CHAPTER ONE

THE FOLK PAINTERS

STUDY OF THEIR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

Introduction - classification: paintings connected with rituals; paintings associated with professional artist-craftsman.

Socio-religious background of the ālpanā painters.

Citrakaras - the artist-craftsmen:
- Origin and history of the citrakaras; socio-religious life - religion as reflected in the paintings - socio-religious behaviour; occupation pattern; sense of security.

Other castes practising folk paintings - the kumbhakāras and the sūtradharas.
since art activities take place in the context of human society of a given social milieu, it is, therefore, in the logic of things that artists' imaginative vision and creative activity should be understood and interpreted in the perspective of the whole situation of which he is a part. Thus any attempt to assess artist's work necessitates an understanding of his milieu by which his endeavours are conditioned. It is also to be noted that the evolution of art from the primitive stage to its more advanced and sophisticated forms depends on a parallel evolution of man's subjective attitude towards his world. In other expression, art reveals all the social elements of which he is a part.

Paintings at the grassroot level seem to have emerged from two different sources. The first category of art grew up in connection with rituals; the second from those of the professional artist class.

The painters of the first category are mostly women. They paint auspicious symbols in connection with ritualistic function or the vratas. The rites and the rituals connected with these vratas are of magical significance, some of these are performed even to-day for protection, prosperity and happiness. Obviously therefore, the contents of art have not undergone serious alterations with the passage of time. But instances are not too
infrequent where one can see definite evidence of painters taking delight in reproducing objects or motifs. His consideration in such cases is obviously aesthetic rather than symbolic.

As the vratas are performed usually in collective way by a group of women, the ritual decorations or alpanas are also executed collectively on the occasions of auspicious rites, performed by women folk. The accompanying drawing seems to perform two important functions: first, it provides magical embankment to secure happiness and prosperity; and next it intends to bring abundance by magical action. These two meanings could be understood etymologically as well. There is a possibility that the root word 'alpana' is connected with the non-Sanskrit word alipana meaning art of making aig or embankment. The meaning of this seems to be that with the help of this embankment or the magical boundary line the vratinees intend to keep the place, the house or the village free from evil forces, but there is still another meaning which seems to have a closer affiliation with the Sanskrit alimpana, indicating plaster or coating obviously with colour. Vinaya Pitaka in making references to cittagara or picture halls mentions about a kind of paintings which was known as lekhya citra. This lekhya citra or line drawing was possibly of the same nature and character like alpanas. Indeed, literary records are too many to indicate the theoretical basis of this art. The
śilpaśūtra seems to describe details of this painting according to which it is to be done on the door steps in front of the house, either on the verandah or in the courtyard, on the floor of bed chamber or other living room. From this description one should not fail to recall that in referring to this painting, the writer obviously had alpanās in view. The Sanskrit works like Kādambarī and Tilakamāñjari vividly describe these paintings including its technique and designs.

But due to its ephemeral character it is difficult to trace its history in chronological context. Thus what have we tried here is to make study of these paintings on the basis of the data collected from rural Bengal. It is well known that traditions die hard, especially so in India where the rural agricultural pattern of social economy and connected culture ideology persist through centuries despite contacts with civilisations.

All that is attempted in the following pages is not only to analyse the artistic-cultural picture of the traditional painting of Bengal, but also to find out how far the changed conditions of today have necessitated changes in the traditional art.

The Alpanā Painters:

We have observed earlier that the alpanā painters whether they are mentioned in the texts, or are retained in the tradition do not belong to any professional group. The female
folk of rural Bengal learn this traditional skill through inheritance, and thus have become legitimate heirs to the peoples' art. The girls pick up this skill from their mothers and other women of their family, and this is how the tradition of this art passes from generation to generation, timelessly without any break. It is true that from time to time some new forms and themes have been incorporated into it, and naturally varieties of motifs and designs are being created emphasising its time-bound effect.

