of the story of Kapila, the divine cow may be regarded as a continuation of this traditional occupation. There are no figures for these occupations in the first or second ascending generations however formerly these were performed along with the exhibition of the scrolls. Now some of those who have given up scroll exhibiting have carried on these occupations. These songs are believed to bring good fortune to the family for whom they are sung so that the cows will be free from disease and give more milk.

1.2 Snake charming and abracadabra and other clandestine occupations.

It was most difficult to collect information about these occupations. Those engaged in them would not tell me anything. Any information had to be gathered indirectly and later verified by observation without the knowledge of the person concerned. Usually clues came first through family rivalry or jealousy. In a few cases Patuas with whom I had developed a friendship and who had somehow benefitted from my acquaintance told me about their secret occupations and also gave me the names of others who had similar occupations. Occasionally when a person understood that I already know about his/her occupation and that there was no point in concealing the facts from me I was given the rest of the details. However some people reacted very strongly and offered stiff resistance to any attempt to elicit information. Broken baskets of the type used for keeping snakes found in a home or outside in the rubbish

heap sometime served as clues. Information on snake charmers was also collected from the owners of Ayurvedic shops at Bolpur, Suri and Rampurhat who purchased poison from the Patuas. Some information was also collected from the agents who collect snake poison from the Patuas of this area for medical colleges in Calcutta.

From the information gained it was clear that snake-charming was never confined to a 'a few families at Ayas and other villages of Birbhum'. Actually it was one of the major occupations of some Patuas not only in many villages in Birbhum but also in the districts of Murshidabad, Burdwan and Purulia. As snake-charming is looked down upon nowadays the Patuas earning a living by it are very reticent about it.

The same is true of other clandestine activities such as abracadabra, removal of cataract, jalpara, dhulpara, illegal abortifacient, lifting, etc. Thus the numbers given in the tables for these are gross under estimates.

The number engaged in snake charming which was 15·58% in the second ascending generation fell to 11·24% in the first ascending generation and to a mere 4·03% in the present generation. The causes of this decline is the Patuas' anxiety to get incorporated into the Muslim community which looks down upon this occupation. The movement launched against it with threats of boycott have been discussed elsewhere in this book. Moreover, now a days, snake charming is not an economically profitable profession.

Only 3 persons or 0·72% of the working population in the first ascending generation were engaged in abracadabra which includes jalpara, dhulpara, selling of herbal tablets supposed to be infused with power by incantations, etc. W. W. Hunter attributed this type of occupation with petty thefts to the Bediyas—a wandering gipsy like tribe. The Bediyas are now taken to be a sub-caste of the Patuas. According to many aged informants, both Hindu and Muslim as well as Patua, the Chitrakars or Patuas and the Bediyas were originally the same people. This means that abracadabra was traditionally practised among the Patuas. Patua snake charmers practise dhulapara—in searching out and catching hidden snakes from



private houses for which they earn good fees. I can say from my own experience that formerly one came across practitioners of this kind of things quite frequently. It is not so now. The Table gives the number of people practising abracadabra as 0.72% but the real figure must be higher. Though the number of practising abracadabra was certainly dwindled the Patuas who practise it now, do it more secretly and will not admit. I met only one man who made no secret of it. He is Dwijapada Chitrakar of the village Bonta who in addition to his occupations of go-baidya (cow leech) and exhibitor of scrolls practises tuktak—dhulapara, Jalpara, etc. in the more backward villages.

Mat making as an occupation is attracting more Patua people in the present generation. The Table shows that 0.24% was engaged in this occupation in the second ascending generation. The figure remained unchanged in the first ascending generation. But it shoots in the present generation to 2.96%. The main reasons for this increase perhaps is that with the Patuas' growing dislike of their women's going out for earning under the impact of Islamisation more and more Patua women are taking to mat making which can be done at home.

Peddling or huckstering has been one of the traditional occupations of the Patuas. Earlier records also show that huckstering was widely practised among the Patuas, especially by the woman, even today it is so. The figure shows a rising trend from 5.35% in the second ascending generation to 6.94% in the first ascending generation to 10.36% in the present generation. It has been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that data on the occupations of women in the second and the first ascending generations could not be fully collected. The Table in the appendix shows 25.42% persons of the total working force engaged in peddling. The sex-wise distribution of this figure shows that 9.14% of the total male working force and 57.41% of the female working force are engaged in peddling.

Fluctuations are noticed in the occupation of cowleech which registered a rise from 10.22% in the second ascending generation to 15.31% in the first ascending generation but has declined

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to 11.42% in the present generation. Because of its association with the Muslim community, the Islamised Patuas of the present generation take pride in the pursuit of this occupation. Despite this, the number of persons engaged in it has declined in the present generation. The explanation lies in the fact that in recent years veterinary dispensaries with veterinary surgeons in charge have been opened in rural areas under the Community Development Project so that cow-leeches are now less and less in demand.

The occupation of Ojha (exorcist) was practised by only one member (0.24%) in the second ascending generation. There was none in the first ascending generation but two persons (0.42%) in the present generation have adopted this occupation. Considering the smallness of the number engaged in this occupation, it is of little significance in the community's economic life.

Making and selling of clay horses used as votive offerings to deity, basketry and wall colouring are also counted among Patua caste occupations. But these are of little significance in the economic life of the Patuas as only one or two persons are engaged in them.

The Table shows only one person is engaged in bamboo work in the present generation. But mention has been made in the discussion on Patua intra-caste structure of a sub-caste among the Patuas known as 'Banskata'. The literal meaning of the word is bamboo-cutter. The job of the Banskata, Patuas told me, is to collect bamboo from the forest for the purpose of making a particular type of flute used by snake charmers when giving shows. This occupation, according to present-day Patua values, is the most contemptible and all my informants said that it was practised in the past but not or scarcely, now. Some of the those engaged in it in the past are utilising their skill in making bamboo spikes for carding. They are found in the district of Murshidabad. Only one person so engaged was found in the present generation in Birbhum and he was a migrant from Murshidabad.

There is no entry in Table either in the second or the first ascending generation, against the occupation of Ghata Chitra

and Piri Chitra or painting on earthen pottery and wooden seats, used in Hindu marriage. Only 0·12% are seen engaged in this occupation in the present generation and Table shows that only one person (0·31%) is fully and another is partially engaged in this occupation. No woman is found in the present generation engaged in this occupation. Ghata-Chitra and Piri-Chitra was noted in the 1951 Census as an occupation pursued by women. The reason for the absence of any entry in Table for this occupation in the second and the first ascending generations perhaps is that data on the occupations of those generations were collected only for male heads of families. Anyway, I learnt during the field work that Ghata Chitra and Piri Chitra was practised by Patua women, no doubt, that it was neither confined to women nor was it a monopoly of the Patuas. It is not very remunerative either. In rural areas many women in the Hindu families themselves do it and in urban areas the competition is with many other castes and nowadays with professional artists also.

The 'shola' or pith work is also known as a caste occupation, traditionally followed by the Patuas. But in Birbhum this work has been found to one family. The fluctuation in figures found in Table is that without any significance as the same family has been in pith work for three generations. One of the members of this family, Sri Ananta Malakar, is noted for the excellence of his work. Some other castes in the Hindu community, particularly the Kumbhakars, are also known for their proficiency in shola work.

Similarly work in tinsel for ornamental decoration is confined to two families in Birbhum and they are related to Ananta Malakar. These decorations are known as 'daker saj' in Bengal.

As can be seen in Table the numbers engaged in the list of rural occupations connected with land show rising trends over three generations : owner-cultivators—8·52% to 7·89%, share-croppers 1·71% to 2·63% to 6·14%, agricultural labourers—0·49% to 0·72% to 1·06%, and day-labourers—0·24% to 1·43% to 8·46%. These rises, however, are much less than the corresponding rises in the same occupation registered by the Patuas' neighbouring communities—Hindu, Muslim, Santal and other.

Though an inclination towards land and a settled economic life is visible it is still very weak. Birbhum is famous as a rice producing district yet the Patua community's interest in agriculture is marginal. The rise in the number of owner-cultivators in the present generation is not due to any enhanced interest in land among the Patua community as a whole. The rise in the figure for owner cultivators has been due to a new urge in the small comparatively educated and conscious section of the Patuas towards own cultivation. The cause of a part of the rise in the present generation has been political in that Patuas had a share in the vested lands distributed among the landless poor in the recent past. The land owning Patuas are not distributed throughout the district. They are found only in three or four villages—Itaguria, Purandarpur and Panuria situated near Suri, the district headquarters town and Bagdola near Sainthia.

The figures for contract labourers (0·24% to 0·72% to 0·42%) for three generations show that this occupation has little attraction for Patuas. They rather point to the Patuas' dislike of any work that will keep them tied to a place or keep them under one employer for any length of time.

From the list of their occupations it is clear that Patuas prefer independent kinds of work requiring skill and intelligence which will not interfere too much with their itinerant habit. The Patuas being skilled in so many things can often do more than one job at a time and earn more than ordinary labourers. The Patuas' average per capita monthly income (Rs. 32·33) is higher than that of landless agricultural labourers. Casual day labour often commands higher wages than agricultural labours for which wages are more or less fixed. Hence the Patuas' preference for the former as the rising number of non-agricultural day labourers among them shown. This type of labour which does not tie down a person to one place for any length of time also agrees with the Patuas' peripatetic way of life.

Carding, an important operation connected with weaving was a major rural occupation in areas where weaving flourished as an industry. The Banskata Patuas or those who were expert in bamboo work switched over to this occupation. People

engaged in this occupation accounted for 6·33% in the second and 6·70% in the first ascending generation. The reasons for this fall is the shrinkage of the market for the bamboo dents (carding spikes) due to the increased use of machine-made iron dents.

Two Islamised occupations, making of Tajia and service in rural mosque have got no economic significance as these attracted only one or two persons and is followed by none in the present generation.

One Patua in the present generation earns money by singing 'Jari' songs. Some Patuas expressed their desire to take up Jari singing as a means of earning as they considered it an Islamised occupation which would provide them with opportunities for mixing with Muslim.

### Occupation Dynamics over Three Generations

Occupation	Self No.	%	Father No.	%	Grandfather No.	%
(a) Caste occupation	244	51·59	288	68·91	298	72·51
(b) Rural occupation	155	32·77	85	20·33	76	18·49
(c) Modern occupation	65	13·74	31	7·41	11	2·67
Sub total (b + c)	220	46·51	116	27·74	87	21·16
Not known Father's & Grandfather's occupation	—	—	11	2·63	23	5·60
* Others	9	1·90	3	0·72	3	0·73
Grand Total	473	100·00	418	100·00	411	100·00
* Others Begging	7		1		—	
Dacoity	1		1		2	
Theft	1		1		1	
Total	9		3		3	

Carpentry, hut making, garland making, basket making, weaving all these which require individual skill naturally attracted those who were displaced from their traditional occupations.

The occupation of actor in 'Jatra' (open-air opera) in which only two persons are engaged in the present generation is of too individual a nature and is without any significance in the economic life of the community.

The data on economic table shows an increasing trend in the number of those engaged in modern occupations. Only 2·67% of the total working force in the second ascending generation were attached to modern occupations, out of which 1·71% were engaged in mason's work. In the first ascending generation 7·41% were in modern occupations out of whom 4·54% were working as masons. The figure for those engaged in modern occupations in the present generation rose to 13·74% out of which 9·31% are engaged in mason's work. Thus mason's work has been the chief contributor to the increase in the number of the employed in modern occupations.

Due to the impact of industrialisation and road development and other projects in rural areas, the scope for mason's work has very much widened during recent years. This work requires skill and is also considered prestigious by the Patuas as it has been an occupation of Muslim for a long time past. It is regarded as a 'Musalmanikaj' or Islamised occupation. Patuas who are naturally good in skilled work have earned a name in mason's work including white washing, distempering and stucco work in buildings. A mason's job, being a skilled one, commands good wages which make it all the more attractive.

The other modern occupations figuring in the Table tailoring, work of radio mechanic, work of tube-well mechanic, teaching and bidi making—absorbed a small number of people. But their significance in the community's economic life is not in their number but in their character that is, as indicators of trends corresponding to changes in tastes and of responses to conditions resulting from industrialisation, road and other developmental work in rural areas. Though only a few have been able to enter these professions so far. I found a great deal of eagerness about them among the young Patuas during the field work.

The occupations of deed writer, broker, vendor 'dafadar' and 'darwan' which have been adopted by a few are also new for the Patuas. But there is no such eagerness or enthusiasm for these as is found in case of the occupations mentioned in the previous paragraph.

A study of the economic life of the Patua community reveals the importance of the position of women have always held as earning members. This importance is no less noticeable today. The Table on the sex-wise distribution of occupations of the heads and other members of families in the present generation shows that men constitute 66·25% of the total working force and women 33·75%.

The recent times, in Birbhum, the Patuas have been showing an especial urge to follow Muslim customs in expectation of their integration in the Muslim community. But so far as the Muslim custom of not allowing women to go out to work for earning money is concerned, it has not got affected the Patua community very much as can be seen from the high figures for Patua women engaged in outdoor occupations. This is mainly because the women's income is needed for the family.

Table on occupation lists 11 occupations in which Patua women are at present engaged. But among these 11 occupations, huckstering alone absorbs 57·41% of the female working force, while only 9·14% of the working men are engaged in this occupation. Mat making comes next to huckstering absorbing 33·95% of the working women. Only one man is found in this occupation in the present generation. Among the obsolescent traditional occupations, abracadabra is pursued by 3 women (1·35%) and one woman does scroll-painting. The table also shows no penetration by women into any of the modern occupations.

In this discussion on the economic life of the Patua only a brief reference need be made to their hunting habits because no Patua at present depends on hunting for his livelihood. In fact hunting has disappeared except in a few remote villages like Bonta, Sardha and Chandpara. Even there it is only hunting of birds mainly sparrows and herons, by the boys. They possess good knowledge of the habits of birds. The Patuas say that their forefathers used to practise bird catching. Nowadays, only the Pakhmaras or bird catchers live on bird catching. The Pakhmaras are a wandering community found in many districts of West Bengal. According to Panchanan Chitrakar of Madian, Naren Chitrakar of Bonta and Rakhu Patua of

Bagdola, the Pakhmaras were a branch of the Bede or Bediya Patuas but now they do not have any connection with them and the Pakhmaras have become a separate community.

The Patuas do not have any hunting implements. They have a very simple method of catching birds by trapping. The trap is made of two thin bamboo sticks. The length of the sticks are 18" to 24". The sticks are moistened with glue made by mixing the juice of the banyan tree with mustard oil. These sticks are planted cross-wise in a paddy field. An insect-mole cricket (*Grylotalpa africana*) is tied at the crossing of the sticks. A small bird attempting to catch the insect will get stuck. Usually sparrows are caught in this kind of trap and not more than one at a time.

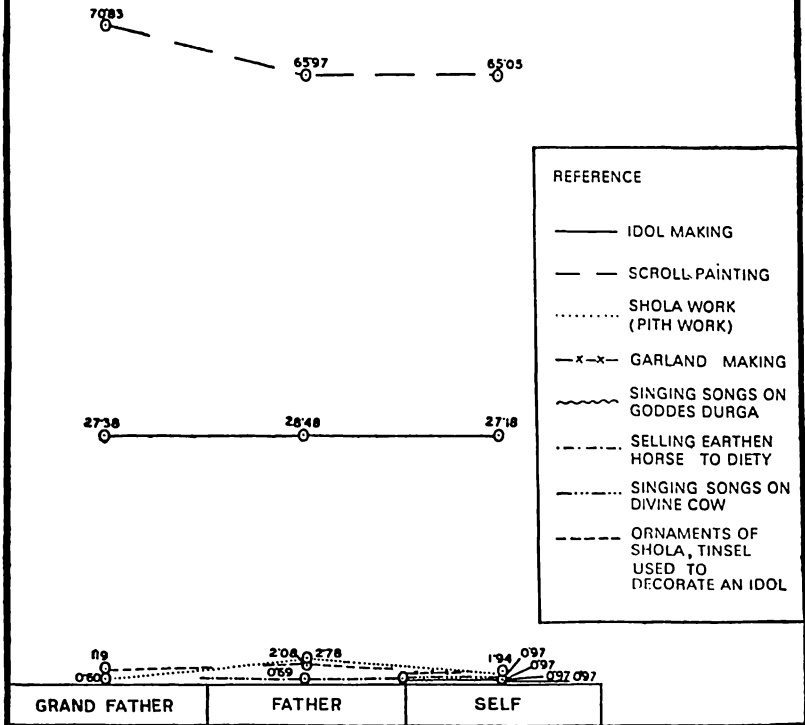
They have another method of catching birds, particularly those of the heron type. They devise traps with loops made from cow's tail hair and palmyra leaf. The traps are laid in a grassy field. As the birds walk in the field their characteristics movement makes the insects in the grass to rise and be caught and eaten. The strategy of the hunters Patua boys under umbrellas, is to move in a narrowing semi-circle encompassing the birds, all the time looking away from them and affecting indifference. The birds are thus led in the direction of the traps. Although bird catching is not a regular economic activity with the Patuas it provides an occasional extra in their diet. The Patuas say they like this type of small hunting. They never go for big game or fishing.

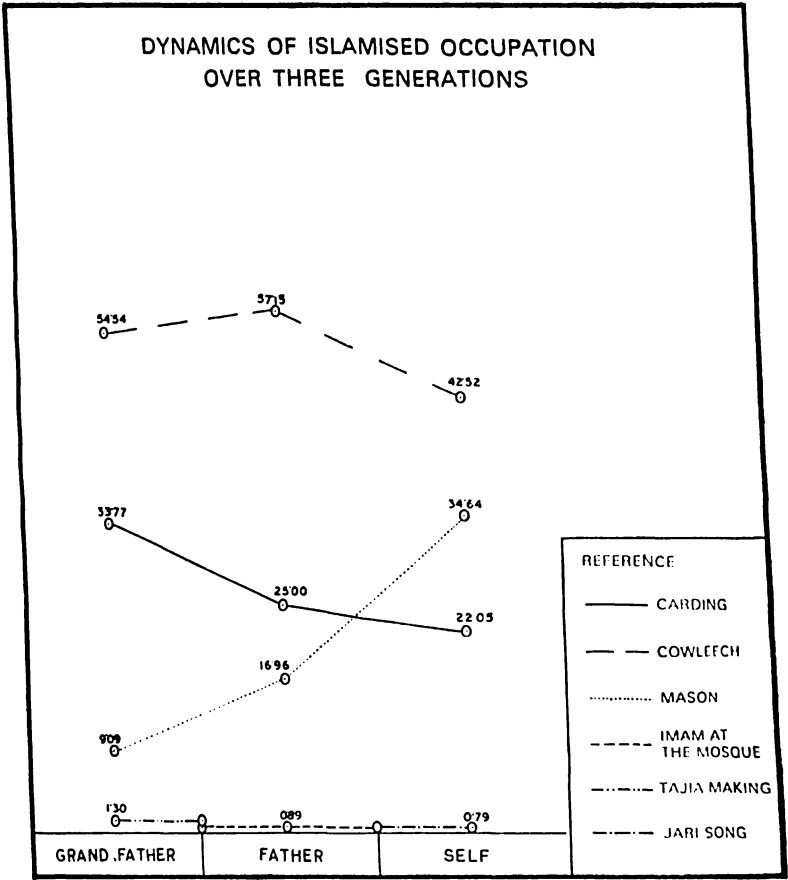
The young girls go out for collecting dried leaves and twigs from the village for fuel.

During the field study I often came across very pronounced attitudes, favourable, or unfavourable, in respect of this or that occupation. Snake-charming was generally considered as an unclean occupation. Patuas inclined towards Islam professed contempt for idol-making, scroll-painting and scroll-exhibiting as Hinduised occupations and extolled the occupations of cow-leech, carder and mason which they regarded as Islamised occupations and as such prestigious. In order to study from the economic point of view the Patua community's oscillation between the Hindu and Muslim cultures I have classified the



# DYNAMICS OF HINDUISED OCCUPATION OVER THREE GENERATIONS





occupations that is those which for historical reasons and for their characteristic associations bend themselves to such classification into two categories, namely, Hinduised and Islamised, according to the Patuas' own belief, ethics and sentiment as well as those of the common Hindus and Muslims in this area.

Economic Tables on the dynamics of the Hinduised and the Islamised occupations provides a significant picture of occupational change in the Patua community. Data shows that the total number of Patuas engaged in the Hinduised occupation is 168 in the second ascending generation which declines to 144 in the first ascending generation and further comes down to 103 in the present generation. The trend as can be seen in Table is case of reversed in the Islamised occupations. The working force engaged in these occupations which numbered only 77 in the second ascending generation rose to 112 in the first ascending generation and then to 127 in the present generation. The overall picture that emerges from the two tables shows that the trend of Patuas participation is as strongly downward in the Hinduised occupations as it is upward in the Islamised occupations.

There is however, one ubiquitous factor discernable at every stage of this history of rise and fall, of acceptance and resignation of occupations and that is the Patuas' capacity to adjust their skills in handwork according to any social and economic change in the environment. They changed the themes of their scroll-paintings and their songs with the rise and fall of the Muslim power in Bengal swinging to or from the so-called Hinduised or Islamised occupations according to circumstances. Sometimes the motive appears to be religious sentiment. But an analysis of the statistics on the dynamics of occupations will show that in every case of change the Patuas adopted only what was economically profitable and rejected those occupation which were becoming obsolescent and uneconomic due to industrialisation or other socio-political reasons.

At present the so-called Islamised occupations of cow-leech, carder and mason are socially prestigious among the Patuas.

Nevertheless, there is a declining trend in Patua participation in the first two because they are becoming economically less promising with the establishment of veterinary dispensaries in rural areas and the introduction of machine-made steel 'sana' replacing bamboo 'sana'. On the other hand the number engaged in mason's work is continuously on the increase with the expansion of building activities in the country. So it seems clear that though religious sentiment and desire for social climbing may exert some influence it is the power of the economic incentive which has decided the issue always. The choice of job has finally and always depended on whether it would be profitable and conducive to economic security in the circumstances prevailing at the time.

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## MATERIAL CULTURE

The material culture of the Patuas reflects the poverty-stricken condition of the community. Except for a few relatively well-off families, the material condition of the community is monotonously poor. A considerable quantity of data on material culture has been collected during the field work but since a detailed account would not be relevant here a short description of the culture milieu is given.

## DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

The common dress of the adult male is dhuti and shirt or punjabi. Inside the house only a short dhuti covering the lower portion of the body is considered sufficient. The trunk usually remains bare. A few Patua students, like other students, use trousers as their college dress. The women wear a sari. Usually they drape the sari in such a way as to cover both the upper and the lower parts of the body. This is the common dress of both Hindu and Muslim women in rural Bengal. When going out for huckstering or for any other purpose the women also use undergarments e.g. petticoat, brassiers and blouse, according to their respective economic condition. Elderly women wear only a sari even when they go out. One Patua lady, named Kohinoor, told me that as Muslim they should wear a 'borkha' like the Muslim women when they go out, but neither Kohinoor herself nor any other Patua woman including those of the highly Islamised village of Pachchiara, ever wore a 'borkha'. The male Patuas of Pachchiara prefer lungi to dhuti like the Muslims of the village. Use of dhuti among the Muslims in Birbhum is not uncommon.

Small children, up to five or six years, rarely wear any clothes. Grown up children, particularly, the school-going boys among them, wear half-pants and shirt. The girls wear frocks quite often without any undergarments.

Women wear ornaments. These, usually, are bangles of glass, plastic or bronze. Necklaces made of bronze or rolled gold of a cheap variety are also in use. The use of gold ornaments is rare. Very few wear gold chains or ear-rings. Rings and ear-rings of rolled gold are worn by young girls. The old ladies generally do not wear any ornaments except one or two bangles. Previously, married women used to wear bangles made of conch-shell and the iron bangle customary for married Hindu women to wear. The Patua women are still seen wearing iron bangles but they are abandoning the use of conch-shell bangles. The widows, as a rule, do not wear any ornament. The Patuas, neither the men nor the women, tatoo their bodies, I found only in two remote villages—Bonta and Jalundi—tatoo marks on the forehead and the arms of three ladies. When asked about the motive behind the tatoo marks they said that they got themselves tatooed at a fair just casually and not motivated by any particular belief.

### UTENSILS

Utensils in Patua households are of the type commonly in use among poor people in rural Bengal. Pitchers and cooking vessels mostly in use are earthen. Families which are a little well off have pitchers and cooking vessels of bell-metal and iron. For purposes of storing they use big earthen pots locally known as 'hola' and sometimes tin cans procured from shopkeepers or neighbours. Enamelled tin plates and cups are most commonly used for serving food and enamelled tin glasses for water and tea. Those who are somewhat better off may use crockery of a cheap variety. Tea drinking has now become common in rural Bengal. The habit has spread among the Patuas as also the habit of offering tea to visitors as a gesture of hospitality. Indegenous varieties of knife and 'da' are used for domestic purposes. Bedding consists of mats made of palmyra leaf or persimmon leaf, rags or 'kanthas' and small pillows. A few well-to-do families possess wooden cots, quilts, mattresses and bedcovers. Similarly, a few families, in the near-urban areas, possess bicycles, transistor radios, electric torches and wrist watches. All these have become articles of

bridegroom demand as dowry. The impact of these demands on the social life has been referred to in the section on marriage.