It is interesting to recall in this connection that alpanas usually suggest patterns which manifest the powerful impact of the basic trends of rural agricultural life. Every detail has a meaning and symbolic significance, but due to a long journey and contact with foreign culture and ideas and ideations, the alpanas of today show various alien myths, symbols and designs. Intrusion of these new motifs and forms obviously have given this painting a new colour, and imagery.

Citrakaras: The artist-craftsmen

The other type of painting which could be called primarily non-ritualistic and much more widely spread, is generally known as patas. The painters practising this occupation have come to be known as Patua. The Patua painters are also termed as citrakara on the basis of their profession. These artists convey wider social implication and continue to
exist in a number of districts of West Bengal. They are known differently at different places. In Bankura, Purulia and Midnapur they are called as Patidar or Patikar or Citrakar; in Birbhum the community is known as Citrakara, while in south Bengal they are called simply by their profession, Patua.

Though as a group of people belonging to a particular professional artist class, they reveal a sort of inherited artistic skill and conventional imaginative vision, the primary activity of this group of painters seems to be to reflect and record the communal needs and requirements, joys and sorrows, social modes and behaviour. Thus the main characteristic of this art has ensured the artists a peculiar state of permanency, within a professional craft group. Their ideational and behavioural patterns appear to be more or less conservative and tradition bound for reasons that, they do not seem to prefer social changes merely for the sake of changes and variation, yet they cannot be taken as slaves of convention as they are often found to have adopted different visual forms to keep pace with contemporary time, but what one should remember at this stage is that the patacitra has never been a spontaneous art activity of a creative mind, rather the paintings accompanied with verse recital of the stories have always been composed to suit the demands either of the listeners or of the consumers. It is for this reason one would find quite often the presentation of a theme, which is otherwise very modern in a traditional idiom.
It is very difficult to trace the origin and history of the citrakaras, the professional group of painters who are said to have been present in rural India from ancient period. Unfortunately the materials with which these painters seem to have worked could not survive the ravages of time. Thus the methodology for reconstructing such history is concerned with scanty evidence available in literatures and the materials collected from the field data.

From the materials collected from two types of evidences mentioned above, there is no doubt that the citrakaras as community belongs to an important section of our rural society. The earliest literary record referring to this community seem to have come from the Astadhyayi of Pāṇini. The great epic Mahābhārata also speaks about this community. Kālidāsa in his Abhijñāna Śākuntalam mentions about this caste. Kautilya in his Arthaśāstra has referred to the painters or guild of artisans where he describes them as being engaged as spies.

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1. iv, 128.
2. v, 5025 (sørensen)
3. Ch. vi.
5. Ibid., vii, xvii, 315.
In all these accounts there is clear reference to their low birth. Both Kautilya and Vatsayana even go further as they refer to the women of this community following the profession of prostitution. Banabhatta in his Harṣacarita refers to the yamapāṭa while he refers to the death scene of Prabhākara Vardhana. The pātas have also been mentioned in Muddrākṣasa and Uttararāmacarita.

The Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, written sometime in the middle of the 13th century AD, is one of the few texts, which writes in details about the origin, caste affiliation and subsequent expulsion of the citrakaras from the recognised caste order. This text holds that the citrakaras along with śutrādharas, śvarṇākāras, kāmsakāras and śaṅkhākāras etc., as belonging to the naba śaива caste group, are said to have originated from the unequal union of the celestial architect Viśvakarman with Ghrūtaci, perhaps of the aboriginal origin, but later the same text informs that they were declared fallen by the brahmmins by outcasting from the naba śaiva group, since they used to paint objects and themes which were not liked by the brahmmins.

6 I.17.
7 I. 13 - 33.
8 Mālākara Karmakāṇgaśaṅkhaśkaśa Kavindañkan I Pumbhakara śutrādha śvarṇacitrakārastathā II Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Brahmakandam, 10.90.
This undoubtedly reveals that the ātriakaras seem to have done the type of art activity which was taken as anti-social by the contemporary high caste people. This tradition of Viśvakarmā's children being cursed to lead a miserable life has also been referred to in the Māṅgala-kāvyas. A recent 20th century story, popular among the ātriakaras, further corroborates the legend of their degradation. The version of the legend as obtained from Chunilal ātriakar of Panuria village of Birbhum district claiming his descent from Viśvakarmā records that one of their ancestors had drawn a portrait of Mahādeva without his consent, and was naturally scared of the anger of the Lord. Once he saw Mahādeva passing through the road and frightened of being detected, he hid his brush inside the mouth. Mahādeva could not stand the pollution of the brush by which he himself was drawn. He cursed the whole community of the ātriakaras which eventually made them outcasts in the society. Members of the community thereafter appealed to him and begged his mercy for their livelihood. Mahādeva told them that they would henceforth be neither Hindu...
nor Muslim, but would follow the customs of the Muslims and earn their livelihood by painting and making images for the Hindus. Another version explaining the half-Hindu half-Muslim status of the citrakaras is found in another legend, collected from an Islamised paṭuā of village dwarka of Birbhum, which tries to impress that the paṭuās were Muslim in origin migrating from the Arab countries. After coming to Bengal they took up idol making as their means of livelihood. But this double affiliation provided them no security whatsoever. There is no doubt that the peculiar status that the paṭuās seem to have been fallen into, forced them to belong to no religion. Thus both by their religious affiliation and cultural traits they live a life of midway between the Hindus and the Muslims.

The report recorded in the census and our survey clearly show that while the citrakaras, the sankarmāls, the jādu-paṭuās and the bediās of Bengal live the life of a half-Muslim and half-Hindu, scroll painters belonging to the Acaryās and the sūtradharās communities are known to be Hindus. A survey of large number of villages in the districts of Birbhum, 24-parganas, Midnapore, Burdwan, Hooghly and Murshidabad

12 Dutta, G.S., Paṭuā saṅgit, intro.
reveals that in almost all the cases the patuā habitations are situated at the outskirts of the Hindu locality with a few exceptions where they are living with the Muslim community. Needless to say that the patuās living in Muslim villages affiliate themselves more to Islamic codes and manners. On the 20th December, 1946, Rajani Chitrakar of Akubpur, Midnapur appealed to the Hindu society to absorb them in the socially sanctioned caste structure of the Hindus. In his letter Rajani wanted to plead their case by the name of the god Viśvakarma, who happens to be their originator. He further urged the Hindu society to give them the social base considering the fact that how the citrakaras from very ancient time have been rendering great help for spreading religious feeling. Later on, in 1949 the leaflets published by the bangiya chitrakar unnayan samiti and bhārat sevāsram sangha, called for a religious conference for integrating the socio-religious organisation of the citrakar community with the Hindu social structure. Even after the independence, a movement was launched by the bangiya citrakar unnayan samiti demanding the enrolment of the patuās as scheduled caste Hindus. They circulated a printed appeal requesting the patuās to enroll themselves as those belonging to the scheduled caste during the census of 1951. For the

16 Copy of the leaflet in Bengali has been reproduced in itihas, vol. 7, no. 4, 1374 (B.S.) Appendix 2, p. 306.
initiation act they even accepted the idea of a śuddhi-yajna for the entry into the Hindu social structure.

A number of such meetings and yajnas were organised in several districts, but these had hardly helped the patuas to enhance their social position who practically remained in the Hindu community as untouchables.

In order to launch socio-political movement the leaders of the patua community formed an organisation which is composed of the members of five villages or pañcagrámi, who in a meeting decided in favour of their Hinduisation. But in a general meeting of the Gandus, an organisation composed of a large number of villages of the entire district of Birbhum and parts of Murshidabad and Burdwan, bhakti patua declared a changed view. In this meeting held at Ayas village, Nalhaţî P.S. he argued that by embracing Hinduism their position would not improve in any way because they would be considered as low in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Instead, if they accept Islam religion they would be given better social status by the

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17 ibid., App 1. Here we may also refer to the identical upgradation formula prescribed for the vrātyas who according to Tāṇḍya Mahā Brāhmaṇa should perform the vrātyastoma ritual. Katyayana grautasūtra further corroborates this view and says that by performance of this ritual the vrātyas would not only cease to be vrātyas, but eligible for social intercourse also (xvii, 1-4).