Tools in use differ from family to family according to occupation. As very few Patuas at present are engaged in scroll painting implements of painting brushes, colour pots, etc., are not to be found in most houses. Old scrolls and 'chowkis'—rectangular slightly raised platforms made of bamboo for holding scrolls at the time of exhibition—are found in almost every house though nowadays a Patua would not readily admit that he had any scroll in his house. The more Islamised Patuas have sold their scroll to other Patuas or to collectors of scroll paintings. In the houses of Patuas who are practising 'go-baidyas', the implements for treatment of cattle—special rope, iron hook, iron scraper will be found. Trowels are found in the house of a Patua who works as a mason or hodman. Instruments used for carding are found in the houses of Patuas whose occupation is carding. Covered baskets made of bamboo plastered with cow-dung paste are found in the houses of snake charmers. No traditional recreational instruments, except a 'madal'—small tom-tom—used as an accompaniment of songs sung during marriage ceremonies, are found in most of the Patua homes.

There is no fixed pattern of orientation for Patua houses. In some cases the houses are road-facing but in most cases the backwall of the house is on the roadside and the entrance is from the inside courtyard. Except in the village Pachchiara, there is a 'maruli' at the entrance of almost every Patua house. Regarding the 'maruli' the Patuas have the same belief as the Hindus in its efficacy to preserve the health and prosperity of the inmates of the house. A similar belief attaches to the five or seven vermilion dots to be seen on the upper portion of the door-frame in many Patua houses. Though the Patuas are known as an artisan community and have an artistic tradition as scroll painters there is no sign of any artistic work on the outside or the inside walls of their houses such as can be seen in the Santal dwellings, irrespective of economic condition, in the area. In Patua dwellings the common pattern of decorating walls consists in hanging calendars with pictures, or pictures cut

out from calendars or newspapers. Among the Islamised Patuas the pictures are of Mecca, Madina, the black stone of Kaba, etc., or they relate to some Islamic legend. Among the Hinduised Patuas the pictures are of goddess Durga, Kali, Tarapith, etc. In the remoter villages pictures connected with both Hindu and Islamic legends are found together. In some Patua houses dolls and terracotta idols are kept in a niche. An idol of Ganesh may be seen in a niche in the house of an Islamised Patua. In a few houses, generally near some town, pictures on holy subjects are seen side by side with pictures of semi naked girls obtained from cinema journals.

## DWELLINGS

The Patua dwellings in a village are clustered in one area on the fringe of the village, in most cases near the dwellings of low caste Hindus. It is not so in the village Purandarpur which is fast developing into a town and is situated only seven miles away from the district headquarters and has become the most important junction for bus routes as all the major bus routes to the district headquarters pass through it. The Patuas' nearest neighbours at Purandarpur are Swarnakars and Sadgope—communities within the Naba Sayak caste group. One Patua family lives separately behind a shop on the main road away from the Patua para. In Itaguria which is a Muslim village situated six miles away from Suri and seven miles away from Sainthia town, the Patuas are on the outskirts of both Hindu and Muslim villages with a Bagdi dwelling nearby, in remoter places such as Tarachi, Kanachi, Malanchi, Taloan Ayas, Jhahpara, Bonta, etc. Usually the Patua habitation is found on an isolated upland. The local Hindus and Muslims refer to it as Bede or Bediya para or Bede danga.

The ground plan of a Patua hut is rectangular. The walls are made of mud which are colourwashed on the inside only in the case of the houses belonging to a few comparatively well-off families in Purandarpur, Itaguria, Sardha and Shibagram. In all other cases the huts have a poverty-stricken look. There are only three double-storied mud houses—one each in Purandarpur, Chandpara and Kanachi. The frames for the roof are



made of bamboos or pieces of 'tal' (palmyra) wood or a combination of them. These frames are fixed by dovetailing and tied with coir-rope. The doors are usually made of single planks or plaited bamboo-splits except those in the few houses of the well-to-do who have wooden doors. There are no windows but only peegion holes in the walls just below the roof on three sides. The roof is usually two-sloped and thatched.

Narendra Patua (63) of the village Bonta stated that according to old Patua custom a Patua house should have compartments ; also, bamboo poles were not to be used in its construction. Rakhu Patua of Bagdola said that it was customary with the Patuas to have only temporary settlements. They would choose a site near some tank and build huts of palmyra leaf. They would stay for two or three months and then break up the settlement and move to a new site. Some times they would return to the same place after a few months or after a year.

The usual Patua house today consists of a single room of approximately 10'×8' and a verandah approximately of 10'×5'. Cooking is done in one corner of the verandah. Some Patuas have two-roomed houses. Only the few two-storied mud houses mentioned earlier have more than two rooms. I did not come across any studio for scroll painting anywhere except in a house in Itaguria, one in Shibagram, one in Madian and the biggest one belonging to Banku Patua of the village Sardha. Banku Patua is the only person now in Birbhum who makes his living by idol making and selling scrolls throughout the year. In the general pattern of Patua housing there is no provision for keeping livestock or poultry. Many Patua said that animal husbandry and bird keeping were outside the community's tradition. At present a few families which possess land keep cattle for the purpose of agriculture. A few families have taken to keeping birds in Purandarpur under the impact of community development work in the block. No kitchen garden was seen attached to a Patua dwelling in any village, there being hardly any land beyond what the clustered houses stand on. Also, the peripatetic tendency of the Patuas staying away from

home sometimes for months together goes against gardening and keeping domestic animals.

### CEREMONIES CONNECTED WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HOUSE

Ceremonial removal of three spadefulls of earth to make a hole in the north-western corner of the site of the proposed house on the 13th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Asvin (September-October) is an essential preliminary to the construction of a new house. A little mustard oil and vermillion is put into the hole. Patuas are shy of admitting that they observe this ritual. In some cases during my inquiries the denial by the adults was contradicted by the children. After the ceremonial removal of earth the construction of the house can take place at any convenient time during the year.

Some people arrange a 'Milad-Sharif' on the day of the first entry into the new house. The village Maulvi reads a few passages from the holy Koran. The poorer people do without such ceremony. But there is a rule which all observe about who should first enter the new-built house.

The ceremonies in connection with the construction of a new house reveal an admixture of traits of Hindu and Muslim culture. The observance of a ritual and at the same time the attempt to conceal the fact from outsiders reflect the Patuas' oscillating attitude between Hinduism and Islam. The poor housing condition and the lack of interest in livestock and poultry are due to the peripatetic habit of the Patuas may be a relic of their nomadic past.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE

### PATUAS AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

The Patuas of Birbhum live in multi-ethnic villages. There is no exclusively Patua village or hamlet. They have their locations (para) usually known as Poto para, Patidar para, Patua tola or Mal para or Bede danga or Bede para, in the fringe areas of Hindu villages in the proximity of the low-caste Hindus except in the villages Kanachi, Kalitha and Pachchiara where the Patuas live by the side of the Muslims. There is a Patua location on the outskirts of the Muslim village Itaguria on one side and the Hindu village Junadpur on the other.

The Chitrakars or Patuas are known to the local Hindus and Muslims as a peculiar community who are neither Muslim nor Hindu as they follow both Muslim and Hindu rites and take food from both communities. The Hindus think the Patuas were Hindus of a very low caste but are now leaning too much towards the Muslims. Hemanta Bhattacharyya, a priest of the village Tarachi reported (October 1969) that even ten years back the Patuas used to come to the Sasthitala (the place of Sasthi, the female deity who protects babies). He also reported that the Patuas offered votive offerings to Kalitala. Afjal Ali of the village Kalitha reported (November 1970) that he officiated as the Maulvi for the Chitrakars or Patuas of the village. There is no social intercourse between the Patuas and the other local small communities—the Santals and the Koras. The Patuas do not take cooked food from the Santals or the Koras. When asked whether they took water from the Koras or the Santals, the Patuas' answer was in the affirmative but actually they do not take water from the Koras or the Santals.

The Patuas are known by their caste name used as surname, such as Chitrakar, Patua, Chitrakar-Patua, Mal Patua, Bede or Bediya. Nowadays there is a tendency growing against using

the caste name as surname. For example, Hefzal Chitrakar of Kanachi who obtained the B.Sc. degree in 1972, expressed his desire to give up his caste-cum-surname Chitrakar. He wanted to keep his Muslim name only. Ananta Chitrakar of the village Kirnahar, a famous artist who won a Rastrapati Award for his goddess Durga, a masterpiece of work in shola, has changed his surname to Malakar, a Hindu surname, which conceals his Patua identity. The Patuas of other districts also are adopting only Muslim names or Hindu surnames.

## MARRIAGE

The Patuas are an endogamous community. Endogamy is observed even within the sub-castes. Recently, however, there have been signs of a change of attitude in this matter, especially among the Islamised Patuas, who say that there should be no sub-caste within the Patua community because Islam rules out such divisions and they are all brothers in Islam ("... all believers are brothers" holy Koran 49:10) are also eager to establish social relationship between themselves and the general Muslim community through marriage. A marriage between a Patua girl and a Muslim boy in the village Pachchiara was given great publicity among the Patuas in Birbhum and the event was so talked about as if Patua-Muslim marriages are already becoming common. In fact what happened was this: an orphan Muslim boy working at Niramay—the T.B. hospital at Dubrajpur—used to stay in a Patua house. He was in love with the daughter of one Chitrakar. The marriage was arranged by the Patuas. I have met the boy. He requested me not to divulge the fact of his marriage with a Patua to the Muslims of other villages.

Besides the case noted above I have come across two other cases of inter-community marriage in the district of Birbhum. One Islamised Patua of the village Purandarpur was in love with his neighbour, Swarnakar (Hindu caste) widow. He divorced his Patua wife and eloped with the widow. The Patua community recognised this marriage but the Hindus did not approve. A dispute erupted in the village and the Swarnakars filed a suit against that Patua in the Suri Court. The matter

ended with the Swarnakar widow's embracing Islam and the solemnisation of the marriage according to Islamic rites.

In the village Kalitha a Patua married woman fled with a member of the Muslim community. They married and stayed in a village far from Kalitha. The Patua husband of the woman filed a case against the person in the Rampurhat Court. Fearing legal punishment as well as ostracisation by the Muslim community, He returned the Patua woman. The case was withdrawn and the Patua community accepted the woman socially after a community feast. The case was narrated to me by Noor Mohammad alias Naren Patua, son of the woman involved in this case.

Panchanan Chitrakar of the village Madian reported that the Bediyas and Chitrakars were the same community. Later on, the community was divided into many sub-castes and marriage was confined within each sub-caste. I have come across only one case of marriage where sub-caste endogamy was not observed. This was because of the bridegroom's high personal attainments. Mr A Patua belongs to the Maskata sub-caste, the lowest in the Patua community but he was the first Patua to become a graduate with honours in English. He later obtained the B. Ed. degree from Visva-Bharati. He is considered as a gem of the community. He married a girl from the highest Patua sub-caste of the village 'X' gram. I found a general tendency shared by Mr A himself to conceal the fact about his sub-caste affiliation.

The Patuas state that one man can keep more than one wife at a time though I found no evidence of an actual case. The statement is probably due to the Patuas' anxiety to prove that they are like the Hindus and the Muslims in this respect as in both communities polygyny has social and religious sanction.\* But actually among the total number of 514\*\* recorded cases of Patua marriage in Birbhum there was not a single instance of marriage of a man already having a wife or a woman already

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\* Bigamy has been prohibited among the Hindu community under the Hindu Marriage Act passed in the year 1955 by the Govt. of India.

\*\* 492 cases of marriages among the Islamised Patuas + 22 cases of marriages among the Hinduised Patuas = total 514.

having a husband. The census of 248 families enumerated by me covering the total Patua population of the district Birbhum reveals no family with two wives living at a time. Hence it can be taken that in the Patua community monogamy is the practised custom.

Marriages are settled through negotiations between guardians. Even if in the rare case of a love affair (as it happened in the case of Kamal and Misri of the village Itaguria) the marriage is settled by the parents. In any case, marriages, that is, the first marriages are settled when the brides and the bride grooms are very young. Child marriages are not uncommon as the age at first marriage varying between 9 and 15 for girls and between 12 and 24 for males. In many cases marriage is fixed at an early age with MBZ or MBD or FBZ or FBD.

### LEVIRATE AND SORORATE

According to many aged Patuas sororate and levirate were practised by the Patuas in the past but at present they are not in vogue.

### PROHIBITION

Marriage is prohibited, for males, with wife's elder sister and, for females, with younger sister's husband. Also, there is no joking relationship with wife's elder sister or with husband's elder brother. On the contrary, wife's elder sisters and husband's elder brothers are to be treated with deference from a respectful distance and any kind of familiarity with them is tabooed. There is a taboo also on marriage with a deceased younger brother's widow.

### DIVORCE

The ideal procedure in a divorce case would be to call a "majlish" or assembly in which the village leaders both Hindu and Muslim should be present. They would first try to dissuade the couple from divorce and on their failing to do so a Maulvi should be called into write out a "talak nama" and the husband would utter 'talak' three times before the assembly. But actually these formalities are not observed. Divorces are

very common, and sometimes on any flimsy ground. The right to divorce lies only with the male. The grounds for divorce are (i) adultery (ii) insubordination (iii) disliking of each other (iv) non receipt of promised dowry, e.g., money or bicycle or wristwatch (v) sterility (vi) indolence.

A wife cannot formally divorce her husband, but she can bring about divorce by persistently refusing to live with her husband. It usually happens like this: the wife leaves her husband's home, comes to her father's house and stays there refusing to go back to the husband. Sometimes she is not allowed by her parents to go to her husband's house, forcing the husband ultimately to divorce. According to general report the usual cause of such a course of action taken by a married woman is ill treatment and oppression in the husband's house often by the latter's parents. Conversely, when a husband wants to put pressure on his wife's parents for money or desires to divorce her, he sends the wife away to her parents' house and does not allow her to come back. Sometimes a divorce is accomplished just by sending a post card informing the parents or the guardians of the wife that she has been divorced.

The study of marital status reveals 166 cases of divorce for 514 cases of marriage. Thus the ratio of divorce to marriage is a little higher than one to three. Two males and two females among the Hinduised Patuas and 66 males and 66 females among the Islamised Patuas were divorced once. Only one male among the Hinduised Patuas and 12 males and 8 females among the Islamised Patuas were divorce twice. Five males were divorced thrice and one female four times. Two males were divorced six times and one female as many as seven times.

The facts mentioned above show clearly that the divorce is widely practised among the Patuas. Quite a number are divorced and married several times. The highest individual records are seven divorces and eight marriages. The high rates of divorce and re-marriage in Patua community indicate the instability of two basic social institutions, i.e., marriage and family.

TABLE—M-1

*Number of marriages among the Patuas in Birbhum*

Hindu					Muslim				
No. of Marriages					No. of Marriages				
1		2-3		Total	1		2-8		Total
Male	Female	Male	Female		Male	Female	Male	Female	
8	9	3	2	22	163	168	85	76	492

GRAND TOTAL : 22+492=514

TABLE—M-2

*Number of Marriages among the Patuas in Birbhum**(Break-up of Table—M-1)*

## M A R R I A G E

Hindu						Muslim															
No. of Marriages						No. of Marriages															
1		2		3		1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
8	9	2	2	1	—	163	168	66	66	12	8	5	—	—	1	—	—	2	—	—	1

The Table M-1 shows that out of 22 cases of marriage among the Hinduised Patuas 3 males and 2 females were married more than once and 8 males and 9 females were married only once. Out of 492 cases of marriage among the Islamised Patuas 163 males and 168 females were married only once and 85 males and 76 females were married more than once. The break-up (Table M-2) shows that 66 males and an equal number of females among the Islamised Patuas were married twice, 12 males and 8 females were married thrice, 5 males were married 4 times, 1 woman 5 times, 2 males 7 times and 1 female 8 times.

In all the cases of remarriage the brides and the bridegrooms were either divorced or widowed. Usually a bachelor's marriage is arranged with a spinster. I came across only one case of a widower marrying a spinster—a girl in great distress. Marriage between a widow and a widower and between a divorced man and a divorced woman is the usual rule.



## CLAN

There is no idea of clan among the Patuas. This was checked by all conventional anthropological methods. The result of inquiries about taboo, avoidance and worshipping of totem proved negative. Enquiries were also made about territorial clan feelings and here also the result was negative so far as the Patuas of Birbhum were concerned.

The Hinduised Patuas, though, are supposed to have assumed a clan (gotra) but they have no idea about its meaning. Mohan Chitrakar, is a Hinduised Patua. His guru had told him, "From today your gotra is Sandilya". So at the time of his daughter's marriage he told the priest that his "gotra" was Sandilya. When the priest asked him about the "gotra" of the bridegroom Mohan had no answer and in order to get out of the fix he told the priest to take 'Sandilya' as the gotra of the bridegroom also. This annoyed the priest who scolded Mohan for his ignorance of the Hindu rule which did not permit marriage within the same 'gotra'. Since this experience Mohan has been thinking whether he should not join the Islamised Patuas. At the same time, there are some among the Islamised Patuas who for some reason or other do not feel comfortable in their present position and might be thinking whether it would not be better for them to join their Hinduised brethren. These points show how the Patuas have been psychologically oscillating between Hinduism and Islam.

## CHANGE OF RESIDENCE

The Patuas are patrilineal. Other patriarchate features are also observed. Their residence is virilocal in nature. The authority in the family is vested with the father or the eldest son in the absence of the father. Succession and inheritance also follow the father's line. After marriage the daughter usually goes to live in her husband's house. But some times a man will go and live in his father-in-law's house, especially when there is some property of the wife to live on. The common reason for changing residence is quarrel with the members of the family. According to the Patua rules of inheritance the female members also have some share in the paternal property.

Hence there is some inter-village migration for the enjoyment of mother's property.

## FAMILY

From the nature of their composition Patua families may be grouped into two categories, the commoner and more numerous type being the simple or the nucleus family consisting of parents and their unmarried children. The other type is the joint or the extended family.

Due to the high rate of divorce the children in a family may not be all born of the same couple. In some cases the mother takes the baby into the house of her new husband. There are cases of divorced wives who got married while pregnant. The child was born in the house of the new husband. The Patuas socially recognise this kind of marriage and they do not mind accepting such a child in the family. In some cases, particularly when a child is somewhat grown up, the father keeps the child. There are no disputes over children at the time of divorce. During the field work I did not come across any case of dispute or tension between step-son or step daughter and step mother or step father. Acceptance of step father or step mother is a normal phenomenon among the Patuas. Another characteristic of the Patuas is the ease with which they can leave home and family, pointing to a peculiar transience about the basic social institutions, like marriage and family, among the Patuas.

TABLE F-1  
*FAMILY TYPE*

Simple Family	Joint Family	Total
No.	No.	
156	92	248
(62·90%)	(37·10%)	(100·00%)

The Table F-1 shows there are 156 (62·90%) simple or nucleus families and 92 (37·10%) joint or extended families.

TABLE F-2  
*Economic Status of Member by Size of  
Households*

Family Size	No. of household	Earner		Total working force %	Dependents		Total %	Total Population %
		Male %	Female %		Male %	Female %		
1	13 (5.24)	6 (46.15)	7 (53.85)	13 (100.00)	—	—	—	13 (100.00)
2	23 (9.27)	21 (45.65)	12 (26.09)	33 (71.74)	12 (1.17)	12 (26.09)	13 (28.26)	46 (100.00)
3	46 (18.55)	51 (36.96)	25 (18.11)	76 (55.07)	16 (11.59)	46 (33.34)	62 (44.93)	138 (100.00)
4	37 (14.92)	46 (31.08)	27 (18.24)	73 (49.32)	34 (28.98)	41 (27.70)	75 (50.68)	148 (100.00)
5	49 (19.76)	62 (25.32)	32 (13.07)	94 (38.37)	67 (27.35)	284 (34.8)	151 (61.63)	245 (100.00)
6	36 (14.52)	49 (22.68)	23 (10.65)	72 (33.33)	60 (27.78)	84 (38.89)	144 (66.67)	216 (100.00)
7	22 (8.87)	33 (21.43)	18 (11.69)	51 (33.21)	52 (33.96)	251 (33.1)	103 (66.88)	154 (100.00)
8	12 (4.84)	23 (23.96)	11 (11.46)	34 (35.42)	28 (29.16)	234 (35.4)	26 (64.58)	96 (100.00)
9	2 (0.81)	4 (22.22)	2 (11.11)	6 (33.33)	4 (23.22)	8 (44.45)	12 (66.67)	18 (100.00)
10 & above	8 (3.22)	23 (24.47)	5 (5.32)	28 (29.79)	24 (25.53)	42 (44.68)	66 (70.21)	94 (100.00)
Total	248 (100.00)	318 (27.23)	162 (13.87)	480 (41.10)	286 (24.48)	240 (34.24)	688 (58.90)	1168 (100.00)

Out of the total 248 Patua families (Table F-2) 13 families are one-member families—6 male and 7 female, the latter indicating social tolerance of women living independently which is not found in the local Hindu or Muslim community. Families consisting of 5 members constitute the largest group (19.92%). Next come three-member families (18.55%), 37 families (14.92%) consist of four members ; 36 families (14.52%) consist of six members ; seven member families number 22 (8.87%) there are 12 (4.84%) eight member families, eight (3.22%) families of 10 members each, two families (0.81%) of nine-members each and only one family, in the village Shibagram, of 12 members.

The average size of a Patua family in Birbhum is 4.71. This figure is much less than that for the average rural family size in Birbhum. As for the reasons for the smaller size of the Patua family from the physical anthropological point of view, although I did not make any special enquiry about the death rate of the Patuas, I tried to get some idea about the extent of child mortality while collecting data on demography. From enquiries and observations during the field work I found that the rate of child mortality was not especially high among the Patuas. From the social anthropological point of view I searched for evidence, ritualistic or other, of infanticide and also about any practice of family planning. I found no evidence of infanticide. On the contrary, the Patuas love children, both male and female. Both are potential earners for the families. The Patuas, except two educated families, do not practise family planning. This is also corroborated by the extension workers in family planning in this area. The reason for the small size of the family may be attributed to the Patua habit of remaining away from home for long periods. Both male and female adult members move from fair to fair and stay in public places or the male members leave home in search of work and move from village to village. This wandering nature of the Patuas and the high rate of divorce which keeps the couple apart for sometimes are likely factors in keeping the size of the family small.

The Table F-2 also reveals that earning members constitute 41.10 percent of the Patua population in Birbhum. Split sex-wise, 27.23% are male and 13.87% are female. The remaining 58.90% are dependants, 24.48% being male and 34.42% female. The Table shows an interesting correlation between the size of the family and the number of dependants. The larger the family, the larger the number of dependants. The larger number of dependants is due to the family being joint, and therefore, with a larger number of children. The number of female dependants is also larger in larger sized families who can be maintained by the larger number of male earning members.

The Patua family is patrilineal. The authority in the family lies with the father or the male head of the family. Mother's brothers also have a voice and a role in family affairs like marriage, divorce or any dispute in the family. The Patua women are not altogether without a voice in the affairs of the family. They, too, participate in discussions and decision making in domestic matters. Some Islamised Patua women think that women should wear a borkha and should confine themselves to domestic work, they should not talk with, or unveil their faces before males outside the family. The interesting thing, however, was that they were saying all this to me, a male outsider, without any hesitation. No Patua woman in fact wears a borkha. The Patua women freely go out for shopping and work. All this shows that the women folk of the Patua community have been enjoying the right of free movement almost equally with the men. However, the new tendency towards concealment in the matter of Patua women's occupations and the views expressed by some Patua women about the wearing of borkha, etc., due no doubt to the impact of Islamisation, indicate the possibility in future of a regression from the social and economic rights which the Patua women have been traditionally enjoying. This is despite the fact that in India today both the Hindu and the Muslim women are fighting for emancipation and equal right with men. Such regression, if it occurs, will be in accordance with the logic of acculturation by which an inferior community attempts to

adopt all the traits, including the irrational, of the superior community's culture.

### INTRA-CASTE STRUCTURE

The common understanding about the Patuas in Bengal is that they are a homogeneous artisan caste but since there has been no detailed study of the Patua community, no systematic scientific accounts are available. There were a few articles published in some of the regional papers but none of the authors had attempted a depth study of the social structure of the community.

Apart from the fission caused by periodical movements in the direction of Islamisation or Hinduisation, the Patuas are structurally divided into four major vertical divisions. There is no difference between the Islamised and the Hinduised Patuas as regards the intra-caste structure. The customs, attitudes and divisions are of the same pattern in both sects.

When asked about their intra-caste structure, the Patuas would commonly answer, "Like any other caste of the world the Patuas are also divided into four thaks". Any caste in this area and even the Muslims would give the same answer in the same words, and in fact every caste has four hierarchical divisions. Each of the sub-castes of the Patua community is an endogamous unit. Those belonging to the highest of the sub-caste do not take cooked food and water from the lowest sub-caste but they take cooked food and water from the other two sub-castes.

It is not possible to know a man's sub-caste from his surname nor from the locality where he lives. Though usually one sub-caste lives in one village but cases of different sub-castes living in one locality is not also rare. In such cases the houses of one sub-caste are huddled together. Particular occupations are attributed to each of the sub-castes and when reporting, Patuas referred to the occupations of the lower sub-castes with some contempt. But in fact there is no real taboo on any of the occupations nor any rigid following by the sub-castes of the occupations particularly attributed to them. The process of caste-fission is observed among the sub-castes too. For ins-

tance, the Mal Patuas, one of the sub-castes, is sub-divided into four vertical segments with a supposed traditional calling for each, like the Hindu artisan castes. The intra-caste divisions are not uniform throughout the district. There are variations in the statements by the various informants. The most commonly accepted sub-caste divisions are arranged below in an hierarchical order :

Chitrakar Patua  
Mal Patua  
Bede Patua and/or Duree Patua  
Maskata and/or Chile Patua

### CHITRAKAR PATUA

They are considered as the highest of the sub-castes. The occupations associated with the Chitrakar sub-caste are idol making, scroll painting and scroll showing.

### MAL PATUA

The Mal Patuas stand second in the hierarchical order. The occupations associated with them are snake charming, cow-leeching (go-baidya), scroll painting and scroll exhibiting. The word Mal means an inhabitant of a plateau and a snake charmer. The Mals use chitrakar or patua as their surname.

### BEDE PATUA

The word Bede or Bediya is applicable to wandering people who give roadside magic shows. They tame animals like bears monkeys and goats to entertain people with their tricks at fairs and market places or at the road side. They also come to people's residences for this purpose, moving from house to house. The women folk accompany the men and help in the performances. These nomadic troupes often wander over a very wide area and they are sometimes called "Duree" by the local people. The word is derived from the Bengali word 'Dur' meaning distant. Duree means those who wander or who come from, or go to, distant places. The women folk practise huckstering and are supposed to be experts in occult practices and particularly in treating female diseases like difficult

menstruation. The Bediya sub-caste stands in the third position in the social ranking.

### MASKATA PATUA

The Maskatas occupy the lowest position among the sub-castes of the Patuas. The word 'Mas' is the vulgar or colloquial form of the Bengali word 'Mansa' which means flesh, meat. The literal meaning of the word 'Maskata' is one who cuts or severs flesh or meat. The occupation associated with the 'Maskatas' is that of cutting the umbilical chord of the new born baby. One of their occupations is to perform illegal abortions. The Maskatas are also known as 'Chile'. The meaning of the word is scraper. They are called chile because they remove or scrape away eye cataracts by an indigenous method in remote villages. According to a Patua of the village Kalitha, the Maskatas originated from an illicit union between a Chitrakar-Patua and a woman of the Let Bagdi caste and therefore the Maskatas are considered as the lowest among the Patuas. The Maskatas take cooked food from the Chitrakar Patuas but the Chitrakar Patuas do not take cooked food from them and avoid social intercourse with them.

Some Patuas said that caste sub-divisions were in fact more than four. According to Samadish Chitrakar of the village Purandarpur the hierarchical divisions are as follows :

Chitrakar—idol maker and scroll-painter

Patua—scroll-painter

Mal Patua—snake charmer

Bediya or Chile—wandering people who practise juggling, abracadabra, etc.

Banskata—carder ; so called because the teeth or 'Sana' of the tool they use for carding are bamboo spikes.

Maskata—their occupations are illegal abortifacient removing cataracts and also animal taming.

Bazikar—road-side juggler and expert in fire works.



Durees—homeless nomadics ; make temporary shelter under some big tree ; hunt birds with bomboo pipes, usually of seven pieces which can be arranged in a telescopic manner, the woman folk go out for selling herbal medicines ; not averse to begging and petty theft ; also known as Pakhmaras. \*

In the Nanoor and Bolpur police station areas which include the villages Pankurhans, Khujutipara, Bagbara, Itanda, Jalundi and Benuria the sub-caste Mal Patua is divided into four sub-castes. The hierarchical divisions are as follows :

Chitrakar or Poto Mal—scroll painter, idol maker  
 Dakhnia Mal—migrant from the south ; snake charmer  
 Sapure Mal—snake charmer  
 Bajune Mal—drummer.

These sub-caste divisions have different names in the village Benuria such as :

Rajbansi Mal or Nara Bagdi Mal—cultivator  
 Poto Mal—scroll painter  
 Sani Mal—carder  
 Sapure Mal or Sankar Mal—snake charmer.

In the village Bagbara-Sien area the Maskata sub-caste is again sub-divided into four vertical segments. The divisions are as follows :

Bajune Mal—drummer ; regarded as holding the highest rank within the sub-caste as they beat drums before the gods and goddesses.  
 Saidu Mal—agricultural labourer  
 Bora Mal—practise abortifacient in the rural areas and juggling.  
 Bhogo Mal—wanderers ; practise juggling and abracadabra.

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Pakhi—Bird, Mara-kiling, killer, hunter catcher.

cit. pakhmara-bird catchers ; Perhaps they may be identified with the " Bediya ". A Statistical Accounts of Bengal, p.p. 333 by Hunter W.W.

The hierarchical divisions found among the Patuas are due to the influence of the Hindus. Although the Patuas associate some particular occupation or occupations with each sub-caste or sub-sub-caste and there is a linking of social status with such occupations, it was found from observation and also from the analysis of the occupations that the Patuas did not rigidly stick to the pattern. There was no taboo on any occupation. Recently the more Islamised among the Patuas, particularly in the villages Pachchiara, Itaguria, Kalitha, Purandarpur, Panuria and Kanachi, have given up idol making as their Muslim neighbours consider it a Hinduised occupation.

The Patuas in general even now consider idol making and scroll painting their traditional and honourable occupations. The occupations like those of cow-leech, carder, teacher, mason or hodman, house painter, etc., are also considered as honourable occupations. Some of the old traditional occupations, e.g., maskata, chile, snake charming, roadside juggling and showing of animal tricks and abracadabra are nowadays considered as shameful. There is a tendency to conceal these occupations from neighbours.

The unstable state of the community is also reflected in the social structure of the Patuas. They had adopted the caste structure under the influence of the Hindu social organisation. But for some time now a tendency towards intra-caste fusion has been mounting as the Patuas are swinging towards Islamic ways of life. A good number of Patuas expressed the opinion that there should be no hierarchical divisions among the Patuas, as all believers in Islam are brothers and equal. They are now thinking of breaking the sub-caste endogamy. Though only two inter-sub-caste marriages have been solemnised so far, the Patuas believe that there will be many more such marriages in near future. The restrictions on inter-dining among the sub-castes are rapidly losing force. The Patuas have held several meetings in their Panchagrami in which they discussed proposals for bringing all Islamised Patuas into one social fold, provided they give up occupations like maskata and snake charming and social customs like drinking and smoking ganja and marijuana in public during festivals or during

marriage ceremonies and death rites. The young Patuas say that the community had adopted the caste division from the Hindus but now under Islam there should be no divisions among Patuas. The young men declare their determinations to eradicate the intra-caste divisions among the Patuas when they assume leadership of the community.

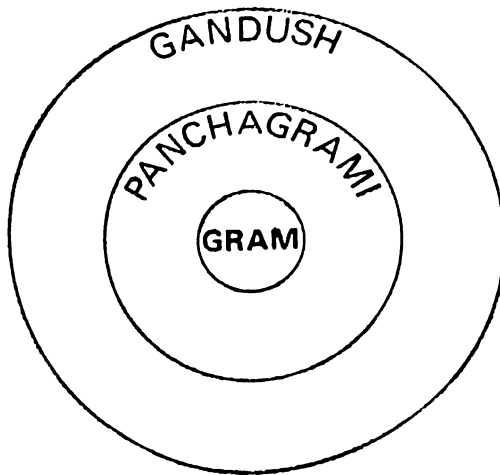
### POLITICAL ORGANISATION

“In its widest sense, the political organisation of a people embraces, on the one hand, the whole complex of institutions by which law and order are maintained in the society, and, on the other, all the institutions by which the integrity of the group is maintained in relation to neighbouring communities of a similar kind and protected against attack from without. Thus political organisation includes the legal institutions by which the juridical rights of every member of the society are safeguarded and his juridical obligations enforced (v. Law p. 146), the organisation of local, i.e. village, town, tribal subdivision, government, and the system of tribal or national or state government.”<sup>1</sup>

This definition in the “Notes and Queries on Anthropology” was kept in view while collecting data on the political organisation of the Patua community. As the Patua community has been swinging to and fro between Hinduism and Islam, it has lost many of its original characteristics. About the traditional forms of the political organisation data was collected by the interview method from old village leaders. Cases of settlement of disputes, long past as well as comparatively recent, were collected to ascertain the actual behaviour of the Patuas. Careful enquiries were also made about ‘Samajik Schools’ mentioned in the “Tribes and Castes of West Bengal.”<sup>2</sup> For this, investigations were extended somewhat beyond the jurisdiction of the present field of enquiry. Efforts were made to collect data from remote and inaccessible villages tracing the traditional organisation.

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1. Great Britain and Ireland, A Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institute.  
Notes and Queries on Anthropology. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., Sixth Edition, 1951, pp. 132.
  2. Census 1951, Tribes and Castes of West Bengal by Mitra, A., pp.309.

The existence of the two great Samajik Schools mentioned above could not be ascertained or verified from the field study. The Patuas have three-tier system of political organisation. The village is the smallest unit of socio-political organisation. The next larger unit is known as Panchagrami. The literal meaning of the word Panchagrami is a unit of five villages. But in practice Panchagrami may include six, seven or eight villages depending upon the nearness and the demographic strength of the villages. The largest unit is known as 'gandush'. This is the supreme socio-political unit. The decision of the Gandush is final from which there is no appeal. Cohesion in the Patua community is maintained through these three institutions. These are described below at some length.



### VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

The village is the basic social-political-religious unit. According to the leaders, the Patuas had a name for their village organisation but it has ceased to be in use. At present they call it Panchayat or Sabha like other people who use these terms for similar institutions. Every Patua village has a 'Morol' or village headman. Initially a 'Morol' is elected by the villagers.

sitting under a tree or in an open space in the village and then the post becomes hereditary. If a Morol dies without any issue or if a Morol is guilty of adultery or breach of trust and loses the confidence of the village and is dismissed, a new Morol is elected in his place. The Morol in consultation with other elder members of the community selects two to five elderly persons according to the size of the village to form the village Panchayat.

The function of the Patua Panchayat is to look after law and order in the Patua community in the village. If there is any dispute within the community the Patua Panchayat settles it. Inter-community disputes go before the statutory village Panchayat.

The Patua Panchayat deals with cases of adultery, premarital child birth and sometimes divorce cases. Any dispute regarding landed property goes to the statutory village Panchayat. The usual punishment dealt out by the Patua Panchayat is a fine and/or a community feast at the cost of the culprit. Sometimes the feast is arranged by the Panchayat with the money realised from the culprit as fine. Previously, even until twenty years back, a feature of the feast was community drinking of country liquor. But now the drinking of liquor is prohibited in the Patua community. On the offender's failure to give the decreed feast his family is excommunicated and all social intercourse is stopped with that family. The case may also be referred to the Panchagrami, the next higher body in the Patua political organisation. A Patua or a Patua family dissatisfied with a decision of the Panchayat may appeal to the Panchagrami for reconsideration of the case and the punishment imposed by the Panchayat.

### PANCHAGRAMI

Apart from dealing with appeals from the decisions of the Panchayat, the Panchagrami has some socio-economic functions. There are large-seized cooking vessels in the custody of the Panchagrami. These vessels are purchased and maintained with funds created out of the money realised as fines. Any Patua can borrow these vessels from the Panchagrami on

occassions of marriage, death rites, or any festival without any rent.

## GANDHUSH

The Gandush is the highest body in the socio-political organisation of the Patua community. Two, three or four Panchagramis or 15 to 20 villages constitute a Gandush. Neither the Panchgrami nor the Gandush follows administrative boundaries. The Gandush may cut accross the district boundaries. If the Panchagrami fails to settle any dispute the case is referred to the Gandush. A party, dissatisfied with the decision of the Panchagrami, may also appeal to the Gandush for justice. The verdict of the Gandush is considered final and cannot be challenged. If an offender disobeys a deicision of the Gandush he is declared ex-communicated and is totally boycotted by the Patuas within the territory of the Gandush. If an offender who has been fined surrender to the Gandush and begs mercy, pleading his inability to pay, the Gandush may remit the fine. But in such cases the offender must undergo the ordeal of declaring his or her offence in a public meeting and must also promise that he or she will not commit any such offence in future.

The office-bearers of a Gandush are known as Raja (King), Dewan (Minister), Bhadrak (Announcer) and members of the Sabha or Committee of the Gandush. The office-bearers are initially elected by the headmen of the Panchagramis. All headmen or Morols of the Panchagramis are ex-officio members of the Committee or Sabha of the Gandush. After election, the post of an office-bearer becomes heriditary. But if any office-bearer dies without any issue the post is filled by election. Also, if an office-bearer is found guilty of any offence and loses the confidence of the community or the Sabha of the Gandush, he is dismissed and his place is filled by election.

A detailed list of the members and office bearers of a Gandush is given below :

### TERRITORIAL BOUNDARIES

North	Kalitha	(Birbhum district)
East	Belul	(Murshidabad district)

Serial No.	South West	Bhuri Pachchiara	(Burdwan district) (Birbhum district)	Designation
	Name of the villages	Name of the	Morol	
1.	Madian (Birbhum)		Sadananda Morol	Member
2.	Tarachi	„	Nabin Patua	„
3.	Jhaupara	„	Umesh Patua	„
4.	Ayas	„ (Raja village)	Bhakti Patua	Morol
5.	Sardha	„	Nabin Patua	Member
6.	Bonta	„ (Mantri village)	Naren Dewan	Dewan
7.	Jhilli	„	Khudu Chitrakar	Member
8.	Bagdola	„	Kedar Chitrakar	„
9.	Itaguria	„	Dedar Patua	„
10.	Purandarpur	„	Janai Chitrakar	„
11.	Bhramarkol	„	Kulin Patua	„
12.	Sat Palsa	„	Tarini Chitrakar	„
13.	Mejara (Murshidabad)		Jahu Patua	„
14.	Panchthubi	„	Ahmed Patua	„
15.	Kandi	„	Khusi Patua	„
16.	Taloan ( Birbhum )		Rabi Chitrakar	„
17.	Aogaon	„	Sashi Chitrakar	„
18.	Aira ( Burdwan )		Bhadar Chitrakar	„
19.	Shibagram (Birbhum)		Setar Patua	„
20.	Dnarka	„	Likari Patua	Bhadrak
21.	Gokarna (Murshidabad)		Karim Patua	Member
22.	Dakshinkhanda	„	Niaj Patua	„
23.	Katur	„	Panchkari Patua	„
24.	Kanachi (Birbhum)		Majil Patua	„
25.	Malanchi	„	Rasomay Chitrakar	„
26.	Kalitha	„	Nakphuru Chitrakar	„

The territorial distribution of three Panchagramis are given below :

Panchagrami around Madian

1. Madian (Birbhum)
2. Tarachi „
3. Ayas „
4. Jhaupara „
5. Shibagram „

### Panchagrami around Kalitha

1. Sardha (Birbhum)
2. Jhaupara „
3. Kalitha „
4. Ayas „
5. Bonta „

### Panchagrami in Bolpur-Nanur area

1. Pankurhans (Birbhum)
2. Jalundi „
3. Khujuti para „
4. Santra „
5. Itanda „
6. Kalyanpur (Burdwan)

Every Patua whom I have questioned about the “Samajik Schools” mentioned in the (Census 1951) Tribes and Castes in West Bengal ( pages 309-310 ) replied that he had no knowledge and never heard of any Samajik School as the Tamruk-Kalighat-Tribeni Samajik School or the Birbhum-Kandi-Katwa Samajik School. From my long association with the Patuas I feel that the Patuas are not likely to have sophisticated names for their social organisations.

Panchanan Chitrakar of the village Madian informed me that they have a ‘Samaj’ that is, a specified territorial region outside which they should not contract matrimonial alliances. The boundary of this territory or ‘Samaj’ is as follows :

East—Belul (Murshidabad)

North—Kalitha (Birbhum)

South—Bhuri (Burdwan)

West—Pachchiara (Birbhum)

Previously, the units of the Patua political organisation—the Panchayat, the Panchagrami and the Gandush used to function properly. But due to the Patuas oscillation between Hinduism and Mohammedanism the organisation has gradually weakened and at present the Gandush is not functioning. “Samaj Bandhan’ (social cohesion) has decayed and the whole community is in disarray”, observed old leaders like Narendra Chitrakar of the village Bonta. Although a territory is defined for marriages and social communication, social communication



in fact has been much attenuated between the Patuas of the villages Pachchiara, Panuria, Itaguria, Kanachi and Digha and the Patuas in rest of the district because the former claim to be more Islamised than the others.

#### ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

When a case is settled by the Gandush the Raja gets as fee Rs. 3.00 the Mantri Rs. 2.00 and the Bhadrak Rs. 1.00 out of the fine realised from the offender. A feast is usually given in the village of the offender. In a case of inter-village or inter-Panchagrami dispute the feast is given in the Raja gram (King village) to which the members of the two villages involved are invited. If a family is ex-communicated by the Gandush the offender in order to be exculpated must give a feast to all the members of the villages within the Gandush. In such a case the feast must be given in the Raja gram (King village). In case of an inter Gandush dispute the meeting should be held in the Raja Grams of both the Gandushes. But no Patua could cite any actual case of inter-Gandush dispute. Formaly the disputing parties had to deposit Rs. 10.00 each with the headman (Raja) of the Gandush. The party who was found guilty would lose his deposit while the winning party would get back his. The forfeited amount went to the Morols of the Gandush. Either they divided the money equally among themselves or had a feast with it. The deposit system is now abolished. The travelling expenses of the Morols are to be borne jointly by the disputing parties.

The Patua method of truth finding by ordeal known as 'Phal chata vichar' was in vogue untill 50 to 60 years back, according to Panchanan Chitrakar of the village Madian, Baku Chitrakar of the village Sardha and Naren Chitrakar of the village Bonta.

In this ordeal a red hot 'Phal' (share of a plough) was brought before the Majlish or Sabha. It was then pasted up with cowdung and the accused person was asked to lick it. If the tongue of the person was burnt he was declared guilty. If there were two disputants making contradictory statements both were asked to lick the hot 'phal' to test the truth of their statements.

With the deterioration of the socio-political cohesion of the Patua community the roles of the Patua self-governing institutions have become restricted. The Patua Panchayat has no right to interfere in cases of offences against the laws of the land applicable to all. Nowadays the Patua Panchayat and Panchagrami deal with cases occurring within the Patua community of adultery, petty theft, petty swindling, personal disputes and disobedience of the decisions of the Gandush against drinking in public, etc. The punishments imposed usually are fines and social boycott. According to some informants beating in public as a punishment was formerly practised in the case of an obstinate offender but nowadays this is not possible as the latter may seek help from the police. During the field work I came across one such case. It was alleged that the offender had illicit relationship with the wife of his neighbour and made an attempt to elope with her. He was tried by the Panchayat and ordered to pay a fine of rupees two hundred. The man left the village without paying and for some time moved from place to place. He was then persuaded by some Patuas to return to the village. On the very night of his return to the village the man was brought before the village Panchayat and ordered to be beaten. But after he had been given a few slaps some people who were opposed to the leader protested and in the ensuing melee the man got bold and threatened to go to the local police station and complain against the Panchayat leaders. The threat brought the proceedings to a close. The man left the village again the same night and as far as is known that was the end of the affairs.

The last Gandush meeting in Birbhum was held in the village Ayas under the leadership of Bhakti Morol in the year 1952.

The subject matter for discussion in that meeting was social reform of the Patua community. Before the meeting Bhakti Patua, as reported, had a talk with Mr. Kiran Banik, a worker of Bharat Sevasram Sangha, Calcutta. At the meeting the main issue was the question of indentivity—whether Patuas who were in an intermediary position between Hindu and Muslim should definitely and once for all join one community—the Hindu or

the Muslim. According to Narendra Chitrakar who was a Dewan at that time more than half of the Patuas present were willing to join with the Hindus but "Bhakti was a demagogue" and he persuaded the meeting to vote for Islam. He told the meeting that the Bharat Sevasram Sangha might be able to provide priestly services for the Patuas but the priest would be of the class that served only the lower castes. The Patuas were of the opinion that they belonged to the Naba Sayak caste group of the Hindu community and so they must be served by priests who serve higher caste Hindus. The barbers who served the higher castes did not mind serving the Patuas and touching their feet during such service. So the Patuas must not accept the services of priests serving only the lower castes. They voted for Islam as in their opinion Islam was more egalitarian than Hinduism. In mosques all believers in Islam were treated as equal.

After that meeting, the Patuas of the Muslim-dominated villages and of the villages adjacent to Suri town began to exhibit their leaning towards the Muslim community but the Patuas living in the Hindu-dominated villages were much less ebullient in the matter. From my field experience I found the community was suffering psychologically due to this tug of war on the question of identities. Some families in the villages Purandarpur and Kalitha and almost all the families in the village Pachchiara were very aggressive in their expressions and behaviour on the question of their identification with the Muslims. The other were rather hesitant in their expressions and seemed still to be in two minds as to whether to be identified with the Hindus or with the Muslims. However, in accordance with the decision of Gandush the Patuas enrolled themselves as Muslims in the 1961 census.

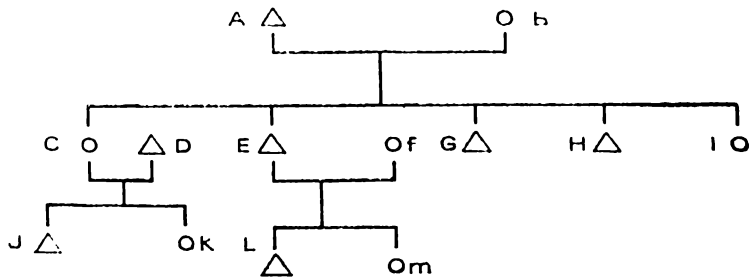
According to many Patuas the leadership of the Patua community has deteriorated particularly from the time of Bhakti Patua. There were allegations against Bhakti of procrastination in settling disputes and squeezing money from both parties. Charges of bribery were levelled against some of the other Patua leaders also. All this indicated a decay of community cohesion among the Patuas evident also from the fact that no meeting of

the Gandush was held in this area after 1952. Efforts to revive the organisation have started recently. Banku Patua of Sardha, Narendra Patua of Bonta and Samadish Patua of Purandarpur have been trying to re-consolidate the Patua community under the traditional Gandush in this area. Some young educated Patuas like Sukumar and Kamal are trying to break the intra-caste divisions and unite the community as one.

From the foregoing facts the socio-political structure of the Patua community would appear to be in a state of oscillation between fusion and fission.

### INHERITANCE

The rules of inheritance in force amongst the Patuas are based on patriarchal conceptions of family and property. There is no right of primogeniture. Women also inherit from father and husband. The following case of Nakphuru will help to illustrate the customary rules of Patua succession which are the same for Hinduised and Islamised Patuas.



On the death of A the property will be divided among b, c, E, G, H and i. The widow (b) will get 1/8th of the entire property. Of the rest of the property, 5/8ths will be equally divided among the sons (E, G, H) and 3/8ths equally among the daughters, married or unmarried (c, i). After the death of the mother (b) 5/8ths of her property will be divided equally among the daughters (c, i) and 3/8ths among the sons (E, G, H).

If a widow remarries she loses her right to the property of her previous husband and the property is divided among her children by the latter according to the rules mentioned above.

When a divorced woman remarries her children (including the one that may be in the womb at the time of the remarriage) by her previous husband do not have any right to the property of their step father.

When a man dies without leaving any issue his widow is entitled to the property till her death. After her death the property goes to the sons only and not daughters of her husband's brothers. If the husband had no brother the property will go to his nearest male agnates.

Owners, both male and female, can dispose of property by will and leave it to whomsoever they like. Though the daughters are supposed to have a right to  $\frac{3}{8}$ ths of their father's property after the widow's  $\frac{1}{8}$ th share is subtracted and to  $\frac{5}{8}$ ths of their mother's property, these rights are not generally enforced in practice. The daughters usually renounce, or they are persuaded to renounce, these rights by 'na-dabi' (no calim) declarations.

Some of the other rules also are not always strictly followed. The case of Kashed and Amina is an example of laxity in the observance of the rule that a widow on remarriage loses her right to the property of her deceased husband. Amina was the third wife of Meher Patua of the village Bhramarkol who died issueless, leaving 12 bighas of agricultural land and an 11-cottah homestead with a two-roomed house, which by Patua standards was considerable property. Attracted by this property Kashed who was married to a daughter of Samadish Chitrakar of the village Purandarpur divorced his wife and married Amina of the village Bhramarkol. Amina was more than 10 years older than Kashed and her late husband Meher was a brother of Kashed's maternal grandfather. The marriage of Kashed and Amina was secretly solemnised by a Muslim Kazi at Suri. No traditional rites were observed. The marriage annoyed the Patua community and a meeting of the Panchagrami was convened to consider the matter. Kashed and Amina were fined Rs. 60.00. The fine was paid and after

the usual feast the couple was socially accepted, and continued to live in the house and enjoy the property left by Meher though according to the rules Amina should, by her remarriage, lose the right to her deceased husband's property.

From an examination of the Patua rules of inheritance as professed with the variations in practice it would appear that the Patuas' originally patriarchal tribal customs with later changes under the Hindu influence are now fairly Islamised. The present Patua rules of inheritance more or less approximate to the Muslim law of inheritance though, of course, the latter is much more elaborate and complicated. The recognition of women's rights particularly may be attributed to the Muslim influence.

When looking into the economic life of the Patuas, one notices a certain casualness in their attitude towards property. Generally speaking, the community does not seem to have a strong acquisitive instinct or a sense of passionate attachment—to permanent possessions—land or other durable property. Perhaps this is mainly due to the nature of their occupations and their proclivity to move from place to place. This habit together with their low earning power is inimical to saving and any inclination to acquire permanent possessions. On the other hand it encourages a proneness towards a hand-to-mouth existence. The rather disjointed economic life of the Patuas is pervaded by a lackadaisical spirit.

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## SOCIAL LIFE

### DAILY LIFE

A typical day at a Patua village in Birbhum is marked by brisk activities. Some differences in these activities are noticeable in the villages near urban areas and in the Patua habitations adjacent to the Muslim villages.

The Patuas get up at day-break. They cleanse their mouth by brushing their teeth with twigs of neem tree (*Margosa indica*). Some highly Islamised Patuas in the villages Purandarpur, Pachchiara and Kanachi perform namaj before day-break. Comparatively well off Patuas take tea and the poor ones take soaked-rice in the morning before they go out for the day's work. The most notable feature is that no one is found sitting idle, no one is found begging except very few lepers.

Most of the Patuas do not possess any cultivable land, domestic animals or poultry to subsist on. So, unlike their neighbours the Hindu, the Muslim or the Santals who remain engaged either in the field or for looking after their domestic animals the Patuas are free to move about to earn their livelihood by the skill they acquired traditionally in various types of professions. So the male members going out with a bag containing implements for treatment of cows, some with indigenous herbs and scrolls, some with snakes, some going out in search of masonry work, some others busy in sana making (carding) or going out for selling tiny items like body powder, alta etc and stationary goods, is the common picture noticed in a Patua village.

The Patua women used to go out freely. But very recently, with the growing impact of Islamisation, a marked change is noticeable in the attitude towards women's freedom. The Patuas now look down upon women's going out as hawkers and

staying outside the home particularly at night, necessitated when they go in a village fair as a hawker. In the more Islamised villages—Pachchiara, Kalitha, Itaguria and Kanachi—the Patua women of comparatively wealthy families, nowadays refrain from going out as their Muslim neighbours do not like it. But it is to be noted here that in spite of this change in attitude the Patua community as a whole cannot keep their women confined at home due to their poverty. In actual practice, in interior villages like Digha, Bonta, Pankurhans, Chandpara and Shibagram, the Patua women, go out to earn their livelihood as they used to do in the past.

At dusk they return home, the women cook food, arrange their stationary goods in a basket for next morning or feed the snakes if it is a snake charmer's family. Those who cannot return home, take shelter in the railway platform or under some big trees or in any other suitable place.

There are a few families, particularly in the village Madian, Sardha and Shibagram, who own studios for making scrolls and idols of gods and goddesses. They do not travel in search of work. Other artisans who do not possess any studio make the images of the goddess Durga at distant villages during the autumn season. The rest of the year they travel around with scrolls or as go-vaidyas (cow leech) or practise abracadabra.

A Few families who possess some agricultural land, cultivate their own plot of land; some others work as agricultural labourers in the rainy season and in the autumn. They also practise other Patua professions during the lean period of the year.

## LIFE CYCLE

The critical periods in the life of the individual are marked by rituals in which the entire community in the village or within 'Panchagramme' participate. Such rites-de-passage are birth rites, name giving ceremony, initiation rites, marriage and death rites. A description of essential features of these rites-de-passage is presented in this chapter.

### **Pregnancy**

The general belief among the Patuas is that when a person



dies his or her body is destroyed but the soul is imperishable. The soul hovers in the atmosphere for a maximum of seven days and within these seven days the soul of the deceased person enters into the womb of a married woman of the Patua community only, preferably one among the near kin. Pregnancy is caused due to this entry of the soul.

Among the educated Patuas and due to the impact of family planning propaganda in the rural areas this traditional belief is changing. They now consider that male sperm is responsible for pregnancy. Pregnancy is determined by the cessation of the monthly course. Some minor symptoms such as vomiting etc., indicate conception. The old women, if there are any, recognise conception from these symptoms. The expectant mother usually informs her husband at the earliest opportunity.

Like the neighbouring Hindus, the Patuas do not observe so many rites in relation to pregnancy. Usually the Patuas do not observe 'Sadh'—a ceremony observed by the Hindus, but it was reported that some, particularly financially better off families, perform 'Sadh' at the seventh month of pregnancy.

No taboo is imposed on food and drink during the period of pregnancy but there are certain restrictions. A pregnant woman is not allowed to go out of the house from dusk to dawn. Of course in the day time, they are free to move about. Restrictions are observed in the use of items like cream, body powder or any kind of scent. No separate arrangement is required for the delivery. It may take place either in the room or in a covered verandah. Usually village Dai (midwife) is called in for the delivery. She severs the umbilical chord. The placenta and the umbilical chord are put in a new earthen pot and are thrown away in any open field out of the village. This act is known as 'Dhulafela'. A Napit (barber) is also called in within an hour or two. He pares the nails ceremonially of both the new born baby and the mother. The Dai then cleanse the baby and the mother with luke warm water. After the bath, egg-curry is given to the mother. In some cases both the Dai and the Napit are paid on that day but in most of the cases they are paid at the time of name giving ceremony.

Rice, that is the regular diet, is given on the fourth day

after delivery. Her meal includes egg, meat or fish curry, if possible, and chire.

**Ekuisha :** The term means the twenty first day. The barber comes on that day, cuts hair and pares nails of the mother and the baby. The midwife also comes on that day, cleans the room and bathes the baby. With this the period of pollution is over, on the twentyfirst day, and the mother resumes her normal household work.

### **Ekika**

The name giving ceremony among the Patuas is known as Ekika. According to some people it is known as *Akhika*. This is a Muslim term for name giving ceremony. The Hinduised Patuas also call it Ekika. Of course, the more Hinduised Patuas like Mohan Chitrakar of Ahmedpur and Ananta Malakar of Kirnahar used the term 'Annaprasan' like the local Hindus. This is also to be noted that although the Islamised Patuas insist on the Ekika, the Hinduised term 'Annaprasan' and 'Nama Karan' is known to all of them. Some Patuas reported that in the past the term Annaprasan was in vogue among the Patuas.

There is no hard and fast rule for the name giving and first rice taking ceremony (Annaprasan). Both the ceremonies are performed on the same day like the Hindus. In some cases Ekika is observed on the third, fifth or seventh day after the birth day of the baby. In the interior areas, particularly those who live in the Hindu villages, observe this ceremony in the seventh, eighth or ninth month after birth. In the village Bonta, the ceremony is observed either on the sixth or eighth month in case of a male child and on the fifth or seventh month in case of female child. In most of the cases when they observe the ceremony no difference is made between a male and a female child. Usually the date for the occasion is fixed according to Panjika—the Hindu almanac. A few Islamised Patuas reported that they get sinni from the mosque and put it into the mouth of the baby. In other cases they get sinni from 'mayerthan' (The place of local deity, particularly goddess Kali) and put in the mouth of the baby. The maternal uncle must put the sinni ceremonially in the mouth of the baby. If a baby does not

have a maternal uncle some distantly related person whom he can address as mama (maternal uncle) performs the rite.

The name of the baby is announced by the father immediately after the rice taking ceremony. The traditional way of naming was to repeat the name of grandfather or grandmother but nowadays no one follows the custom. Early in the morning of the fixed day for the occasion the Napit or barber and Dai or the midwife, who attended at the time of birth of the baby, are called in. The barber is to shave the child's head, but actually he cuts a little bit of hair as a token and pares the nails of the baby and the mother. The midwife then anoints the body of the baby with mustard oil and bathes the baby in lukewarm water. According to some, they used to blow a conch shell like the Hindus at that time but now many of them deny it. Both the barber and midwife get a new cloth and 'sidha' i.e. rice, oil, vegetables and salt according to the capacity of the family. They also get cash amounting to one or two rupees. In some villages like Kalitha, Pachchiara or Kanachi a Maulvi is called on the occasion who reads 'Khodba' excerpts from the holy Koran. The Maulvi takes one or two rupees and the new mat of date-palm-leaf he sits on.

According to Shri Hemanta Bhattacharyya, a priest in the village Tarachi, the Patuas used to visit Sasthitala—the abode of goddess Sasthi, with fruits even seven or eight years back and he himself performed puja for them. Mohammad Afjal Ali, the Kaji in the village Kalitha said that he attends the Patua houses for religious purposes. According to him the Ekika or name giving ceremony is observed on the seventh, fourteenth or twentyfirst day after the birth of the baby. The poor Patuas do not call him on this occasion but in some cases he conducted the ceremony without any fee. He reads a passage from the Bokhari Hadis in the name giving ceremony. He "chants some mantras in Arabic" in the name of the baby and then a goat is sacrificed according to Muslim custom. For those who cannot afford to purchase a goat, he reads only a passage from the Bokhari Hadis and the ceremony ends with that. As remuneration he gets money, sidha—rice, vegetables etc.

Although the date is fixed according to Hindu calendar book

(Panjika) some Patuas consider that Friday is the auspicious day. Nefu Patua of village Kalitha brought Sinni from the mosque on the previous Friday and the ceremony was observed on the fixed day according to Hindu calendar book.

It is to be noted specially that every Patua has two names—one Hindu name e.g., Rashmoy, Sukumar, Kumaresh, Mahadev etc., and the other Muslim name, usually begining with the first alphabet of the Hindu names e.g., Rasul, Sukuruddin. Korban Mohammad etc. They keep the Muslim names secret from the Hindus and the Hindu names from the Muslims.

Recently the Patua community has undergone some changes. Except for a few families in the district Birbhum, the Patuas openly express their views in favour of Islam and have swung in this direction. As a result, in the villages Kalitha, Itaguria, Pachchiara and Kanachi the new generation of the Patuas have only one Muslim name. The outlook of the Patuas living in the village near urban areas has also changed in this direction. In the interior villages like Sardha, Bonta, etc., the practice of having two names still persist. Another change has been in their attitude towards communal drinking. They used to drink liquor in any social gathering, social festival and ceremony, including this name giving ceremony. This was considered as their traditional custom. But now the Patua community has become very strict about drinking publicly, and drink of liquor during the name giving ceremony or annaprasan has been abandoned.

Having two names of a Patua—the Hindu and the Muslim, is a peculiarly unique feature of the Patua community. This incongruity should be marked carefully which is very much expressive of their anomalous and vacillating social condition. To have a clear picture of the community in this connection, a few such pairs of Hindu and Muslim names of the same person are given below :

Hindu name	Muslim name
Sukumar Chitrakar	Sukur Chitrakar
Sudarshan Chitrakar	Sukuruddin Chitrakar
Digvijay Chitrakar	Digribaux
Janhu Chitrakar	Janai Chitrakar

Hindu name	Muslim name
Rakhu Patua	Allarakha Patua
Naren Chitrakar	Nurmohammad Chitrakar
Kamal Chitrakar	Kamal Chitrakar
Shymadish Chitrakar	Somadish Chitrakar
Kinkar Patua	Omar Patua
Bodhan Patua	Badaruddin Patua
Rashmoy Patua	Rasulbaux Patua
Ek-kari Patua	Elahi Baux
Sankari Patua (female)	Sakila Patua
Jaggewari Patua (female)	Jarina Patua

### AMULETS FOR PROTECTING A CHILD

When a baby or elderly person suffers from some chronic disease the Patua takes medicine from the local doctors but if the disease continues they go to the Ojhas (local magician) to take herbal medicine or amulets to protect the baby from the evil spirits. The village Ojhas are respected by both the Hindu-Muslim community. He or she may belong to either of these communities. They take sacred bael leaf (*Aegle marmelos*) and flower offerings from mayer than (the sacred place in a village where the goddess Kali or Manasa is worshipped) or sand from pির than,—a sacred place where a Muslim sage (Pir) was buried. This sacred leaf and flower or sand are put in a tiny capsule made of brass or silver and then the capsule, tied with a thread, is put around the arm or waist or wear it like a necklace. Cowries tied in a black thread are also put in the same manner as amulets. They wear these amulets to protect the baby from the evil eye. Although some of the Patuas practise abracadabra, perform magical rites to drive away the evil and sell herbal tablets to the Hindus and the Muslims, they do not practise all these among themselves because they say that the Patuas know the tricks of their activities.

### INITIATION CEREMONY

The initiation ceremony among the Patuas is known as Khatna—circumcision. This is a Muslim term and every Muslim must do it. Every adult male Patua in the district of

Birbhum has undergone through this rite including the Hinduised Patuas. Mohan Chitrakar and Ananta Malakar who have decided to embrace Hinduism in its truest sense, told me that henceforth they would cease to follow the practice of Khatna—a distinct Islamic rite.

There is no fixed date or time for the observance of this rite, but it is to be done preferably between two to five years of age. Hajam—a Muslim barber—performs this Khatna rite both for the Muslims and the Patuas. One Hajam operates within an area, consisting of fifteen to twenty villages. When a Hajam comes in a village for this purpose, he performs Khatna for a number of boys together. The Hajams do it using indigenous implements and then a little amount of indigenous herbal oil is applied as a measure against infection. This Khatna rite is performed at night and the whole process must be over before sunrise. The barber (Hajam) is given as remuneration for this service a new cloth, utensils and money according to the family's ability.

Some Patuas who are economically in a better position arrange for a 'milad sharif' on this occasion. The Patuas as well as the Muslims are invited. The invitees talk on some religious topic or recite some passages from the holy Koran or Hadis. Food is served and the Patuas take cooked food while the Muslim invitees take fruits only.

### PUBERTY RITES

There is no special term for puberty rites, nor is any elaborate function associated with it. On the first day of the first menstruation some sweets or 'payes', rice boiled in milk with sugar, is offered to the girl by her mother or elder sister. In case of a married girl the sister-in-law puts sweets in the mouth of the girl.

### MARRIAGE

The Patuas do not have any religious or supernatural belief about marriage. All of my informants believe that it is a social custom practised through generations in order to start sex behaviour which is part and parcel of life. Premarital sex relationship is an offence and adultery is considered as a crime but

can be expiated by giving a community feast and paying a fine. One informant said that one should marry to maintain the continuity of one's line and a male child is preferred because he would perform death-rites of his parents. It seems the practice of celibacy is unknown to them. Maximum number of marriages are consummated with the age range 13-14 for girls and 18-19 for males.

### **AGE OF MARRIAGE**

From the data collected are concerned, the age at first marriage, in case of a girl, varies from 9 to 15. The minimum age in case of a man is 12 and the maximum age is 24 at the time of first marriage. Second or subsequent marriages occur either between a divorcee or between a divorced man and a widow or between a widower and a widow. Marriage between a divorced man or widower and a spinster is very rare.

### **Dowry**

Previously there was no dowry system but a token bride price was normal. Nowadays dowry is to be given from the bride's side.

Dowry is demanded both in cash and kind. Cash demand varies from Rs. 20/- to 300/-. New garments for the groom are usually provided by the bride's father or guardian. A bicycle is the most common demand from the groom's side. In many cases the marriage takes place on the strength of the promise.

### **Den Mohar**

According to Islamic rule the groom must agree to some amount of money as security to bride. The amount varies from Rs. 500/- to 1000/-. Only a token amount of money is paid at the time of marriage and the "Vakil" from groom's side announces the total amount of promised "Denmohar" before the public as well as the bride. The marriage ceremony starts only after getting the consent from the bride. The agreements are made verbally or some times on a piece of ordinary paper.

### **Methods of selection of bride and bridegroom**

Usually the Patua young men and women do not select their

own partners in life themselves. The parents or guardians select brides for their sons and bridegrooms for their daughters. Of course, when they are old enough to have their own opinion, the consent is generally sought before by the guardians. So selection through negotiation is the customary method. After preliminary talks the girl's father and/or maternal uncle along with the the headman of the village go to the boy's house and settle the amount of dowry and "Denmohar" with the boy's father or the guardian.

Marriage is preferred between near relatives mainly between cousins and territorially within Panchagrami because in any social function the members from these five villages are to be invited. So selection of bride or groom from outside means more people are to be invited, hence the cost would be more. Nowadays, marriages outside a Panchagrami are not very rare.

#### **Fixation of date**

After the final settlement of the match, the date of marriage is fixed ceremonially. In all cases the date is fixed after consulting 'Panjika' excluding the bride's and the groom's months of birth. Months of Bhadra, (August-September) Aswin (September-October) Kartik (October-November) and Chaitra (March-April) are also avoided as inauspicious. But these restrictions vary from place to place, and the more Islamised Patuas do not observe these restrictions. They prefer a date which coincides with Friday which is considered as a sacred day by the Muslims. The most preferable month for marriage is Baisakh (May-June) and the period around full moon because in the dry season they can move at night at the distant places safely and without trouble.

#### **Pan Sarbat**

Pan Sarbat or Sumat Janani ; On this day the father or guardian of the boy visits the girl's house along with two or three relatives or elderly persons. According to the traditional custom the boy does not visit the proposed father-in-law's house to see the girl before the marriage.

But nowadays sometimes the boy also visits the girl's house



on the Sumat Janani day along with his father or guardian to see the proposed bride.

As soon as the boy's party arrives, water is given to them for washing their feet. Then they enter the house, take their seats and sarbat is served to them. The former Patua custom was to serve the party with country made liquor. Nowadays, in some cases tea is also served. After that luchi is offered and at noon meat and rice is served. Usually the party leaves the girl's house on the third day after their arrival but in some cases they leave on the next day. The object of the visit is to observe the girl minutely.

Before they leave the girl's house, the boy's party sit in a place where betel leaves and nuts are kept on a plate. The boy's party and the girl's father or guardian along with elderly and responsible members of the community in the girl's village take their seats in two parallel rows facing each other. Before this assembly, the boy's guardian announces the date of marriage, which is final. Now both the parties are free to send their invitations to friends and relatives to attend the marriage ceremony. The boy's father offers sweets and presents some coins to the girl and to show respect she bows before him touching his feet. At the end of this ceremony the betel leaves and nuts are offered to any person present there. Previously the closing of the ceremony was observed by taking plenty of country made liquor but now this custom has been completely abandoned.

### **Invitation**

The form of invitation is to offer pieces of betel nut to the person and the invitee accepts it with namaskar, the Hindu manner of salutation.

### **Haridra Divas**

This ceremony is observed three or five days before the marriage day. In some cases it is performed in the morning of the day of marriage. In this ceremony the women, only from the Patua community, anoint the bride and the groom with turmeric paste and mustard oil in their respective houses. In some cases this ritual is performed simultaneously in the bride's

house and in the groom's house, in some cases it is performed on alternate days and in some cases the groom observes this ritual one day more than the bride.

Before the beginning of the ceremony the neighbours bring "Thubra" and feed the bride or the groom with it as the case may be. Sometimes some money is also offered after feeding Thubra. From the starting of Haridra Divas the bride and groom always keep a piece of iron with them till the functions of marriage are over.

### **Day of marriage**

In the morning of the day of marriage the bride and groom take a bath after anointing the body with turmeric paste and mustard oil at a particular place called "Chharlatala". This is performed in their respective houses.

### **Chharlatala**

Chharlatala is a very important item in the marriage rituals. It is the duty of the sister's husband of the bride and of the groom to make a token pond in the courtyard and then to fix four bamboo twigs (Kanchi) in the four corners of the pond. These twigs are to be connected with a chain made of mango leaves. Then jamaidada (sister's husband) carrying on his head the Purul, an earthen pot, goes to a tank to fill up the Purul, if possible he is followed by a band party.

### **Dala Dhara**

The women, except the widows, draped in red or vermilion colour sari also follow the party and one of them, preferably the sister of the bride or groom carries a new dala—basket or winnowing fan on her head which contains a new cloth, an earthen lamp, myrobalan, mustard oil, vermilion, turmeric, betel leaf and nuts, iron, cowrie, paisa, durba grass (cynodon dactylon) and a silver coin. All these things are required in the Hindu rituals too. On the bank of the pond three women then bring down the dala with their left hand. They lift and put down the dala seven times in the same manner. Then they put the contents of the dala on the ground except the lamp, iron knife, new cloth and one silver coin. Now they cover these things with a new earthen plate. Jamaidada now

stands in waist deep water, makes a circle around him by 'cutting water' seven times with an iron knife, dips with the pot on his head and gets it filled up in one breath. Now he comes out of water, stepping first with the left foot. He also breaks the earthen plate with his left foot. Completing all these rituals he then proceeds towards chharlatala carrying the filled up Purul on his head. When he reaches the chharlatala he puts it on the western bank of the token pond. The women also put down the dala in the same manner described earlier on the bank of the token pond. Then the bride or groom sits facing the filled up pot. Water is first poured on her or him by the sister's husband and then by the women present there except the widows. This ceremony is observed on the eve of the marriage day and in some cases in the early morning of the day of marriage.

### KSHAR MATI

Kshar Mati, is some times pronounced as Kshar Mudi by the villagers. The meaning of the word Kshar mati is alkaline earth. This Kshar mati, prepared by burning leaves, particularly banana leaves, was very commonly used in rural areas for cleansing purposes before the use of soap was introduced. Collection of this kshar mati from the house of a Bagdi or a Dom forms an essential part of rituals in the Patua marriage.

The ritual 'Kshar Mati' is observed immediately after the performance at 'Chharlatala'. After the bath of the bride/bridegroom at 'Chharlatala' the women take up and carry away the 'dala' with the contents mentioned earlier on the head of one woman while other three women hold it at the time of lifting. Then they go to the house of a Bagdi or a Dom and put the 'dala' either in the verandah or in the courtyard of the house after holding up and putting it down seven times. They ask for kshar and betel leaf and nuts from that house and put these things in that 'dala'. After collecting this kshar they bring back the 'dala' and observing the same manner of holding up and putting down seven times, it is kept in the bride's and bridegroom's house. On the day of marriage when the bride and bridegroom take a bath at the 'chharlatala,; this 'kshar' is given to them to cleanse their body before the bath. Ceremonially,

the sister's husband first rubs a little of this 'kshar' on the body of the bride/bridegroom. In some cases this 'kshar' is kept and given to the bridegroom to cleanse his body on the day of 'Astamangala'.

The significance of this ritual 'kshar mati' is interesting. As the Patuas collect 'kshar mati' from a Bagdi's or Dom's house as an essential part of their marriage rituals, it is quite possible to infer that in the past they belonged to the Hindu community and had intimate social intercourse with low caste Hindus like the Bagdis, the Doms etc.

The role of the sister's husband in this ritual is very important. If one has no sister's husband, a cousin's husband must play the part and if even a cousin's husband is not available then someone from the community is adopted as a substitute for a sister's husband to perform the ritual. The 'Jamaidada' gets in return of this ritualistic performance a presentation of a new clothing and sometimes money too.

### **Barjatra**

After the morning ceremony the bridegroom along with his guardian, the headman of the village, relatives and friends set out in a procession for the bride's village at the auspicious moment according to Panjika. On their arrival the party is received on the outskirts of the bride's village, usually after dusk. Then the party proceeds towards the bride's house, halting before every Patua house in the village as well as Hindu or Muslim friends who offer sweets and water to the bridegroom. The bridegroom enters the compound of the bride's house riding on a horse and goes seven times round the Marawatala—a place in the courtyard where chharla was made earlier. The sister's husband follows him sprinkling water and on the completion of these seven rounds he helps the groom to get down from the horse and then carries the bride on his lap to the decorated sitting place in the verandah. After some light refreshment, usually one or two banana, sweets and sharbat, the bridegroom and the bride are asked to sit on a small wooden plank placed at chharla facing the purul. Then the bride's sister's husband pours some water first on the bridegroom and then on the bride.

This performance of pouring water is then followed by a number of women, present in the bride's house, excluding the widows.

## DRESS

The bridegroom is given by the father-in-law a new pair of shoes, underwear, pyjamas, ganji, a full sleeved shirt, pagri (turban) and over the turban a mukut made of shola. The recent trend noticeable among the Islamised Patuas is to wear only a cap. The bride is dressed in new clothes and ornaments according to the economic condition of the family. The bride wears a mukut made of shola, and an iron bangle on the left hand and vermilion on her forehead.

There is no fixed time for the marriage ceremony. It may take place either during the day or at night but generally in the afternoon, particularly in the more Islamised areas. In no case does the marriage take place at a late hour of the night.

The Kaji comes and supervises the preparation of the 'Kabil Nama' on 'Denmohar'. Then he asks the groom to perform 'Oju' and sends 'Egin' to ascertain from the bride whether she agrees to accept the proposed Denmohar or not. The Kaji reads out a few passages from the holy Koran and prays for the grace of Allah. He then asks the groom whether he knows Namaz. If so, the bridegroom would perform two Rekats of Nafal Namaz. If he does not know, the Kaji relieves him of doing the namaz. Then the Kaji along with witnesses from both sides asks the bride in Arabic Language "will you accept Mr. X, son of Mr. Y, as your legal husband?" She gives her consent three times. The same thing is repeated to the groom and the Kaji secures his consent thrice. Then he offers a glass of sarbat to the groom who drinks two-thirds of it. The rest of the sarbat in the same glass is offered to the bride by Kaji. Then he blesses the couple and prays to Allah that they may have a happy married life and declares that the marriage is now complete.

The band party, who plays flutes, drums, bell etc., are kept out of sight as long as the Kaji is present in that house. After his departure the band party returns to play.

The Kaji then leaves the place and is followed by a man with 'sidha' which includes materials for a full meal in a new

gamcha (towel), new mat, the new cloth on which namaj was performed and Rs. 2.00 as his fee. The Kaji does not eat anything at the Patua House.

### JAUTUK

After the Kaji's departure the newly married couple sit side by side in the 'verandah'. The relatives come one by one and bless the couple putting paddy (*oryza sativa*) and 'durba' (*cynodon dactylon*) on their heads with the left hand. They also feed the couple with sweetmeats and make some presentations to the couple who bow to them touching their feet. Then the groom puts a bangle made of conch shell, in some cases, of iron, around the left wrist of the bride in presence of the invited persons. This performance is known as Jautuk.

### SAMARPAN

After the Jautuk the ceremony samarpan is observed. The father, uncle and the grand parents of the bride take the hands of both the groom and the bride together and say 'Oh ! before the witness of Lord above and the men present on earth we offer you our daughter. You are to look after all her maintenance from today.' They repeat it three times.

### BASAR

Immediately after samarpan the Jamaidada carries the bridegroom on his lap and the bride is carried by one of her sisters to a room which they lock from outside and allow them to stay there for about an hour.

The couple may or may not stay together on the wedding night. There is no special ritual or fixed date for the first sexual meeting of the couple.

### FEAST

A marriage feast is arranged on that day. The Patuas and both the Hindu and the Muslim neighbours are invited. In some villages Muslim guests take food cooked separately by a Muslim cook ; in other places uncooked food is sent to both the Hindu and the Muslim houses. Generally food items include rice, curry, fish, goat meat or beef and sweets. But as the Patuas are very poor community, they cannot always serve

all these items in their marriage feasts. Many of bride's near relatives, specially her Jamaidada and younger brothers and sisters accompany them.

### BADHU BARAN

The bride is received by the bridegroom's mother or by some other elderly female relative, except a widow, in the absence of the bride's mother-in-law. The couple enter the house after bowing before a pitcher filled with water placed at the door. The bride must carry some sweets to her father-in-law's house.

A feast is given to the relatives in the bridegroom's house on that day and the couple sit before the invitees to receive blessings and presentations.

### DWIRAGAMAN

Usually on the next day some members from the bride's family come to the bridegroom's house and come back to her parent's place along with the couple.

### ASTAMANGALA

Although the term indicates some rites to be performed on the eighth day of the marriage, in fact there is no ceremony except a feast which may take place on any day. The Patuas do not have any clear idea about Dwiragaman and Astamangala. It appears that these two terms in connection with marriage are later adoptions from their Hindu neighbours.

### SECOND MARRIAGE

Usually second or subsequent marriages are settled between persons of the same category e.g. divorced male and female, widow and widower or divorced male and widow or vice versa. In this type of marriage, rituals are not observed. Only the Kaji comes and settles 'Denmohar' and performs the ceremony as in the first marriage. Only one case of marriage between a divorced man and a spinster was reported to me. In this marriage all the rites described in connection with the first marriage were performed only in the bride's house but no rite was observed in the bridegroom's house except 'Badhu baran'.

## CHANGES FROM THE TRADITION

Drinking was a part and parcel of marriage ceremony even ten years back. But now they have given up this custom. Drinking publicly in ceremonies is looked down upon by the Muslims. In some cases the Kaji threatened that he would not come to preside over the ceremony if there was drinking.

In the village Purandarpur which has developed into a urban area, a marriage took place recently where the bridegroom did not come riding a horse, instead he came in a cycle rickshaw.

The dowry system has been introduced recently, as a result of which the average age of girls at marriage is rising. According to many, this system among the Patuas began since 1963 when Nakphuru of village Kalitha offered a dowry to a matriculate Patua for his daughter's marriage. The traditional custom was that the bridegroom should pay bride price. Taking dowry in cash and kind from the bride's party is a traditional custom among the caste Hindus. Now, in the district of Birbhum as well as in whole of West Bengal this custom influenced the Muslims and other low caste Hindus who had bride price.

Some changes in terminology are also gaining currency among the Islamised Patuas, particularly who live by the side of the Muslim villages. They are trying to introduce the term "Alem tala" instead of Chharlatala—the place where traditional marriage is performed.

In the case of a Hinduised Patua marriage, all the rituals are same except instead of a Kaji a Brahmin priest, who usually serves the low caste Hindus, attends the marriage and performs the same rituals as for a Hindu marriage which is always performed at night.

## MARRIAGE SONGS

At every marriage the Patuas sing songs. These songs are sung by the women inside the house or in the courtyard. The males do not participate in such songs. Excluding the widows, both unmarried and married women, only from the Patua community form a music party, sit together and sing abusive songs in chorus. One of them beats a drum. There is no other



musical instrument to accompany the songs. The size of the drum is 24" in length and the diameter is 9". This type of drum is found in all the Patua houses except very poor families.

There is no well composed verse for the music. Only some impromptu, obscene, abusive words, naming the bride, her relatives and villagers, in bridegrooms house or the groom and his relatives, in the bride's house are uttered in one monotonous tune. The songs are sung from the morning of wedding day at the bride's house till the departure of the bridegroom and his party and at bridegroom's house after the arrival of the bridegroom with his newly wedded wife and it continues till the next day.

One typical song in their verbatim form is quoted here as an illustration :

Akuliare, tomader gramer aman chala  
amader ganye chalbena.  
Itaguriar khankike amra ghare nebana  
Saharer sadagar Akuliar sange ratribas kar  
Kanachir lokera aikhane esha jhata mere  
Akuliare bar kare dere  
Akuliare thutu de, Akuliar ma babare thutu de  
Akuliare ganyer lokedere thutu de.  
Akulia, tui hali gadhar meye, kuttar meye  
garur meye.....

FREE TRANSLATION

Oh ! Akulia (name of the bride) the manners in your  
parent's village

Would not be allowed in our village.

Oh ! The prostitute of Itaguria,  
we will not allow you to stay in this village.

Oh ! merchant from town, come and enjoy Akulia

Oh ! villagers of Kanachi, come and drive out Akulia  
beating her with broom stiek,

Spite upon her, upon the parents of Akulia,  
relatives and villagers of Akulia.

Akulia you are the daughter of an ass, dog, cow etc.

These lines are repeated changing some words here and there.

## DEATH RITES

Most death occurs due to some disease—is the general belief among the Patuas. In their narration, they denied the existence of any supernatural power which may cause disease or death. But this is only partly true about their belief regarding disease and death. No doubt, being influenced by modern scientific ideas they expressed such views about disease and death. But in actual practice, in their life, whenever anything happens beyond their knowledge, they succumb to their deep rooted superstition and belief that some supernatural power is responsible for such happenings.

When Sukumar's six month old daughter died apparently without suffering from any particular disease, the members of the family were astonished and believed that such a sudden snatching away of life of a child was definitely due to the magical act of an evil person. So, when a person dies suddenly or without much suffering, they are very much inclined to believe the death is unnatural and caused by some evil act of evil power or evil person or by some malignant spirit. Some feel that death hinges on the will of the God. If He so desires no doctor can save that person. They also believe in life after death and rebirth. When a man dies, immediately after his burial the god Yama sends a messenger to take away the soul of the man for trial at the court of Yama.

When a Patua is about to die all the relatives in the house and the neighbours from the villages are called in. Each of them drop a little sarbat in the mouth of the dying person. Some remain engaged in preparing a bed of straw on the floor. A pillow made of straw is also given. Then the dying person is placed on that straw-bed with his head pointing northwards. His clothes are untied and the black thread around his waist is cut. In the case of woman they undo the hair and spread it over the pillow in a northerly direction. At the upper end of the pillow a basket or winnowing fan is kept which contains five poa (approximately 116 grammes) of rice and musuri and some kalai; beside this a little quantity of pan-supari and a cowri are kept in it. The belief is that whatever things are

given at the time of death would go to the other world along with the soul. The cowri is given as a symbol of a coin with which the deceased may purchase his or her requirements.

Immediately after death two small lump of cotton, moistend in scent are plugged in the nostrils. Incense sticks are burnt around the dead body. Some people go out for the preparation of carrying the dead body and digging the pit. Fresh bamboos are collected from the villagers. Members of any community extend their help at this time and allow them to take one or two sticks of bamboo without paying. Messengers go out in various directions to inform the relatives of the deceased and the dead body is kept, sometimes even for forty eight hours, for the near relatives, both from mother's and father's side.

When a death occurs a chorus of wailing and lamentation by the relatives, particularly the female relatives of the deceased, is set up. In the case of a man whose wife is living, vermilion from her forehead is wiped off. Now due to the impact of Islam many do not put vermilion on the forehead and at the parting of hair. In that case too "vermilion" from the forehead is wiped off. The iron and other metal bangles from the deceased's wife's arm are removed and bangles made of glass or plastics are broken. Instead of her coloured sari she is given a new white sari, sometimes with a narrow black border to wear like the Hindu widows.

After having a last look at the face of the deceased the relatives, arrange for the last bath. A pitcher of water is boiled with seven kul (*zizyphus mauritiana*) leaves ; the boiled water then mixed with forty pitchers of cold water, the dead body is fully undressed and placed on a wooden plank in a slanting position so that water may roll down easily. In the case of a woman the bathing is performed only by the female relatives in a covered area. They brush the teeth of the deceased seven times with seven neem twigs (*margosa indica*) cleans the body thoroughly with soap. The belief is that the deceased should not carry any earthly dirt to the other world. They sprinkle *golap jal* and *atar* profusely over the dead body. The body is then covered with three new white pieces of cloth. One piece covers the head to serve the purpose of a cap. The

second piece is torn in such a fashion that it gives the shape of a punjabi to cover the upper trunk of the body, the third piece covers the lower part of the body like a lungi—the usual dress of the local Muslims. No stitched cloth should be used for the purpose of covering the dead body. Oju is performed three times by the deceased. The body is now covered fully by a new piece of white cloth and the body is tied by three strips of new white cloth at the neck, waist and ankle.

In the meantime, some other Patuas construct a bamboo frame (khatuli) made of two long bamboo poles and few cross-bars fixed across it. On this bier (khatuli) the corpse is laid on its back with the head towards the north. Then the corpse is covered with a new white cloth.

When the dead body is about to be taken out, a loud chorus of lamentation and wailing is set again up by all, dominantly by the female relative. In the case of a male, the deceased's wife is brought before the bier. She utters before the assembly "He does not have any credit to me, he has no fault. I make him free." She then requests the assembly to forgive him for any fault committed by him earlier and to make him free of the last journey. The assembled persons say "No, no, he has no fault. He is free". In the case of a female the same process is followed by the husband and in other cases the parents or in their absence the nearest relative beg mercy for the deceased.

The bier is then carried to the western side of the Idgar—a Muslim prayer place by the side of burial ground where janaja or last prayer is performed. The prayer is conducted by a Maulvi. All the persons who joined the funeral procession perform the prayer. Previously the female relatives also used to follow the funeral procession but nowadays no female takes part in the funeral procession. Although the bier is carried only by the members of the Patua community, they allow the members of the Muslim community to join the funeral procession. The Muslim neighbours visit the Patua houses on such occasions, help them, follow the procession and take part at the janaja. The Santals, the Koras and the Hindu neighbours of the Patuas of Birbhum do not participate in their funeral procession.

After the janaja two persons go down into the grave which has been dug earlier. The depth of the grave must not be less than waist deep. Two persons from the surface of the grave lower down the corpse steadily. The other two persons hold the corpse and softly place it on the bare bottom on the grave. The clothes which were put on the corpse are not removed but the three knots which were fastened before carrying the corpse are untied. The corpse is laid on a new mat made of tal (Palmyra) or khejur (Persimmon) leaf on its back in the north-south direction with the head to the north.

The bamboo bier on which the corpse was carried, is fitted with bamboo poles in the grave, at about one foot below the surface of the grave. A new mat is spread out over which straw is strewn carefully to cover the opening of the grave so that no earth may fall on the corpse. The assembled persons praise him and say that he owes to nobody and he is free to leave this earth. Then each of the nearest relatives, first put a clod of earth three times on the straws, then others present similarly put clods of earth on the straws. There is no taboo in this respect. Any one present there, of any caste and creed may put earth into the grave, if he so desires. I was present in four such occasions of burial and put earth like other Patuas and Muslims. After the ceremonial placing of earth some people cover the grave with heaps of earth, raise a mound upto waist height and plaster the grave neatly with mud.

After that the rice, pulses and vegetables, kept at the upper end of the deceased's head are distributed among the poor people present there at the time of burial.

In the meantime food is prepared in the house of the deceased. If the family is poor and cannot procure food, the Patua relatives and neighbours donate either one rupee or rice as much as they can afford. The Patua members, who join the funeral procession take a bath in a nearby pond, touch fire put on cowdung paste and a piece of iron before entering house. Food, cooked by some women of the Patua community is served then to these people. Although the food is cooked by women, it is served by the male relatives of the deceased. The Muslim members who join the procession and participate

in 'janaja' go to their respective homes from the burial ground.

On the fourth day from the date of death at least five Patua boys are invited to the deceased's house. They are offered cooked meat (goat or beef) and rice.

### SATARBHATA

On the seventh day from the date of death at least five Patua boys and beggars, irrespective of any caste or creed, are offered cooked meat and rice. The cooking for these rites must be done by the female relatives of the deceased and served by the male relatives.

The Patuas believe that it would be good for the departed soul if they can give a feast to the beggars and the holy Koran is recited on this day.

### SRADDHA

On 40th day after the death, the Sraddha ceremony is held. According to Islamic rites this is known as Kambarkara. The Patuas refer this ceremony as Sraddha and also Kambarkara. The verandah, in some cases the courtyard, is cleaned and plastered with water and a little mud. A Maruli—a circle at the entrance of the house is plastered with cowdung like that of their Hindu neighbours. A new mat made of palmyra leaves or persimmon leaves is spread out on the cleaned area. A new piece of cloth is also spread over the mat. A Maulvi is called in. He sits on the mat facing west and reads selected pieces from the holy Koran. The Maulvi takes the new mat, cloth, one or two rupees (it may vary according to economic status) one dish or bowl made of bronze and some sweets tied in a new gamcha. The Maulvi and other Muslim participants do not take anything in the Patua house on this occasion. The Patuas sometimes report that the Muslims take food from them but from actual observations I found that the Muslims show sympathy and also help them on this occasion but do not take any food from their house.

The rituals in connection with death end with the observance of Kambarkara. The Patuas are of the opinion that if funds permit they should perform Sraddha every year or after

two to three years on the same date on which the death occurred in the same manner.

So far as the district of Birbhum is concerned only one Patua woman was burnt on funeral pyre like the Hindus. Mohan Chitrakar's father practised Hinduism but at the time of his death he requested his son to bury his dead body according to the Patua tradition. But when Mohan's mother died she did not express any desire as regards the disposal of her dead body. So Mohan along with other Hinduised Patuas decided to cremate her body. No local Brahmin performed the rites. So he had to go to Katwa on the bank of the river Ganga to cremate the dead body. When the burning was completed Mohan and other Hinduised Patuas who accompanied him, carried the ashes to the river Ganga and threw them in the river. There was no priest and they did not utter any Mantra. After this they bathed in the river and returned home. Before entering the house they touched fire put on a cowdung paste and a piece of iron. The belief is that the evil spirit would not enter into the house if they touch fire and iron.

Mohan Chitrakar observed a period of pollution for ten days but his wife and children did not. Within the period of pollution Mohan neither shaved nor took meat, fish or egg. He slept alone on a bed made of straw on the floor during the period of pollution.

On the 11th day in the morning a barber was called in who shaved his beard and moustache and nails were pared. The barber was given a new gamcha and 50 paise only.

As no local Hindu priest was available, Mohan sought help from the Bharat Samaj Sevak Samgha—a Hindu organisation—who sent a Brahmin from Burdwan, who performed Sraddha rites.

After shaving Mohan took a bath in a pond near the house. His wife and other members also bathed inside the house with water brought from a nearby tubewell. It is to be mentioned that Ahmedpur is a developing village and the market area near the Railway Station has the atmosphere of a town. Shops have developed on both sides of the Ahmedpur-Suri Road. Mohan owns a small shop of soldering (tinsmith) on

this road and resides at the rear portion of the shop. They usually wash with tube-well water inside the house.

Mohan sat on a small mat made of kushgrass facing the east wearing a clean cotton dhuti with the upper part of his body uncovered. The priest, who sat by his side uttered mantras in Sanskrit. A Sidha containing rice, oil, vegetables, salts, sweets worth one man's consumption for a day. Rupees two, a red bordered new sari and a new umbrella were also kept on a winnowing fan which would be taken by the priest.

There were five Pindas—a conglomerated mass prepared out of sun baked rice kept on a banana leaf. This was boiled by Mohan in a new earthen pot on the open courtyard. This part of obsequies is known as Pindadan or the sacrament of food-offering to the names of forefathers. Mohan took lumps of the rice one by one and placed them on a kush grass in front of him after uttering mantras along with the priest. Water was also taken in his cupped hands and offered to the deceased forefathers pouring it on to the rice after uttering mantras along with the priest. After this the Sraddha or obsequies was over and the lumps or conglomerated mass of rice were dropped in the nearby pond. The 'Sidha' or things which were placed on the winnowing fan were taken by the priest. The priest did not eat anything in the house. No one from any other communities were invited at the Sraddha ceremony. The Hinduised Patuas of Ahmedpur and Mohan Chitrakar's relatives who embraced Islam were invited at the sraddha ceremony of his mother. Both Hinduised and Islamised relatives took food on the occasion at Mohan's house. Meat and fish were not cooked on that day, only vegetarian food and sweets were served. Mohan's wife cooked food for the invitees but they were served by Mohan's sons. After this ceremonial feast, the death rites of Mohan's mother were over.

The Hindus believe that offering Pinda or ceremonial offering of conglomerated mass of cereals to the names of forefathers at Gaya is a great virtuous act and without it the soul of the deceased is not salvaged. On my query whether Mohan



would go to Gaya for the salvation of his deceased mother he replied that he would not go to Gaya because his funds would not permit him to take up such a long journey and the Hindu priests might not allow him to perform the rites as he was not aware of the clan of his family. He was also aggrieved at the refusal of the local priests to perform the rites at a Patua house. The priest who performed the rites also rebuked him when he could not say his clan name (Gotra) properly. He was in a dilemma on the question of remaining in the Hindu community or joining Islamised Patua brethren.

This case of Mohan Chitrakar's mother's cremation and performance of Sraddha exactly in a Hindu manner, demands special attention. The revealing factor is that a Patua remained a Patua—an outcaste—even after such enthusiastic effort on his part to be regarded as a Hindu.

Previously, the Patuas used to ceremonially take liquor, ganja and hashish at any social gathering. They had bride price like the local tribal people and the low caste Hindus like Hari, Dom, Bauri, Bagdi, Bayen and others. But now they have given totally up the taking of liquor, ganja, hashish at local gatherings and it is looked down even when taken privately. Some Patuas consider that the change was due to Islamisation. The Hinduised Patuas also do not take liquor, ganja or hashish at any socio-religious ceremonies. Neither the Hindus nor the Muslim socially recognise drinking. In fact, the Patuas, in order to identify themselves with the superior cultural communities like the Hindus and the Muslims, decided to give up drinking liquor and taking narcotic publicly.

According to Islamic rules taking of dowrie from the bride's party is irreligious. But the Patuas have given up their traditional customs of bride price and have inclined to bridegroom price in cash or kind like the Hindus of this area.

The rites of passage from birth to death of a Patua now vividly bring before us a clear picture of the mixed culture borrowed both from the Hindus and the Muslims.

## ANNUAL CYCLE

The mixed culture expressed throughout the life cycle of the Patuas, has extended its influence on their religious life also.

Some differences between their verbal report and actual performance are possible in their festivals. The Patuas who now claim to be Muslim, narrated that they do not bow their head before the Hindu gods and goddesses but from actual performances it was noticed that they bowed before the goddess Durga, Saraswati, Mansa, Kali and observed certain rites during Visva-Karma Puja. On the other hand the Hinduised Patuas also have a respectful attitude towards Muslim festival like Id and give new garments to their children during the Id festival. Almost all the Patuas reported that they take beef and participate in 'go-korbani'—sacrifice of cows—during the Id festival. I have observed, as a method of study, the participation of the Patuas in the Hindu-Muslim festivals. I found a good number of Patuas have neither participated in 'go-korbani' nor taken beef at the Id. On the contrary, instead of sacrificing a cow they sacrificed a chicken. The Patuas who live by the side of the Muslim neighbours, of course, sacrificed cows and took beef.

## NAVA VARSHA

On the first day of the month of Baiskh the Patuas observe Nava Varsha or new year's day. They do not participate in any religious activities on that day like the Hindus. The day is observed only by taking better meal than the average day according to their ability. They try to avoid quarrelling or beating the children on that day because they have a belief like the local Hindus that the year would continue peacefully if there is no quarrel on the first day of the year.

## ID-UL-FITAR

This is observed on the 1st day of the month of Shawwal according to the Muslim calendar. The Patuas do not know the purpose of this festival but observe Id-Ul-Fitar like the local Muslims. Although they reported verbally that they participate in the special namaj on that day, from observation it was found that only a few Patuas in the village Pachchiara participated in

the special namaj at the mosque. The Patuas in general observed the day by adding chicken or goat or cow meat to their normal diet. Some of the Patuas participate in 'go-korbani' or cow sacrifice along with the Muslim neighbours.

### DURGA PUJA

In the month of Asvin (September-October) the entire Hindu community bursts into a festive mood in connection with Durga Puja.

The Patuas do not observe any ritual during this Durga Puja, but new garments are bought, particularly for the women and children. Wearing these new garments they visit Puja pandals, do 'Pranama' before the goddess but always maintain a distance as outcastes. On Vijaya or Dasahara day—the day of immersion of goddess Durga, they follow the procession and offer sweets after Vijaya to the visitors like the Hindus. They also perform ritual of cleaning the household utensils and instruments like knife, dao, spade, plough etc., and mark them with vermilion mixed with mustard oil.

### SNAKE CATCHING CEREMONY

On the day of Vijaya Dasami—the day for the immersion of the goddess Durga, the Patuas, particularly Mal Patuas and Bede Patuas go out for a ceremonial catching of snakes.

Only the male members go out and the women stay in the house and prepare food which, on this day, includes one or two special items. The members who are to go out to catch snakes take a bath in the morning and abstain from food till offerings are made to the goddess Mansa—the snake deity. On that day a cock or he-goat or a duck is sacrificed and some sweets are offered to the goddess Mansa under a baniyan tree or neem tree at a place which is known as mansatala (abode of Mansa) in the village. No Brahmin or priest presides over the sacrifice and the offerings. Female birds or animals are tabooed for the purpose of sacrifice to the goddess Mansa.

After the sacrifice is made to Mansa the participants take food and then go out for the ceremonial catching of snakes. There is no fixed direction for the commencement of the journey. They must catch a snake, venomous or nonvenomous, big

or small, on this day. The purpose of this ceremony is to ensure good luck in catching snakes throughout the year. This particular day is known as the 'Day of Jatra'—which means a day when a solemn ceremony is performed on the eve of a journey to make it a lucky one.

This snake catching ceremony which bears the relic of their tribal past is now considered degrading. Nowadays, the Patuas consider snake charming to be the most condemned occupation as this occupation is looked down by both the Hindus and Muslims. The Patuas in general are very unwilling to say anything about this snake catching ceremony or snake charming. Only a Patua teacher enlightened me about this. But he also said that there might be some rituals with first catching of a snake in the remote past but at present no ritual is observed in this connection. Further investigation, however, disclosed that the Patuas still perform the snake catching ceremony in detail, particularly in the villages like Pankurhans, Jalundi, Khujutipara, Itanda, Bagbara and Benuria. In the villages Chandapara, Bonta, Bagdola, and Shibgram the Patuas observe this day only symbolically. In the highly Islamised villages like Pachcharia, Panuria, Ayas, Jhaupara, Kalitha, Itaguria and Purandarpur this ceremony is not performed at all.

### DAK SAMKRANTI

The meaning of the word 'dak' is invocation or cry and the word 'samkranti' means transit from one zodiacal sign to another, as well as the last day of every Bengali month. This ceremony is observed by the Hindus on the last day of the month of Asvin (October). The belief goes that Lakshmi—the goddess of wealth, hovers through the paddy field on that night.

Early in the morning of the day of 'Dak Samkranti' the Hindu male farmers plant a reed in a Bakchur Paddy (*Oryza sativa*) field. The belief is that the reed will fertilise the paddy flowers. The adult female members of the Patua community abstain from cooked food and take soaked mung or kalai on that day. After the sun had set, one female member (not a widow) from each family fetches water in a new small earthen

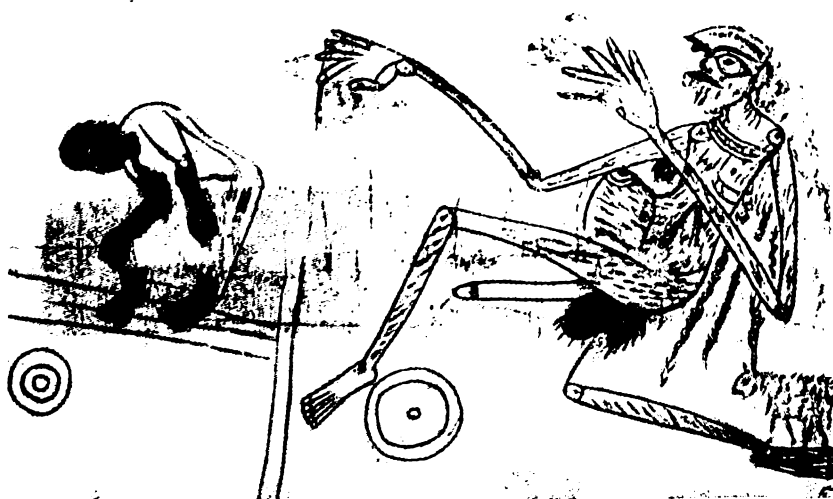


Yama, the God of Death at the seat of Judgement—section of an age old pat by an obscure Patua painter from West Bengal.

A scroll showing  
the usual length



A Pishach pat (necrophagous  
spirit) sometimes used for  
abracadabra from Midnapur





Traditional style of  
paintings of a  
Pakistani Ruler  
during the Bang-  
ladesh War. 1971



Muslim Kaji presiding  
over a death rite in a  
P a t u a house in  
Birbhum.



Santali Pat : depicting  
the origin of Man  
according to  
Santali legend

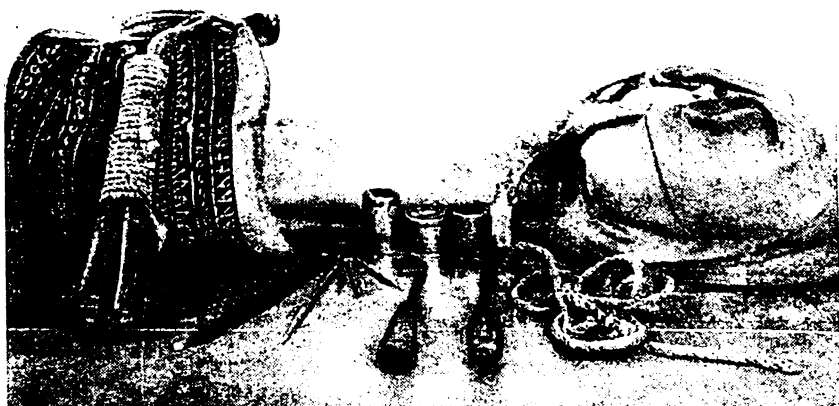


A Patua wayfarer of Birbhum



Lamp Stand in the style of traditional Ghata Chitra

A Kit containing implements for cow-leeching dress and other herbal medicines etc. with which they wander for day together alongwith pats





Pat on Bangladesh War of 1971 by a patua of Midnapur

pitcher from the field where the piece of reed was planted in the morning. Care is taken to avoid touching the reed. If any one touches the reed they will suffer from a headache which will not be cured throughout the year. This water is given to the cows or buffaloes if they have any. The Patuas also take a few drops of this water in the belief that this will protect them from poisoning. During the last quarter of the night of Dak Samkranti the adult male members of the Patua community go to the Bakchur Paddy field along with the Hindus and look up towards the sky and shout 'Phule Otho Phule Otho'—be abundant, be abundant. The belief in rural areas is that the cry 'Phule Otho' in the night of Dak Samkranti has a magical power to induce a bumper crops.

The Patuas believe that there must be rain on the day of Dak Samkranti or else the entire world will be destroyed by the loud hissing and venom of angry snakes. A drop of rain water or even a dew drop on that day makes the water in any field ambrosia. The snakes, snails frogs etc., drink that ambrosia and enter into their pits. Due to the magic spell of ambrosia the snakes etc., forget their thirst and hunger and go for a long sleep till the 12th day of the month of Jaistha (June). During this period the snakes neither drink nor eat nor bite even if a man or frog touches its body. The Patuas consider that it is a good omen for them to see a snake on this day.

On the 13th day of the month of Jaistha the snakes come out of their pits and take a bath in the rain water that drops from Rohini Nakshatra and resume the behaviour normal of the snakes. The snakes, snails etc., begin to feel thirsty and hungry and move about in search of food. According to Patua belief there must be rain on this day or else the venom in the fangs will be increased. The Patuas, particularly Mal Patuas and Bede Patuas observe this day by taking a bath in the morning and no other ritual is associated with this rite.

The Patuas of Manbhum perform this rite but they call it Jihoor instead of Dak Samkranti. They perform this rite more elaborately than the Patuas of Birbhum. They have another ceremony known as Pashar. At the Jihoor Samkranti night a cowherd takes out cows and buffaloes for grazing in the

field to moisten their bodies with dew. This will help to keep the cows and buffaloes free from disease throughout the year. They have many legends in this connection.

One story goes thus : A cowherd boy fell asleep under a tree on the night of Jihoor Samkranti. The snakes were distributing nectar on that tree and a drop of nectar fell in the mouth of the sleeping cowherd boy and he swallowed it. As a result the boy slept over seven months from the 1st of Kartik (October) to the 12th of Jaistha, like the snakes, forgetting everything. The boy became healthy and handsome in spite of having no food or drink due to the impact of the drop of nectar.

### KALI PUJA

The Patuas do not have any particular ceremony in connection with the worship of goddess Kali. In some villages they give votive offerings through a Hindu priest to the goddess Kali in the month of Kartick (October-November). Generally the Patuas believe that goddess Kali is a powerful deity and they pay respect to her.

### ID-UZ-JOHA

The Patuas narrated that they observe 'Ramjan-fasting' throughout the day in the holy month of Ramjan, like the Muslims. But I found that very few of them actually observe fasting. They have an explanation for this. They say that they are to move from one place to other for their work. This work is tiring and it is very difficult for them to work for the whole day without a drop of water. Id-Uz-Joha is observed on the tenth day of the twelvth month, known Zilhijja according to Muslim calendar. The day is not fixed. The Imam declares the date by seeing the moon on the new moon night.

The Patuas observe the day of Id as a festival like the Muslims. They go to the mosque to perform special namaj. They put on new garments, invites their relatives and offer sarbat and sweets to the visitors.

### DAHA

Tazia is known as Daha to the local Muslims. The Patuas also call it Daha. They do not have any 'Tazia' but observe

the day as Dahan Parab (The day of Dahan festival). Every family is to perform the festival. At night each family prepares Polao-rice cooked at least with five varieties of pulses and fried with ghee. They sometimes invite some friends in this connection but usually the ceremony is confined to the family.

### SAB-E-BARAT

According to the Muslim calendar this festival is performed in the month of Sha'ban. But the Patuas never mentioned any month of the Muslim calendar. They refer to the months according to the Hindu calendar. The date of celebration is fixed according to the instruction from their Muslim neighbours.

This ceremony is observed at night. Each Patua family cooks rice or polao and meat, usually of goat or chicken. The Patuas of the village assemble with cooked rice and meat in a common place usually at a sacred place within the Patua hamlet. All this food is kept in a common place. They ceremonially offer the food to their ancestors. No namaj is performed. The Patua leader of village prays on behalf of all the Patuas in his house by performing namaj. After the namaj cooked food is served amongst all the Patuas of the village. Neither any Muslim or any Hindu is invited in this connection. Candle sticks or pradeeps are lit around the house of each family.

Some of the Patuas in the village Pachchiara and Kalitha reported that after the ceremony they invite the Muslims in a common gathering who talk about religion and the stories on the life of Muslim Pirs or religious leaders.

On enquiry it was found that even the Islamised Patuas who observe the Muslim festivals like Id-Uz-Joha, Dahan, Sab-e-barat etc., are not very much keen about it. The zeal and the eagerness of Muslims for their festivals are absent among the Patuas. At present, because of their desire to be regarded as true Muslims, they observe the festivals no doubt, but the spirit is still superficial. Most of them do not know even the names of all the Muslim festivals and are ignorant of the dates according to Muslim calendar. Islamic names of the months are not known to many of them. Islamisation is thus still a process and has not gone deep in their life.

## VISVA-KARMA PUJA

According to the legend, the Patuas are the descendants of Visvakarma, the celestial architect and Ghritachi—the celestial nymph. Respect for the Lord Visvakarma is noticed among all the Patuas of Birbhum. More Islamised Patuas of Kalitha, Itaguria and Pachchiara initially pretended that they do not know anything of Visvakarma. But after a long association with them it was revealed that they also have reverence towards Lord Visvakarma, although they do not show any outward expression.

According to the Hindu calendar, worshipping of Visvakarma is held on the last day of the month of Bhadra (September). The Patuas also observe the ceremony on the same day.

That day they get up early in the morning and clean the house and courtyard with mud and water. They do not use cowdung like the Hindus for purifying the place of worship. In a box, they take all the instruments with which they work and get them 'bathed' from the pond and then spread these instruments in the courtyard under the sun. Then the owner of the instruments goes for his bath. In the meantime the instruments and the container get dried. Now the owner, or any other male member of the family, anoints the instruments with mustard oil and marks each of the instruments and the container with vermilion. Then the instruments are kept unused for three days. In the village Purandarpur, the Patuas keep the instruments unused for one day only. The Patuas must abstain from work particularly with instruments on the day of Visvakarma Puja.

According to the statements of the Patuas, it is not taboo for women to perform all these rituals. But in actual practice it was found that the women never participate in these rituals of cleansing the instruments on the occasion of worshipping the Visvakarma. So it may be inferred here that it is the spirit of Islam, which, according to Islamised Patuas, preaches equal rights for both men and women which influenced the Patuas to deny any taboo about women.

None of the Patuas in the district Birbhum worship the image of Visvakarma, not even the Patuas who make idols of

Visvakarma for worshipping by the Hindus. But on the day of Visvakarma Puja the Patuas visit the Hindu place of worship and pay their respect to the Lord Visvakarma.

### GARUPARAB OR COW-FESTIVAL

The day after Kali Puja this ritual is observed by the Patuas who possess land and are connected with agriculture. In the morning the feet of the cows are washed fourteen times with water in which fourteen types of vegetables have been mixed. Some yellow marks are put on the body of the cow and vermilion drops on the forehead of the cow and turmeric mark on the forehead of the ox. The horns are anointed with mustard oil. Then the cows are taken to the field in front of the shrine of goddess Kali. Many Hindus also assemble there and engage in a mock selling of gold, silver, paddy, drinks etc. After that somebody from the community rings a bell and at once all the cows are let loose. The cows run freely for sometime. After that the cowherd boys return home with their cows and feed the cows with rice and pulses.

### PITHA PARAB

This is a Hindu festival observed on the last day of the month of Paush (January) in which the Hindus observe some rites and prepare 'Pitha' or sweets of various kinds with pounded rice and other sweets, etc. The Patuas do not participate in any rites associated with this festival. They only observe this day by taking some sweets prepared with pounded rice and sugar, oil etc.

### CHHATU PARAB

This is observed on the last day of the month of Chaitra (April), the last month of the Hindu year. No rites and rituals are connected with this festival. They only take chhatu—flour made of barley—with gur (molasses). Chaitra is the last month of Hindu year and with this festival the rites spread out all over the year among the Patuas are over.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL MOVEMENT

### A STUDY ON INTER-CULTURAL OSCILLATION

According to Rakhu Patua they were a wandering group. This statement was further corroborated by Naren Patua (67) of village Bonta, Banku Patua (66) of village Sardha, Sudarshan Chitrakar alias Sukuruddin Putua (79) of village Itaguria and Panchanan Chitrakar (57) of village Madian. They also reported that the Patuas and the Bazikars, the road-side entertainers, were related. The latter also practised abracadabra in various forms and were experts in rope tricks. Later on some of them learnt making fireworks from Muslim experts and came to be known as Bazikars, the term being applicable to both magicians and manufacturers of fireworks. Hemchandra Chitrakar was a famous Bazikar in Calcutta. He entertained the public with his magnificent fireworks. He won the first prize in a competition with Messrs Jem's Pain and Sons Ltd. of London and Bonbonnier Ltd. of Calcutta, organised by the Earl of Ronaldshay, the then Governor of Bengal, on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales at Calcutta Maidan in 1921. His son Gurudas Chitrakar, a resident of Maniktala, Calcutta, is also a famous Bazikar who has many patrons among Maharajas, Nawabs and Zamindars for this fireworks, testifying to Patua efficiency in pyrotechnics.

That the Bediyas and Pakhmaras are two other sub-sections of the Patua community has already been noted in the section on intra-caste divisions among the Patuas. The Pakhmaras and the Bediyas are wandering communities to this day<sup>1</sup>. While describing the population of Birbhum W.W. Hunter<sup>2</sup> classified the the Bediyas, Mals and Pakhmaras under the heading 'Semi-

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- 1 B. Bhattacharyya : Intra-caste structure of the Patuas, Abstract of the Proceedings of the Indian Science Congress, 1973.
  - 2 Hunter, W. W. : Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. IV, pp. 327-329 Trubner, & Co., London, 1876.



Hinduised Aborigines'. He writes, "Bediyas, a wandering gipsy like tribe who live by selling trinkets at fairs, bird catching, juggling, fortune telling and when these things fail by petty thefts ; 593 in number. Pakhmaras, bird catchers, perhaps they may be identified with Bediyas." Hunter did not mention anything about the Chitrakars or Patuas in his exhaustive 'Statistical Account of Bengal'. Herbert Hope Risely described the Bediyas as vagrants in Bengal, low status<sup>3</sup>. He also did not mention the Chitrakars or Patuas in his monumental work. "The People of India". There is a mention by Buchanon<sup>4</sup> of the Chitrakars among the artisan castes of Bihar and L.S.S. O'Malley mentioned the Jadu Patuas in the District Gazeteer of Birbhum, 1901. The absence of any mention of the Patuas or the Chitrakars in The Statistical Account of Bengal by W.W. Hunter and in 'The People of India' by Herbert Hope Risely probably was not due to oversight but due to the fact that the Chitrakars or Patuas of Birbhum were known as Bede or Bediya or Paharia Mal or Nyasara or Nasya (low caste Muslim converts are known as Nasya in North Bengal<sup>5</sup> to the old Hindus and Muslims<sup>6</sup>. Naluas, a similar detribalised low-caste Hindus, later on converted to Islam was traced by Dr. M.N. Basu in the eastern part of Bengal.

The total population of Bediyas (593) and Mals (9346) in the district of Birbhum was 9939 according to the Census of 1872. The total number of Patuas or Chitrakars, including all the sub-sections such as Bede, Mal, Maskata, Bazikar etc. was 1168 according to the census of the Patua population of the district Birbhum made during my field work in 1970-72. Part of the decline in the population is perhaps attributable to some physiological reason reflected, for example, in the size of the Patua

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3 Risley H. H : The People of India, 1915, Second Edition, Jan., 1968, published by Oriental Books, Reprint Corporation, Delhi-6, p. 456.

4 Buchanon, Francis ; An Account of the District of Bihar and Patna, Bihar and Orissa Research Society.

5 Ibid 3 : P. 122.

6 Bhattacharyya, B. : Chchatrak, Vol. 3, No, 1, Autumn Issue, Patua Jatir Paschatpat Prasange ; 1972.

family which is much smaller than the size of the average rural family. But this is a problem for the Physical Anthropologists and does not come within the purview of the present study which is primarily concerned with the sociological problems of the community. The sociological factors relating to the decline in the number of population are migration and clandestine penetration in the Hindu and Muslim communities through concealment of Patua identity. Many abandoned and dilapidated houses, once inhabited by Patuas, were noticed during the field work. Many Patuas have changed their surnames and have migrated to the industrial areas of Burdwan and Calcutta where they are no longer known as Patuas. For example, an educated Patua is now working at Mankar as a school teacher and his brothers are working at Raniganj and Barakar. All of them have adopted "Pal"—a Hindu surname. Six families migrated to Calcutta as Muslim. They are now living in Dilkhusa Street and in Bhowanipur, Calcutta. Of their bread earners, one is working as a peon in the Writers' Buildings, one in a Medical College and four others in a private firm. These examples throw some light on the migratory tendency of the Patuas and other sociological reasons for the erosion of the Patua population.

The occupational pattern for three generations of Patuas described in an earlier chapter shows their peripatetic tendency. The lack of attraction for land and agriculture is probably due to an ingrained nomadic habit. Many Patua young men told me that they liked to move from place to place rather than stay at one place.

The data collected during the present study—which, so far as the history of the Patuas is concerned, is a maiden one—support the conjecture that the Patuas were a nomadic tribe with their original habitation somewhere in Central India. They spread out in different directions from their original habitat and one of the branches entered Bengal either through Orissa or through Bihar or both. They came with their original occupations such as snake charming, bird catching, abortifacient, juggling, training animal for tricks and giving road-side shows for entertainment, abracadabra, etc., and also with their tribal way of life

which includes drinking liquor on all ceremonial and festive occasions, sacrificing chickens to benign as well as evil spirits, characteristic form of tribal government, election of leader, oath taking and truthfinding through ordeal. Close contact with the vast and powerful Hindu community gradually weakened their tribal entity and loosened their tribal moorings. They gradually added huckstering, scroll painting and later idol making to their original occupations. There are many castes among the Hindus in various parts of India who traditionally practise scroll painting and idol making. In Birbhum itself scroll painting was done by the Acharyas<sup>1</sup> and Sutradhars.

The Sutradhars (architects and architectural wood carvers) and Kumbhakars (clay modellers) were also famous for image making and scroll painting. There are a few well-known Sutradhar families in the village Hatserandi of Birbhum who still practice scroll painting. It has been noted earlier that the Patuas do not know the dhyanmantra, the scriptural description of a particular god or goddess to be found in the Hindu religious books, but they can very well emulate the traditional Hindu image makers like the Acharyas who know the dhyanmantra. The Patuas with their natural skill in handicraft adopted the art of image making from the Hindus. The break-up of the occupations table reveals that the Patuas were never dependent only on scroll painting or image making.

The itinerant nature of the Patuas' occupations made them move from place to place and from house to house and the Patua huckstress could go into the inner courtyard of a Hindu house to sell to the ladies trinkets and alta—a lac-dye—specially used by Hindu women to paint the borders of their feet (nowadays the Muslim women also use alta in Bengal). With the passage of time the Patuas lost more and more of their tribal culture till only some vestiges of it were left. They settled generally on the fringes of Hindu villages. The study of Patua habitations shows that in five out of the 38 villages having Patua habitations, these are situated on the outer fringes of Muslim villages or Muslim paras; in three cases in between Hindu and Mus-

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1 Mitra, A.: Tribes and Castes, Census 1951, Government of West Bengal, pp. 344-345.

lim villages and in the rest of the villages the Patua habitations are on the outskirts of Hindu villages and near to the low-caste Hindu settlements. The settlement pattern clearly indicates the low status of the Patua community in the eyes of both Hindus and Muslims. As the Patuas expanded their market among their Hindu clientele with scrolls depicting Hindu mythological stories and moral tales, with songs sung in accompaniment with Khanjani (small cymbals) glorifying the god Mahadev and his consort Durga and with selling images of Hindu gods and goddesses, they adopted many Hindu traits of culture and inclined towards Hinduism. Like other Hindu artisan castes, they adopted the worshipping of Visvakarma and other Hindu gods and goddesses such as Durga, Kali, Manasa. They also developed a myth about their origin and the cause of their present degraded social position. Every Hindu low caste has a myth attributing the caste's origin to some god or a great Brahmin or some mythological sage and the cause of the fall to the present low status of the caste in the Hindu social order to some crime or misdeed or breach of taboo by one of the forefathers in the remote past. The myths and the reference to the Chitrakars in the *Brahma-Vaibarta Purana*<sup>1</sup> indicate that at the time when this Purana was written—13th century A.D.—the Patuas or Chitrakars were incorporated in the Hindu social system, however lowly their status in it. There is no mention of Chitrakars or Patuas in any earlier Purana or list of castes.

Islamic rule played a very important role in the changing political, social and cultural life in India. Though since the beginning of the 8th century when the Muslims from West Asian countries first invaded India more and more of the country had been coming under Muslim rule advancing from the north west, the Muslims could establish their rule in Bengal only in the 12th century. There was no unity among the Hindu kings of the time. Bengal was ruled by Vallal Sen who was enthroned in circa 1158 A.D.<sup>2</sup> He introduced 'Kulinism' in the Hindu

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1 Mitra, A. : Tribes and Castes of West Bengal, census 1951.

2 Majumdar, R. C. : History of Ancient Bengal, Published G. Bharadwaj & Co, 22/A College Row, Calcutta-9 First Ed., 1971, pp. 221-252.

society in Bengal during his 11-year reign. Not only some castes were upgraded and others downgraded, hierarchy was introduced even within a caste. Many Patuas told me of their belief that they were degraded along with Subarna Baniks and other artisan castes and ostracised during the reign of Vallal Sen. The social history of that period reveals that it was an especially harsh time for the low-caste Hindus as casteism and caste hierarchy got especial support and encouragement from the royal court. There are many records pointing to Vallal Sen's pre-occupation with casteism and his unpopularity among the low castes. In 1510 A.D. Anandabhatta composed a book on the life and character of Vallal Sen—'Vallala-Charitra'. It was edited and translated by Mahamahapadhyay Haraprasad Sastri and published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1904. The book depicts Vallal Sen as capricious and tyrannical especially in his treatment of some castes. There is a story in that book that once Vallal Sen borrowed a crore of rupees (nishka) from Vallabhananda, the richest merchant in his time for financing an expedition against the king of Undantipura. After repeated reverses in that expedition Vallal asked for a fresh loan of a crore and a half of 'suvarnas'. Vallabha was ready to give the money but wanted that the revenue of Harakali should be mortgaged against the loan. This enraged Vallal Sen and he forcibly took possession of all the wealth of Vallava, who was the leader of the Baniks (merchant community) along with the wealth of many other merchants and inflicted other hardships on them. There was a series of changes in the caste order. The caste to which Vallava belonged was of course downgraded. So it is not improbable that a number of castes including the Patuas were so treated at this time. Their resentment was a contributing factor in the Muslim conquest of Bengal.

Lakshman Sen succeeded Vallal Sen in the year circa 1170 A.D. and reigned upto circa 1207 A.D. Towards the end of his reign Muhammad Bakhtyar Khilji invaded Bengal (1202 A.D.) Maulana Minhaj-ud-din Abu-Umar-I-USman gives a detailed account of this invasion in his famous book *Tabakat-I-Nasiri* in which he describes the unopposed progress of Bakhtyar "untill he reached the entrance to the palace of Rae Lakhmanah, when he

drew his sword and commenced an onslaught on the un-believers". History records no mass or popular resistance to the successive Muslim invasions in Bengal. No student of sociology or social anthropology can help thinking that the common people must have been alienated from the ruling class ; otherwise, it would not have been so easy for the foreingers to conquer the country. The social history of that period unveils the fact that the domination by the three upper castes backed by royal patronage over the rest of the society was so harsh that the common people, particularly the low castses, welcomed Muslims in expectation of some relief from this oppression<sup>1</sup>. The Patuas, who undoubtedly were in one of the lowest strata of the Hindu caste hierarchy and who were possibly not fully assimilated to the Hindu social order may have been drawn towards Islam sometime in this period. The new Muslim rulers also wanted to propagate Islam through proselytisation to fulfil the Islamic injunction to convert unbelievers as well as to strengthen the base of their rule in this country. The scrolls were being used not only for entertainment but also as a medium of mass education. The Muslim rulers soon saw how this medium of mass education could be utilized in the propagation of Islam. This inference is substantiated by the evidence of the large number of scrolls, known as 'Gazir Pat' dealing with the lives and miracles of Muslim pirs (religious preceptors) and other Islamic legends. This royal patronage and the Islamic saying that "all believers are brothers" (Koran 49 : 10) must have attracted this poor community at the lowest rung of an oppressive caste system towards Islam.

The Patuas gave me two other views regarding their swings, in later periods, towards Islam. When the Maratha plunderers (Bargis) ravaged rural Bengal (1741-1751) again and again, the Muslim rulers took more interest in protecting Muslims than in protecting Hindus. There was no unity in the Hindu community, divided as it was into rigid compartments by caste. And the Patuas, a small poor and week community, in search of security, naturally swung towards Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> Sen, Dinesh Ch. : *Brihat Banga* ; Pub. Calcutta University, 1934, pp. 532-533.

The other reason ascribed for the Patuas' Islamisation related to the imposition of the *zizya* tax on the Hindus. To be exempt from this oppressive tax, the Patuas like many other low-caste Hindus took shelter in Islam. Anyway, there are good grounds to believe that the Patuas embraced Islam during Muslim rule in India. But it seems the conversion was never complete because the Patuas could not give up overnight the Hindu traits which they had acquired through a long process of acculturation. And secondly, for economic reasons, it was not possible for them to give up image making, scroll painting and shows for which the Hindus provided their main market. So the Patuas' position was an ambiguous one forcing them to conceal their acquired Islamised ways from the Hindus.

With the decline of Muslim rule and the rise of British power in India, the Patuas swung back towards Hinduism. Muslim patronage was now worth little. In spite of the adoption of Islamic themes the popularity of scrolls was never wide even among the common Muslims because of the general Islamic objection to any picture. Socially, the Patuas were relegated to a very low position among the Muslims. Risley writes on the converted Muslims in Bengal: "In some places a third class called *Arzal* or 'lowest of all' is added. It consists of the very lowest castes, such as the *Halalkhor*, *Lalbegi*, *Abdal* and *Bediya*, with whom no other Mohammadan would associate, and who are forbidden to enter the mosque or to use the public burial ground."<sup>1</sup> This description applied to the social position of the Patuas among the Muslims.

Moreover, in the changed situation of the early period of British rule in India, the Patuas felt that the Muslims were not very much liked by the new rulers whereas the Hindus, favoured by British, were gaining in power, politically and economically. So the Patuas, haunted by a feeling of insecurity, turned towards the Hindus. But they could not give up the Islamic traits of culture they had acquired in their everyday life, such as circumcision, performance of *namaj*, observance of Muslim religious festivals, solemnisation of marriage by a Muslim *Kaji*, burial of dead body in an Islamic way, etc. So the Patuas'

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1 India, Government ; Census Report of Bengal, 1901, Vol. I, p. 439.

position was now more anomalous and much more a degraded among the Hindus than before.

With the establishment of British rule a process of change practically in all departments of life set in. Under the impact of western influence and urbanization the old cultural values and tastes were being transformed or replaced. Scroll painting and scroll shows lost their popularity. Less and less people were interested in the kind of religious themes which the scrolls generally dealt with. The Patuas therefore had to look for other occupations and took to jobs like mason's work, carding, soldering etc. Thus the special economic link with the Hindus was severed or weakened and in course of time the Patuas came to be known as neither Hindu nor Muslim—a position that continued for years.

But a small community cut off from their traditional moorings and living in between two great and powerful communities cannot maintain a separate nondescript existence for long. This became particularly difficult when the country was in the throes of national movement or when fierce riots broke out between Hindus and Muslims. At such times the question of identification with the one or the other of the two big communities becomes crucial. At the height of the National Movement, some Hindu social reform organisations like the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Bharat Sevasram Sangha intensified their efforts to reinforce the Hindu revivalist movement including a move for taking apostates back into the Hindu fold on an egalitarian basis after some purificatory rites called 'suddhi'. This movement touched the Patuas also. Mohan Chitrakar (67) of Ahmedpur told me: "In my childhood there was a Hindu revival movement in Bengal. Dr. S.K. Roy was a zealous organiser of this movement in Katwa. He persuaded many Patuas to re-embrace Hinduism. Though I was circumcised in my childhood and my marriage was solemnised at the age of 17 by a Muslim Kaji, I decided to become Hindu with many other Patuas. The re-conversion ceremony was organised at the Kali temple in Katwa on the 9th Magh, 1333 B. S. (February 1926). Myself and 40 other Patuas were initiated into Hinduism by Swami Satyananda. The movement



grew and we used to visit Patua houses to persuade the Patuas to be initiated into Hinduism and to observe Hindu rites and rituals. Many songs were composed at the time and I still remember one song :

“Karahā ananda, bhaja Satyananda  
 Nirānānada chite rahio na.  
 Kudin giachhe, sudin eshechhe  
 Ghuchechhe maner bedana.  
 Gateta kalir mahatye pataki  
 Tarate thakbe na.  
 Brahma kopanal haiya probal  
 Ghatechhilo je birambana  
 Sei Brahma asi karuna prakashi  
 Dosharashi karilen marjana.  
 Sagar bangsha jeman bahudin pare  
 Temni udhdharilen jati chitrakare  
 Bhagirath saha S.K. daktare patite  
 Tarila dakhona.  
 Natasire Satish kahila karajore  
 Taba bhakti kichhu janina  
 Parama Brahma tumi Satyananda Swami  
 Kangal bale ghrina korona.

#### FREE TRANSLATION OF THE SONG

O rejoice in the worship of Satyananda !  
 Banish all despondency from your heart.  
 The bad days are over ;  
 Greet the happy time that is here.  
 The fallen of the Kali yug need fear no more ;  
 Brahma's anger that block their salvation is  
 appeased.  
 Through His grace all transgressions are forgiven.  
 Like the clan of Sagar redeemed by Bhagirath  
 after ages of suffering,  
 Behold the Chitrakar community redeemed  
 By Satyananda in the company of  
 Doktor S.K. Roy  
 Satish, with his head bowed and hands clasped  
 in prayer, pleads :  
 “O my Lord Satyananda, you are Brahma,  
 I know no rules of worship ;  
 Let not your grace be denied to this  
 humble beggar.”

“My father did not know anything about this as I was away from my native village at that time. When he came to know of it he was not annoyed. On the contrary he was pleased. But my parents did not change their religion and expressed their desire to be buried after their death and wished jainamaj to be observed at the time of burial.”

A similar incident of re-conversion was narrated by Dulal Chitrakar, who was initiated by Dinabandhu Goswami at Nabadwip along with 30 or 35 other Patuas in the year 1927. After the initiation they received each a picture of Lord Krishna and a copy of the holy Gita. The guru accepted water from them and drank it.

Ananta Malakar (Chitrakar) of Kirnahar said that his father and a group of 30 or 40 Chitrakars were re-converted in 1926.

After the Civil Disobedience movement (1930-31) there was a feeling of fatigue throughout the country and a kind of lull in every sphere<sup>1</sup>. When there was no turmoil in the political life of the country, the Patua came back to their intermediary position of being neither Hindun or Muslim.

In 1946, fierce Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Calcutta and spread like a forest fire in the whole of Bengal, Bihar, the Punjab and the North-Western Frontier Province (now in Pakistan). The question of choosing sides was never so crucial as now in the life of the Patua community. That the days of the British Raj are numbered was quite evident and the partition of India on communal basis was imminent. Everybody apprehended that there would be a Hindu Raj in India and a Muslim Raj in Pakistan. In this situation the Patuas made another swing towards Hinduism this time in a more organised way. Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti, the Patua Association, organised a movement towards Hinduisation (Appendix as III, IV, V and VI). Gurudas Chitrakar, the famous pyrotechnist and a wealthy and important Patua leader in Calcutta, issued leaflets and organised meetings in different districts of Bengal (Appendix II). The Patuas readily responded to the call of the Bharat Sevashram

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1 Majumder, Ramesh and Bose, Nirmal Kumar ; Congress : Bharat Kosh Vol. II, p. 136, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta.

Sangha (Appendix) which came forward and organised purification yjnas for re-entry of the Patuas into the Hindu social order with an honourable status.

Though secularism was part of the declared policy of the Congress, the ruling party in India, the fact was that the country was actually divided on a communal basis and nobody could be sure how far secularism would be observed in practice. In such a situation a small and weak community like the Patuas naturally thought it safer to be with the Hindus—the majority community in India and so the advent of Independence rather strengthened the movement of Hinduisation. Purification rites were organised and leaflets were issued by the Bangiya Chitrar Kar Unnayan Samiti (Appendix) in which the Patuas were urged to get themselves enumerated as caste Hindus in the 1951 census and faithfully to follow the Hindu way of life, severing all connections with the Islam.

As the years rolled on after Independence, the suspicions about the sincerity of the Indian rulers' profession of secularism were gradually allayed and the sense of security was regained by the minorities. After the General Elections, in 1952 and 1957, which were conducted on the basis of adult franchise, the minorities' confidence in the secular and democratic outlook of the Government was enhanced. The Patuas saw that the Muslims were enjoying all democratic rights and other facilities in matters like grants of stipends, appointments in service, etc., equally with the Hindus. At the same time they found that in spite of all their strenuous and zealous efforts to re-enter the Hindu fold their position was still one of out castes. The caste prejudices of the high-caste Hindus were still strong and formidable. How ingrained and powerful these prejudices were could be seen from the fact that some of the high-caste Hindus who had dined publicly with Patuas after a purification ceremony vomited out what they had eaten at the community feast before entering their own houses. The Hindus in general remained indifferent towards the Patuas. They looked down upon the Patuas as before. The Hindus no longer bought idols from the Patuas. The village people practically lost interest in scrolls. In reality the Patuas were banished socially and economically

from the Hindu community. The last Hinduisation movement practically failed in Birbhum when Brahmin priests refused to serve the Patuas<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, the Muslims were now demonstrably sympathetic towards the Patuas. Their previous attitude of contempt towards the low-caste converts was changed. They now allowed the Patuas equal rights in the mosque and common burial ground. Muslim neighbours also rendered all possible help to the Patuas at the time of disposal of the dead as I have witnessed on many occasions.

All the above factors resulted in a fresh movement of the Patuas towards Islamisation recently in Birbhum as well as in the rest of West Bengal. Nevertheless, the Patuas are not free from a psychological conflict. In every day life the Muslims do not mix with them. Nazmul Karim<sup>2</sup>, Reuben Levy<sup>3</sup>, Grunnebaum<sup>4</sup>, and Cunningham<sup>5</sup> have shown that in spite of Islam's egalitarian message there are hierarchical divisions among the Muslims. The Muslim community in Birbhum is also not free from such hierarchical divisions and they place the Patuas in the lowest amongst all the division. Socially the Muslims look down upon them. But the enthusiastic young Patuas are very much optimistic. They are hopeful that they will be integrated into the Muslim community as soon as they are able to erase the Hindu traits of culture from their lives. But the majority of the Islamised Patuas suffer from a feeling of estrangement from the Muslim community as well as from the Hindus. On the other hand the Hinduised Patuas also are not happy with their present status in the Hindu community. Sometimes the services of Brahmin priests are not readily available to them. The Hindus'

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1. Detailed description has been given in the chapter on Political Organisation.
  2. Karim Nazmul, A. K. : *Changing Society in India and Pakistan*, Pub. Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1956.
  3. *Ibid*, pp. 115-116.
  4. Grunnebaum, Gustave E. Von. : *Medieval Islam*, Pub. The University Press, Chicago, 1946, p. 199.
  5. Cunningham, J. D. : *A History of the Shikhs*, Pub. Sanyal and Co. Calcutta, 1903, p. 31.

attitude towards the Patuas is one of unconcern and indifference. Virtually the Hinduised Patuas are estranged from the Hindus as well as from the Islamised Patuas. This estrangement has resulted in a psychological complex. I observed a mood of restlessness among the Patuas during my field work. It seemed to stem from confusion or doubt on the question of choosing sides to be with the Hindus or the Muslims.

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## CONCLUSION

The conclusion derived from the field data and textual material analysed in the earlier chapters may now be summed up.

The Patuas of Birbhum originally belonged to a nomadic or semi-nomadic tribe. They left their original homeland, somewhere in Central India, migrated in various directions in search of food. One branch came to Bengal in the remote past.

They came in contact with the Hindus, gradually acculturised through a process of induction<sup>1</sup> and adopted some Hinduised occupations such as scroll painting, exhibition of scrolls, singing songs on Hindu myths and idol making in addition to their original occupations which included snake charming and abracadabra. The evidence about the economic life of the Patuas shows that scroll painting was never their sole occupation ; their occupations always have been multifarious. They assumed the name Chitrakar Patua in a much later period and adopted scroll painting as their caste calling to keep conformity with caste-occupation pattern of the Hindu society. Scroll painting is an age-old cultural trait which probably originated in, and diffused from, Egypt<sup>2</sup>, in the long long past. Scroll painting was neither innovated by the Patuas nor was it their original occupation. It was a later adoption from the Hindus.

As evident from a study of their habitations, the Patuas lived near the Hindus for a long time and acculturised to a great extent, occupying a very low position in relation to the Hindus. With the passage of time they were completely cut off from their original tribal moorings. At the same time they

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1 Bose, Nirmal Kumar : Hindu Methods of Tribal Absorption, paper presented in 1941 at the annual meeting of the Indian Science Congress held at Banaras.

2 Roy, Sudhansu Kumar : Prehistoric India and Ancient Egypt, Cambridge Book and Stationery Stores, p. 1, 1956.

were not completely assimilated with the Hindu community in spite of their long association and acculturation with the Hindus. Acculturation, as Kroeber points out in his article "Acculturation with and without Dominance and Assimilation", does not always continue into assimilation. The traditional contemptuous attitude of the higher castes to the lower castes and the itinerant nature of the Patuas' life and occupations were probably the major factors that have 'intervened to counter-balance the assimilation' of the Patuas to the Hindu community. The Patuas position, therefore, became that of a rootless endogamous group.

It has been shown in the chapter on socio-cultural movement that the Patuas swung towards Islam in order to escape repression and ostracisation by the high caste Hindus which reached its climax during the reign of the Sen dynasty in Bengal in the twelfth century A. D. This movement towards Islamisation was strengthened by pragmatic considerations arising from the fact that the Muslims in India as well as in Bengal were then gaining in ascendancy and power. The Muslim rulers showed favour to converts. Scrolls were a good medium of mass communication and the Muslim rulers encouraged the Patuas propagate Islam among the masses through scrolls. Evidence of this is provided by the scrolls known as "Gazir pat", describing the thaumaturgics of Muslim pirs.

Coming into close contact with the Muslims, the Patuas acquired many traits of the Islamic way of life. When moving through Muslim villages they began to take food from Muslim houses. Some came to settle and live near Muslim villages. Like in their contact with the Hindus here also the process of acculturation did not result in assimilation with the Muslim community. The fact that the Patuas could not give up their market among the Hindus which they had built up through so many years thwarted the process of their assimilation to the Muslim community. In the Hindu villages they had to maintain their Hinduised names and Hindu ways of living. They took food from the Hindu houses during their journeys from

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1 Kroeber, A. L.: Anthropology. New Edition, Revised. Oxford and I. B. H. Publishing Co. Calcutta, 1967, pp. 429-432,

village to village. In order to maintain their relations with both the Hindu and the Muslim communities they adopted certain clandestine ways such as keeping two names—one Hinduised and the other Muslim. They also developed a secret paratactic language.

With the fall of the Muslim rule after the battle of Plassy the social stratification in rural Bengal began to change. The most significant feature of this change was the growth of a large stratum of landed middle class—mostly Hindu. The Hindus gradually became economically and politically the dominant and powerful community. Hence the Patuas now found it profitable to swing towards the Hindus from the economic and political points of view. Cunningham<sup>1</sup> pointed out that the low caste converts in India occupied a low position in the Muslim community in spite of the egalitarian preaching in the Koran. Risley<sup>2</sup> wrote that mosque entry was prohibited for some very low castes—Lalbegi, Abdal, Bediya and some others. These observations by Cunningham and Risley are applicable to the Patuas who along with the Bediyas, a sub-group of Patuas, were not allowed to enter mosques and who occupied a very low position if at all admitted in the Muslim community. As mentioned earlier the Patuas of Birbhum are still in low position.

Though the Patuas swung towards Hinduism they could not give up certain Islamic traits such as burial of dead body, jainamaj, circumcision, presence of kaji at the time of marriage, etc. They developed some sort of eclecticism, drawing from both Hinduism and Islam. As a result of this the Patuas virtually remained as an intermediary group between Hindu and Muslim.

From this intermediary position the Patuas swung towards Hinduism during the peak period of the National Movement and then back again, into the intermediary state. The next swing towards Hinduism began with the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1946 and was maintained for some years following the advent of Independence. The Patuas were obviously in search of economic and political security. They sought financial and

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1 Cunningham, J. D. : A History of the Shikhs, Pub. Sanyal & Co., Calcutta, 1903, p. 31.

2 Risley, H. H. : People of India.



other help from the Government of West Bengal. At this time the Hinduised political and semi-political organisations also came forward to uplift the social position of the Patuas. The Patuas were asked to observe the Hindu ways of living (Appendix) and to enroll themselves as Caste Hindus in the 1951 census. There were declarations by some Hindu pandits and leaders that Patuas were Hindus and in many villages the caste Hindus dined publicly with the Patuas after purification rites. But this ardour and zeal declined after the General Election in 1952. I found the Patuas despondent in the years of 1954-55. In the year 1958 the signs of a new swing towards Islamisation became visible. There was a favourable change in the attitude of the Patuas' Muslim neighbour regarding mosque entry and the use of common burial ground. The present study shows that in Birbhum district 95·89% Patuas enrolled themselves as Muslims and 4·11% as Hindus. The two main reasons behind the latest swing towards Islam were : (1) minority communities in India had regained their sense of security and (2) scroll-painting and idol-making—the two activities which formed the basis of the Patuas' economic tie with the Hindu community were becoming uneconomic as occupations. The pro-Islam tendency of the Patuas was reinforced by the indifferent attitude of the Hindus on the one hand and the active encouragement given by the Muslims on the other. It has been shown in the chapter on demographic study that Patua households in any one village are very few ; in many cases there are only one or two families. Under such circumstances, they have very much to depend on the help from their neighbouring communities. The social interaction between the Patuas and the Hindus or the Muslims is visibly poor, the more so in the former case. In rural areas, Hindus do not touch the dead bodies of other castes and more particularly of other communities. So when a death occurs in a Patua family, the Hindus do not come forward to be of any assistance whereas the Muslims, who shrink from any social intercourse with the Patuas, come forward and render help at the time of disposing a Patua dead body. The Patuas, naturally grateful for this act of sympathy, regard it as a social recognition. The Patuas consider the job of mason and hodman as Musalmani Kaj, that is, as a traditionally Muslim occupation.

In fact the mason's work has been almost monopolised by Muslims in the district of Birbhum as well as in West Bengal for a long time past. The graph of the dynamics of occupation for three generations shows an upward tendency for this profession among the Patuas of Birbhum. The cherished desire of a Patua guardian is that his or her ward should become either a school teacher or a mason. In the village Pachchiara I found that the highest ambition admitted to by a Patua was to become an Imam or some functionary for service in the mosque. The desire obviously was for recognition as full Muslims and attainment of social prestige in the Muslim community. This movement towards Islamisation was found to be strong during recent years particularly among the young Patuas.

In spite of their zealous movement towards Islamisation and their eagerness to be absorbed in the Muslim community, the Patuas are not treated socially at par by the Muslims. It has been noted earlier that the Muslims are not willing to establish any marital relationship with the Patuas and although a Kaji and Egin perform certain rites in a Patua house, they never take cooked food from the Patuas. The detailed study of cultural life reveals that the Patuas still carry relics of tribal, Hinduised and Islamised traits of culture all mixed together. Despite Islamisation large sections of the Patua community, particularly the older generation, are still nostalgic of their old traditions. As a result, the entire community is suffering psychologically from a crisis of identity and from restlessness. This was evident from their overt expressions and their unconcealed unhappiness, even exasperation with at their present cultural position. Robert E. Park has described the plight of the "Marginal man" whom "fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures..., his mind is the crucible in which two different and refractory cultures may be said to melt and either wholly or in part, fuse<sup>1</sup>." A comparison also lies with the position of the hero in George Santayana's book "The Last Puritan—A Memior in

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1 Stonequist, E. : Introduction to the book "The Marginal Man", Pub. Charles Scribner's Sons, U.S.A., 1937.

the form of a Novel", who was born in Spain but fate ordained that he should live most of his life in America and England and who always more or less feels as an alien, always conscious of his different traditions and of intimate and indissoluble connections with another.<sup>1</sup>

Similar is the psychological condition of the Patua community as a whole who always have a feeling of estrangement even when they make a bid for attachment to one or the other of two big groups, that is, the Hindus or the Muslims. The Patuas, being an unsophisticated and poor community, always suffer from a sense of insecurity along with the feeling of alienation. This psychological condition may be a potential basis for one or more swings in the future. This phenomenon of two-and-fro movement of a small and weak group may possibly be termed '*cultural oscillation*'. Although the term '*cultural oscillation*' is not in vogue in the fields of sociology and social anthropology, the use of the word oscillation is not altogether new. David Hume (1956)<sup>2</sup> used the word oscillation (between polytheistic and monotheistic views) in his book '*The Natural History of Religion*'. Gellner wrote an essay on the '*Pendulum swing theory of Islam*' in 1968<sup>3</sup>. Levi Strauss showed '*oscillation of constant amplitude*' in the structural analysis of the Asdiwal myth of the Tsimshian tribe of South Alaska.<sup>4</sup>

It has been sought to show in this dissertation that the Patuas' oscillation is a function of security in the broader structure of Indian society in which effective relationships are tight and closed and group economics, status and social prestige count for much in the in-group social acceptance to the disadvantage of those on the fringes with the result that the latter's sense of insecurity is further enhanced in psychological terms, when they are cut off from their traditional moorings.

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1 Park, E.R. : *Culture Conflict and the Marginal Man—Theories of Society*, Vol. II, p. 945, edited by Parsons, Talcott *et. al* ; Free Press of Glencoe, 2nd Print, 1962.

2 Robertson, Roland : *Sociology of Religion*, Pub. by Penguin Books Ltd., England, 1969, p. 127.

3 Ibid.

4 Levi Strauss, C : *La Geste d' Asdiwal* ; Translated by Nicholas Mann, Pub. Tavistock Publications Ltd., London, 3rd impression, 1969, P.20.

Thus a hypothesis on cultural oscillation may be derived from the study of the Patuas as follows :

*If a small rootless cultural group or community is by circumstances/historic reasons forced to live in between two group oscillates, probably in search of both economic and political security and/or social prestige, till the group withers away, that is, it is absorbed into one of the two dominant groups or through a process of disintegration, into both, and the dynamics of such group behaviour may possibly be termed cultural oscillation.*

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## A NOTE ON PATUA LANGUAGE

“I heard from my grandfather that we had a language different from Bengali. But at present we do not know any language other than Bengali.” This was what Rakhu Patua of Bagdola told me. Similar statements were made by a few other Patuas in the district of Birbhum. This and the information from Murshidabad and from the Mal Patuas of Purulia suggest that the Patuas might have had a language of their own before they adopted Bengali.

Though at present the Patuas of Birbhum speak Bengali, I observed during the field work that their speech does not always follow the local variations in accent in the different regions of Birbhum. For example, the Hindus and the Muslims in the Nalhati area, adjacent to Murshidabad district, have a longish tone in ending each word and sometimes after a syllable but strikingly enough, these variations are not so pronounced in the speech of the Patuas of the same localities. This difference in intonation and accent makes one speculate that the Patuas possibly are immigrants in the district of Birbhum. In the matter of language, as in some other matters, the Patuas have a tendency towards secretiveness. They have a code language which they use among themselves before outsiders, when they want to keep something secret from the latter. The code language is used particularly when the Patuas need consultations among themselves, as, for instance, when they are giving a magic show or are engaged in some abracadabra in their dealings with outsiders, the Patuas take recourse to a good deal of simulation. For instance they exhibit Hindu traits and conceal Muslim traits when dealing with the Hindus and to the opposite when dealing with the Muslims. I heard on many occasions the same Patua using the word ‘jal’ in a Hindu house and the word ‘pani’ in a Muslim house, for water. In a Hindu house they will take the meat of a goat killed in a non-Muslim way and deny that they take beef. But in a Muslim house they will take beef and deny that they ever take meat of animals killed in non-Muslim way. They try to keep the Hindus in the dark about their

Islamised ways and the Muslims in the dark about their Hinduised ways. The Patuas would not divulge anything to an outsider about their code language. After long efforts I could persuade one or two people to tell me a few words and sentences and their meanings. They are given below :

### WORDS

Bengali	English synonym	Patua code
Maachch	Fish	Chchimu
Manush	Man	Noka
Dudh	Milk	Fitkiri
Bhat	Rice	Batun
Jubati	Maiden	Gelen
Jal	Water	Liruni
Mansa	Meat	Kuti
Go Mansa	Beef	Khnaaju
Muri	Puffed rice	Lulu
Choto chchele meye	Child	Lalo
Taka-Paisa	Money	Chubi
Bhala	Good	Satim
Thunko	Brittle	Talang
Takachche	Noticing	Tigheche
Dekchche	Looking	Chamsa
Churi	Pilfering	Khnuichi
Paliye chal	Escape	Chulo
Taratari chal	Walk fast	Shatie chal
Palabo	Will escape	Chulabo
Go chikitsar jantra	Appliances of cow leeching	Dagdari

### SENTENCES

(Ami) Bhat Khabo	I shall eat rice	Batun Dutba
(Ami) Jal Khabo	I shall drink water	Liruni Dutba
Meye take Dekh	Look at the girl	Gelenke tig
(Ami) Okey		
Merechchi	I have beaten him	Ami okey thukai dichchi

From the Patua sentences in the above list it will be seen paratactic though that their structural pattern is somewhat similar to that of Bengali sentences. However, in view of the scantiness of the data, no hypothesis regarding this code language of the Patuas can be hazarded.

**Table—1**  
**Occupation Dynamics over Three Generations**

(a) <i>Caste Occupation</i>	<i>Present generation</i> ( <i>Head of the family</i> )		<i>Father's occupation</i>		<i>Grand Father's occupation</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Idol making	28	5.92	41	9.81	46	11.19
Scroll painting	67	14.17	95	22.73	119	28.96
Snake charming	19	4.03	47	11.24	64	15.58
Abracadabra	—	—	3	0.72	—	—
Mat Making	14	2.96	1	0.24	—	—
Peddling or Huckstering	49	10.36	29	6.94	1	0.24
Exorcist	2	0.42	—	—	22	5.35
Singing songs on the goddess					1	0.24
Durga	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Selling of earthen horse for offerings to deity	2	0.42	—	—	—	—
Bamboo work	1	0.21	1	0.24	—	—
Coloured decoration on earthen pottery and wooden seat in Hindu marriage	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Pith (Shola) work	2	0.42	—	—	—	—
Musical narration of Kapila, the divine cow	2	0.42	3	0.72	1	0.24
Tinsel ornaments for the decoration of a deity	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Colouring of wall	1	0.21	4	0.96	2	0.49
Cowleech	54	11.42	—	—	—	—
<i>Total :</i>	244	51.59	64	15.31	42	10.22
			288	68.91	298	72.51

**Table—2**  
**Occupation Dynamics over Three Generations**

(b) <i>Rural Occupation</i>	<i>Present Generation</i> ( <i>Head of the family</i> )		<i>Father's Occupation</i>		<i>Grand Father's Occupation</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Carpentry	—	—	—	—	1	0.24
Own cultivation	43	9.09	33	7.89	35	8.52
Share cropper	29	6.14	11	2.63	7	1.71
Agricultural labourer	5	1.06	3	0.72	2	0.49
Hut making or repairing	2	0.42	—	—	1	0.24
Actor in open air Opera	2	0.42	—	—	—	—
Garland making	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Contract labourer	2	0.42	3	0.72	1	0.24
Basket making	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Weaving	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Jari Song	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Day labourer	40	8.46	6	1.43	1	0.24
Tajia making	—	—	—	—	1	0.24
Servant in a rural mosque	—	—	1	0.24	1	0.24
Carding	28	5.92	28	6.70	26	6.33
<i>Total :</i>	155	32.77	85	20.33	76	18.49



**Table—3**  
**Occupation Dynamics over Three Generations**

(c) <i>Modern occupation</i>	<i>Present generation</i> ( <i>Head of the family</i> )		<i>Father's occupation</i>		<i>Grand Father's Occupation</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Deed writer	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Brokery	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Vendor	1	0.21	1	0.24	1	0.24
Tailor	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Teaching	4	0.85	—	—	1	0.24
Dafadar	—	—	1	0.24	—	—
Darwan	—	—	—	—	1	0.24
Soldering	8	1.69	8	1.91	1	0.24
Radio Mechanic	1	0.21	—	—	—	—
Tube-well Mechanic	2	0.42	1	0.24	—	—
Bidi making	2	0.42	1	0.24	—	—
Mason	44	9.31	19	4.54	7	1.71
<i>Total :</i>	65	13.74	31	7.41	11	2.67
Sub total (b+c)	220	46.51	116	27.74	87	21.16
Not known Father's & Grand						
Father's occupation	—	—	11	2.63	23	5.60
Others	9	1.90	3	0.72	3	0.73
*Grand total	473	100.00	418	100.00	411	100.00

\* *N. B.* Comparative study has been made on the occupations pursued by the heads of 248 households. The reason for showing 473 persons in the grand total in the present generation, 418 in the father's and 411 in the grand father's generation is that one person is engaged in more than one occupation at a time. So one person entered in the Table more than once against two or three occupations, and thus increased the figure in grand total.

**Table—4**

**Sexwise distribution of occupation of the heads of the households and other members of the Patua families of present generation in Birbhum**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Scroll exhibitor and Idol making	8	(2.53)	—	—	8	(1.67)
Share cropper	23	(7.24)	1	(0.60)	24	(5.00)
Peddling	29	(9.14)	93	(57.41)	122	(25.42)
Mason and Idol making	5	(1.58)	—	—	5	(1.04)
Scroll painting	22	(6.94)	1	(0.62)	23	(4.79)
Teacher	5	(1.58)	—	—	5	(1.04)
Agricultural labourer and Scroll exhibitor	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Cow-leeching	25	(7.87)	—	—	25	(5.20)
Snake charming and cow-leeching	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Owner cultivator	19	(5.98)	—	—	19	(3.95)
Begging	5	(1.58)	4	(2.45)	9	(1.87)
Mason	27	(8.50)	—	—	27	(5.63)
Cowherd	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Day labourer	30	(9.43)	—	—	30	(6.25)
Mat making	1	(0.31)	55	(33.95)	56	(11.66)
Mason and cow-leeching	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Doll making ( out of linen )	—	—	1	(0.62)	1	(0.21)

	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
6	Decoration ( on piri & ghat )	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Cow-leeching and owner cultivation	3	(0.94)	—	—	3	(0.62)
	Idol making	12	(3.78)	—	—	12	(2.50)
	Vegetable vendor	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Singer of devotional songs	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Soldering, Sign-board painting	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Colouring on wall & decoration on earthen pot	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Day labourer and agricultural labourer	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Cow-leeching and selling of earthen horses for votive offerings	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Share croper and snake charming	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Owner cultivator & Idol making	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Carding and deed writer	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Mason and Scroll exhibitor	5	(1.58)	—	—	5	(1.04)
	Carding and Scroll exhibitor	3	(0.94)	—	—	3	(0.62)
	Basketry	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
	Service	2	(0.63)	—	—	2	(0.42)
	Cow-leeching and Scroll exhibitor	2	(0.63)	—	—	2	(0.42)
	Agricultural labourer	3	(0.94)	1	(0.60)	4	(0.83)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Contract labourer & Day labourer	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Radio mechanic	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Contract labourer	10	(3.15)	—	—	10	(2.08)
Soldering	10	(3.15)	—	—	10	(2.08)
Biri making	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Pith work and Carding	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Idol making and sign-board making	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Snake charming	5	(1.58)	—	—	5	(1.04)
Clay modelling	—	—	1	(0.62)	1	(0.21)
Mason and day labourer	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Singer of Kapila Mangal	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Day labourer and owner cultivator	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Servant	3	(0.94)	—	—	3	(0.62)
Tube-well Making	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Carding	21	(6.62)	—	—	21	(4.37)
Scroll exhibitor and Day labourer	3	(0.94)	—	—	3	(0.62)
Butcher	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Actor in 'Jatra Party'	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Share cropper and cow-leeching	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Abracadabra	—	—	3	(1.85)	3	(6.62)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Share cropper and Mat making	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Cow-leeching and Carding	4	(1.27)	—	—	4	(0.83)
Mat making and Peddling	—	—	1	(0.62)	1	(0.21)
Broker	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Weaver	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Shepherd	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Tailor	1	(0.31)	—	—	1	(0.21)
Garland maker	—	—	1	(0.62)	1	(0.21)
<b>TOTAL :</b>	318	(100.00)	162	(100.00)	480	(100.00)
<b>Intensity :</b>	(66.25)		(33.75)		(100.00)	

## APPENDIX—1

### With special honour : an appeal

This is to notify to our Chitrakar community that we have decided to hold a religious conference at the village of Morah under the Haripal Police Station of Serampore Sub-division in the district of Hooghly. The dates for the said conference have been fixed as the 17th, 18th and 19th Chaitra of next 1356 (April, 1949). The topics to be discussed in the conference along with its agenda are given below :

### AGENDA

The first day—To fix up the social organisation, rules and future plans of the Chitrakar community.

The Second day—To be initiated into the religion of the Community and a religious offering.

The Third day—Discussions about the rules and regulations regarding the initiated and songs in praise to their glory.

We appeal to the gentlemen belonging to the Chitrakar community—wheresoever they may be—to join the conference on the above-mentioned dates. We shall be obliged if money—as much as one can afford—is sent for the work of the conference.

We are making this known through the villages named below and request the presence and help of the villagers.

1. Puinam, 2. Dhaniakhali, 3. Tribeni, 4. Serampore, 5. Belur, 6. Kalighat, 7. Calcutta, 8. Gobardanga, 9. Bongram, 10. Fatchpur, 11. Bhangar, 12. Bibirhat, 13. Sarisharhat, 14. Barhsiddhi, 15. Akarah, 16. Akappur, 17. Chaitanyapur, 18. Muradipur, 19. Thekchak, 20. Narahjol, 21. Chetodaspur, 22. Tokapur, 23. Sonatikri, 24. Kurchi, 25. Chandipur, 26. Prasasta, 27. Daksindihi, 28. Singur, 29. Ambika Kalna, 30. Abidpur,

31. Kamalberah, 32. Gobindarampur, 33. Kakdwip,  
34. Dighirghat, 35. Joynagar, 36. Majilpur, 37. Malancha.

Yours,

1. Sri Karihlal Chitrakar
2. „ Santosh Kumar Chitrakar
3. „ Hirulal Chitrakar
4. „ Pulin Bihari Chitrakar
5. „ Jatindranath Chitrakar
6. „ Mihilal Chitrakar
7. „ Panchulal Chitrakar
8. „ Panchkari Chitrakar
9. „ Nagendranath Chitrakar

Address : Morah,  
P. O. Dwarhatta  
Dist. Hooghly

Address : Morah,  
P.O. Dwarhatta  
Dist. Hooghly

Venue of the conference—The compound of the Kabikan-  
kan Free School, Village : Morah, P. O. Dwarhatta, Dist.  
Hooghly.

N. B. The nearest railway stations :

(1) On the E. I. Railways Loknath or Bahirkhand  
Station of the Tarakeswar line.

(2) On the Martin Raliways you will have to get down  
at Antpur or Hawakhana or Piasarah station of the Champa-  
danga line.

The end.

Secretary : Sri Gurudas Chitrakar  
(26, Sukia Street, Calcutta)

## APPENDIX—2

*Om* (the sacred syllable)—a salutation of Visvakarma (the god of the artisans).

We, the Chitrakar community, are a part of the Hindu society, from one of the Hind castes. In the Hindu society there are different classes of people with different pursuits : The Brahmins perform religious rites and discuss the Sastras (The books of religion), the potter's trade is to make jugs and pots ; the goldsmith's business is to make ornaments. In this order, the Chitrakar's trade is to make images of gods to be worshipped and to pursue various other arts, including painting. There is a myth about the origin of the Chitrakar community in the tenth section of Brahmakhanda of the 'Brahmavaibarta Purana'. The god Visvakarma, in the guise of a Brahmin, begot the first ancestor of the Chitrakar's upon the heavenly nymph Ghritachi who was then disguised as a milkmaid. The Purana has done great honour to us by mentioning us as the descendants of Visvakarma in the guise of the Brahmin. The great advance made by the Hindus in painting and other fine arts during the period of time exceeding the last two thousand years is due to the Chitrakar community. The late great poet of Bengal, Satyendranath Dutta sang in praise of us. The Chitrakars, some skilled artists from our community, with their playful brush, have painted the immortal pictures of Ajanta. In the old Sanskrit literatures as in Bana Bhatta and 'The Mudrarakshasa' we have allusions to us, the Chitrakars. The Chitrakar have been rendering great help in sustaining and spreading religious feelings in the people belonging to the Hindu society. It is our job to paint, to make sketches, to decorate, to attract the Hindu society towards religion, to make beautiful and decorative all the festivities of life. Even so, the Chitrakars have been segregated from the Hindus for some unspecified reason. According to 'The Brahmavaibarta Purana' the Chitrkars disregarded the specific instructions of Brahmins on painting. As a result the Brahmins got angry and cursed them. So they were outcasted and lost the privilege of employing Brahmins as priests at their religious rites.



In the early days of the Muslim rule when the influence of the orthodox Hindu religion was on the decline, the Chitrakar community kept the religion alive by displaying the paintings about the glory of the goddess Manasa, about the vow of Sabitri, about Rama's banishment etc., by singing and roaming from door to door, in the guise of holy hermits. You will get sure proof of this in the book of Patua songs by Babu Gurusadaya Dutta.

As a result of the new awakening in the Hindu society, there has come a stir in the Chitrakars too. In memory of the glorious achievements of our forefathers, we, the Chitrakar community, are resolved to take our proper place in the Hindu society. We want to undergo the rite of 'purification' and to perform our religious rites and funeral ceremonies with the help of Brahmin priests. We place our earnest appeal to the benevolent Hindus.

On the last Agrahayana 1, the rites of 'purification' have been performed by the Hindu Mahasava at Kalighat. On the 22nd Agrahayana there have been some such rites by the Bharat Sevasram in the village of Baria near Diamond Harbour. On the 10th Agrahayana there were held the rites of 'purification' at the village of Akubpur in the district of Midnapore by the help of the Bharat Sevasram, the Hindu Mahasava, the Arya-samaj and the local Hindus. On the 22nd Agrahayana rites were performed in the village of Singur with the help of the Hindus. People in some more villages are eager for 'purification'. The Hindus, for once, should look into the matter, for many are not 'purified' yet. These people deceive by giving false accounts of their religion, caste and names, enter the holy temples of the Hindus, rendering them unclean, and make images of gods and goddesses. So, if the Hindu gentlemen graciously look into the matter, these people cannot resort to this sacrilegious conduct.

Date  
The 5th Poush  
1353 (20th December, 1946)

Yours obediently,  
Rajani Kanta Chitrakar  
Akubpur, P. O. Sutahat,  
Dist. Midnapore.

## APPENDIX—3

### Rules of good conduct

It is announced with pleasure that the demand of the Chitrakars to be treated as caste Hindus during the coming census operations has been acceded to by the West Bengal Government. But a demand on paper to be counted as caste Hindus is not enough. The Chitrakars must conduct themselves as such. Appropriate directions for their guidance in this matter are given below in the verse form. These must be learnt by heart by all of them, including the children of their families, and the rules followed.

Observance of rules, humility, learning, steadfastness, visits to sacred places, devotion, a blameless way of life, discipline and charity—these nine qualities are the insignia of a caste claiming to be high.

Wake up and rejoice, ye, my brothers, the Chitrakars ! The auspicious day has come. So shed all fear. Look, the darkness of the night has melted away and a bright day has dawned. Advance on the path of truth with a hero's mien. Install yourself without loss of time, in the house that is yours. Let all grievances, sorrows, indecisions and sense of guilt come to an end. Have you not heard the saying in the Shastras,—the truth of all truths,—that he alone is high of caste who follows the Shastric rules of good conduct ? Who ever has violated the rules and trodden the path of inequity and yet been held in high esteem ? It is one of the rules of providence that he, who is truthful, continent, selfless and full of devotion, is the one adored by all. That is why I ask you to obey the rules of good conduct, if you must take your place among castes that are high. Wake up before sunrise, attend to nature's call and bathe yourself. Then chant, for as long a time as you can, the mantras prescribed by your religious preceptor. Install the image of a deity in the house. Plant a 'Tulsi' (Basil) plant in the yard. Blow the conch-shell and burn incense every morning and evening. Put the house, you live in, in good order. Cleanse it by scrubbing the floor and plinth with cow-dung. The clothes, the bed and everything else in the house must be kept scrupulously clean. Read a little of the *Gita*, *Chandi*, *Bhagabat* and the *Ramayana*

every day. Bow down to your elders and at places of worship every morning and evening, with all devotion. Always honour your religious preceptor, the sacred places, the Brahmins, the hermit, the elders, the incarnations of God, the gods and goddesses, and be full of devotion to the cattle. Your parents and elder brothers are as gods to you and there is a special merit in worshipping their feet. The women among you must be devoted to their husbands just as 'Sita' was. They should know it for a truth that their husbands are, to them, the worthiest preceptor. They should wear, on their foreheads, the vermilion mark with its heavenly glow and conch-shell bangles on their wrists for ever. A spirit of service, devotion, modesty of bearing, bashfulness and simplicity of mind are qualities which, if acquired, will make a goddess of a woman. The wives of others are like mothers to all men ; know this,—which all the Sastras say, to be an inviolable truth. If you harbour evil thoughts about them, you will surely fall into the eternal hell. Banish the use of toddy, hashish, and wine. Indulgence in them will degrade you. So banish the habits forthwith, or else they will bring ruin to you. For funerals ; marriages and religious festivals call in Brahmin priest. The celebrations thereof should be within the limits of your means. Do not fall out with your neighbours or with the members of your own household. In your eating habits, recreation, in your clothes and the ornaments that you wear, in your ways of life, in your thinking and actions and in the principles behind those actions, be a Hindu out and out, and guide yourselves by the Shastric habits. Avoid the evil word and the company of evil men, and then and then alone will you be regarded as men of culture. Do not hesitate to lay down your life for the sake of your own religion and race. This code of rules has been prepared after churning study of a sea of books of religion. If the Chitrakars will hold fast to these rules in a spirit of great joy, it will help them to wake up and to take their rightful place in India.

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Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti  
(Society for the advancement of the Chitrakars of Bengal)  
Published from 2A, Parbati Chakrabarti Lane.

To be bound and hung up in every house.  
*Translated from a Leaflet written in verse*

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## APPENDIX—4

### The ensuing Census and the Chitrakar Community

The Census operation has started. How are you going to be classified ? Do you know that the West Bengal Government has recognised the Chitrakars as 'Caste Hindus' ? Please do not let this opportunity pass. No matter what social customs you follow, do get yourself officially recorded as a 'Caste Hindu'. That will be of great advantage in the future. If you do not seize this opportunity the progress of the Chitrakar community and the movement for the establishment of its rightful status will be retarded for ten years. Think of the future and take the right step. Have yourself recorded as a Caste Hindu in the Census. Let there be no mistake in this.

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Wise Chitrakars will please explain the above to their less knowledgeable brethren.

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## APPENDIX—5

### Good News

(Please circulate this among the Chitrakar brethren)

Do you know, brethren, that on the 2nd August last Shri Niharendu Dutta Mazumdar, Minister for the Welfare of Tribal and depressed-class Hindus met in a conference in his office a deputation of representatives of the Chitrakar community from Calcutta and the districts of Hooghly, Howrah, Burdwan, Murshidabad, 24-Parganas and Midnapore. The Hon'ble Minister assured the deputationists of the Government's readiness to fulfil as far as possible the demands made on behalf of Chitrakar community. The question especially discussed at the conference was that of the social position of the Chitrakars. The Minister referred to the Anti-untouchability Act passed in 1948 and gave the assurance that the Chitrakars would no longer have to remain stuck to a lowly place in the Hindu society. In the eye of the law there is no longer any distinction between caste Hindus and Hindus of the scheduled castes. Therefore, there is no question of keeping the Chitrakars classified as a scheduled caste against their will. In the eye of the law a Chitrakar should have the same status and rights as any high-caste person in the Hindu society.

Chitrakar brethren, now you know where you stand. After long unhappy ages, a happy day has dawned for the Chitrakar community. Whoever fails to seize this opportunity will lag behind and is doomed to endless repentance in the future. The Government of our independent country has responded to our appeal. There is no longer any room for despondency. Let us now cleanse our minds of all resentment and misgivings, become united and proceed to take our rightful place in the Hindu society. What is the use of hurling abuse from outside ? Let us enter the Hindu society and try establish our rights there. Is this not the path of wisdom ? Please ponder deeply.

Issued by :

**Members of the Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti**

2A, Parbati Chakravarti Lane, Calcutta.

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N. B.—Enroll yourself as a member of Chitrakar community's representative organisation "Bangiya Chitrakar Samiti".

## APPENDIX—6

We are placing before the Chitrakar community, especially our conservative brethren, a few points which call for serious thought. We appeal to our Chitrakar brethren to ponder over this matter coolly and deeply and then decide what should be the right course for the community to take.

(1) The Chitrakar community has descended from the union of a Brahmin father and a Gope mother. The daily work of Chitrakars is concerned with Hindu gods and goddesses. The profession of many of them is painting scrolls and selling these to Hindu households, which amounts to a kind of preaching Hinduism. Chitrakars' names are similar to Hindu names. Their customs also accord with the Hindus. Thus in religion the Chitrakars are really Hindu. One should die rather than give up one's religion. Whatever may be difficulties, the ultimate good for the Chitrakar community lies in coming again under the protective wings of their old religion.

(2) The Chitrakar community's economic ties are entirely with the Hindus. The Chitrakars' livelihood depends on selling images to Hindus. It is not possible that their profession will be endangered in the near future if Chitrakars remain allied to a non-Hindu society or organisation which is opposed or inimical to image-worship. Since Independence Hindus have become more energetic and active than before in propagating and preserving their religion. Those among the Hindus who are in favour of strict adherence to their traditional religious customs are not going much longer to tolerate people with close associations with a non-Hindu community freely entering Hindu temples making images for worship. Already objections against this have been raised at several places. Some prominent pandits have issued an edict of warning against having images of gods and goddesses made by non-Hindus because this is not sanctioned by the Shastras and is derogatory for Hinduism. In their proclamation the pandits have suggested that if there are no Hindu artisans available for image-making

in any region then Hindu artisans from other parts of West Bengal or Hindu artisans among the migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) should be brought and settled there. Potters of East Bengal are adept in making images and painting. At present large numbers of them are leaving their homes in East Bengal and coming to West Bengal. *The Government of India has sanctioned 24 crores of rupees for the assistance and rehabilitation of refugees from East Bengal.* If the Hindu refugee artisans from East Bengal get land to settle in and also capital for their business through government help they will be especially welcome in areas where there is a dearth of Hindu artisans. Will our conservative brethren in the Chitrakar community try to visualize their own plight in such a situation ?

(3) India has been divided into Hindusthan and Pakistan. From time to time things happen around us which cannot but fill our minds with anxiety and fear. Though it is the desire of every peace-loving person that the relations between the different communities should be marked by unity, friendliness and the spirit of co-operation, there are self-seekers and reactionary elements ready to instigate and provoke trouble whenever they get an opportunity for mischief. The fearful memory of the terrible happenings in Calcutta, Noakhali, Punjab, Bihar and Delhi still haunts us. God forbid—but there is no harm in taking precautions—if some evil deeds perpetuated in East Bengal have some sudden repercussions in West Bengal (such as Bihar in replay to Noakhali) can we be certain that the Chitrakar community will remain unaffected, that is, if it remains associated with some non-Hindu community ? Why should the Chitrakar community attract danger to itself through association with a non-Hindu community ?

(4) In this age of democracy, the state power lies in the hands of those who are in a majority, and those who are in the possession of the state power have all the advantages religious, social, economic, education, military, industrial and commercial. In India it is the Hindus who constitute the majority ; therefore the state power will be on the side for which the majority of the Hindus will vote. The present Congress Government's policy towards the minority communities is an admirable one, it is liberal and impartial. But who can say the policy

will remain equally liberal and impartial if the state power changes hands and is possessed by some other party or organisation? Should not this question be a matter for serious consideration by every Chitrakar?

(5) The Chitrakars are a small community and they have not enough strength to enforce their demands as a separate community. To secure their political rights and privileges they have to be allied with some powerful community. Where, then, should the Chitrakars anchor their boat? Since in most matters—names, customs and affairs of livelihood—the Chitrakars are following Hinduism and since the Hindus are the powerful majority community in India, will it not be the most profitable course for the Chitrakars to be fully integrated into the Hindu Society? Will this not put us in an advantageous position in our dealings with the majority community in the fields of art, industry, jobs, education, etc.? The question deserve serious consideration.

(6) A large section of the Chitrakar community has already merged with the powerful Hindu society. Only a small conservative section is still adhering to a contrary attitude. But can a handful of persons isolated from the main body of the community maintain their separate existence? Are they not going to be a weak and crippled lot? What possible good can result from a handful of persons remaining aloof and isolated?

(7) As the result of the community's division into two opposing groups relatives and friends have been estranged from one another, and social intercourse and friendly exchanges are being hampered. Though many are feeling the anguish caused by the estrangement of friends and relatives they are ignoring the path which would best lead to the restoration of unity and cordiality. What is that path? All difficulties can be solved in a day if the conservatives will give up their separatist attitude and join the 'Hindu Chitrakar Samaj'. Then in a day relatives will be reunited, all the joys of friendship and social intercourse will be revived—all estrangements will be things of the past. Chitrakar brethren, overcome your pride and egoism; if you have been hurt by the conduct of any relative forget it and come forward and join your efforts in building up a powerful



united "Hindu Chitrakar Samaj". May the new awakening of the Chitrakar community not be in vain !

(8) Scroll-painting and image-making are no longer a monopoly of the Chitrakar community like before. Many art schools and art colleges of both Eastern and Western ideology, have come into being for training in painting by modern improved methods. These institutions of training in the fine arts are under the direction and control of highly educated and talented persons. In terms of competition with them, where is the Chitrakar community's place today ? In the fields of architecture and sculpture also, the Chitrakar community of today has no place. The only field now left to them is that of image-making. But even here, the Chitrakars must reckon with the potters from East Bengal. They must also take note of the fact that proficiency in image-making is being displayed by many artisans belonging to the *mahishya*, *poundra-kshatriya* and *kaora* castes of West Bengal. In such a situation Chitrakars can maintain their existence as an artisan community only if they remain united in one social body. If divided, they are bound to be lost in the competition with their rivals. Ponder well whether this is true or not ?

(9) Those who are apprehensive and doubtful as to whether an honourable position is attainable in Hindu society will do well to consider the following :

(a) The old orthodoxy of the Hindu society is on the decline in Independent India the Hindus have generally become liberal-minded and reformist. The fact of the Hindu society is sure to be changed entirely in the next five years.

(b) The big religious and political organisations such as Bharat Sevashram Sangha, the Ramkrishna Mission, the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha as well as every educated person and all important leaders are for reform and reorganisation of the Hindu society. Their efforts are bound to be successful in a short time.

(c) After the Calcutta and the Noakhali riots all the leading pandits, mohants and mandaleshwaras have expressed their unanimous opinion in favour of reform and re-organisation of the Hindu society and have decreed many social and

religious rights and privileges equally for the non-Brahmin castes.

(d) The central and the state governments have enacted very stringent laws against untouchability and other discriminating social usages.

(e) The Hindu society has not turned away those who were forcibly converted or the women who were criminally violated during the riots in Calcutta, Noakhali and Punjab. Rather they were welcomed back into the Hindu society. This proves how liberal the Hindu society has now become.

(f) Wherever Chitrakars have undergone *suddhi* they have received support and sympathy from the Hindus. In most cases the expenses of the *suddhi* have been borne by the Hindus who have made all the arrangements. After the *suddhi*, our brethren were livingly embraced and blessed by the leading members of the Hindu society. At this moment at many places the local Hindus are ready to welcome our brethren into their fold. But who is to blame if the proffered meal is not eaten ?

(g) Wherever *suddhi* has taken place, services of the priest have been made available. In cases of temporary difficulties, redress is prompt by the Bharat Sevashram Sangha despatching a preacher, or a *sannyasi* or a worker or a priest according to the requirement of the situation.

(h) Are they not mistaken who harp on the illiberality of the Hindu society ? Is it not a false excuse ?

(10) Considering the matter from the point of view of religion, it can be certainly said that the Hindu religion, being the mother of every kind of religious doctrine, is the best of all religions. In the Hindu religion there are innumerable paths leading to the salvation of the soul and realisation of God. For worshipping God, one may choose any one of the many ways, according to one's taste, nature or tradition. There is no other religion which allows so much freedom, is so liberal and offers such variety of paths to a seeker in the field of religious endeavour. This is a point which deserves to be especially considered by those who would lay particular stress on the religious aspect of the matter. What other religions give scope

for such a wide range of religious culture as the Hindu religion does ?

(11) What the Chitrakar community has suffered under the inexorable pressure of time were only some distortions and nothing more. I never entered into marital relations with any non-Hindu community. Even today no Chitrakar can contemplate such an alliance without hurting his conscience. Therefore there has never been a mixture of the Chitrakar community's blood with any foreign non-Hindu blood. The blood in the Chitrakar's veins is the same sacred fluid that flowed in the veins of the Aryan rishis and maharishis. Chitrakar brethren, don't you believe that to be true ? Why do you feel shy and hesitant to declare that you are descendants of the Aryan rishis ? Overcome this feelings of shyness and hesitancy. Respond to the call of the new age. Therein lies your welfare.

(12) In the eyes of the non-Hindu, image-worship is idolatry. Because they make images Chitrakars are despised and regarded as untouchables by the non-Hindu community. It is strange, some Chitrakars—nobody knows beguiled by what fond hopes—appear to be inclined towards that community. What is there to attract them that way ? Nothing, as far as we can see. In fact so long as Chitrakars remain image-makers there is no place for them in that community. Why, then, is this looking in that direction ?

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We have placed the above 12 points before our brethren so that they may think over them and those who due to ignorance had been harbouring mistaken notions may get rid of them.

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N. B. Translated from the booklet "*Bangiya Chitrakar Samaj-er Nabajagaran*". Issued by Bharat Sevasram Sangha, 211, Rashbihari Avenue, Calcutta.

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