Muslim community. He also stressed the point that by remaining as Hindu they would be deprived by the local Brahmins even of the scope of performing the last rites. This counter movement ultimately led the paṭuās to decide in favour of their embracing Islam.

_socio-religious life_

due to the peculiar admixture of religion, it is difficult to ascertain the personal religion of the folk painters. We have noted earlier that from the point of view of their origin, they are linked with Viśvakarma, but this never helped them to enjoy honourable social status in the society. Inspite of their repeated attempts to be absorbed by the Hindu social structure they have been denied their entrance and have been traditionally declared as outcastes by the Brahmins. The tragedy of this social situation can be best understood in their acceptance of two names, one Hindu and the other Muslim. As for example, Sudarsan Chitrakar of Itaguria of Birbhum otherwise called Sukuruddin Chitrakar has no other justification for maintaining two names. On enquiry it was found that the paṭuās of the districts like Birbhum, Murshidabad in their social ceremony and festival are in favour of Islamic way of life. But this

19 Ibid.
Thus for understanding religious norms and rituals that the Citrakaras seem to have practised one should study the themes of the painting emphasising the religious and ritualistic convictions, on the one hand and personal religious behaviour including their rites, rituals and beliefs, on the other.

Religion as reflected in paintings

An analysis of the themes depicted by the folk painters unveil a wide canvas accommodating gods and goddesses from Hindu-Puranic to laukika and tribal pantheons. The subjects are taken from the Islamic and Christian myths and legends as well. The pataśas are said to have been present among the tribals also. Srṣṭitattva and Čakṣudāna pataśas are tribal ones. Among the Hindu-Puranic divinities or herogods, the most popular are Śiva, Durgā, Kālī, Kamalekāminī, Lākṣmī, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Caitanya. Side by side with these, the laukika gods and goddesses like Mānasā, Śītalā, Gaṣṭhī, Satyanārāyaṇa and Muslim Piṅs, Gāzī, Muhammād, Jesus and mother Mary have also been given due importance.

It is interesting to notice that though the aforesaid gods and goddesses have been presented by these artists quite frequently, but none seem to have enjoyed so prominent a
place like the images of yama and the trinity of jagannātha in the scroll paintings.

One notices that it is almost customary to the patauās to present yama emphasising scenes of penances in hell, in almost all sorts of pata paintings. Even Gāzī pataś are also found to have accommodated yama. To a patau who has been nourished in the Hindu society where every human action is conditioned by restraints, the idea of yama being empowered with divine strength to punish the evil-doer would naturally play an important part. Similarly the jagannātha trinity, symbolically representing equality and fraternity have impressed and influenced the caste ridden, oppressed imaginative vision of the citrakaras. Indeed, both in painting and in the patau songs the yama panel is succeeded by the jagannātha as the last one, indicating obviously that at long last of the cycle of human life, there is the god upholding justice and law. The same feeling about yama seems to have been shared by skandapurāṇa where yama as pharma or pharmarāja claims: 'I am yama to all beings who are evil-doers and I am pharma to all, self-controlled people'. This tendency of identifying pharma or

20 \[\text{yāmūt gāldūt dāine or bāyēñ/tār maidheyn baiṣyā āchhe yamrājēr mēye/gājēr kon gupe/tarāiyā las bhai gājēr nāme - excerpt from a patau song.}\]

21 \[\text{jagannāthpurite go ek hāñrite jāl dile pare/gāt hāñrite hēṣ ḡaye/seinbē ḡēt dekhun kintu sarvalōke khēye - excerpt from a patau song.}\]

22 \[\text{pharmāranya khanda (417-18) included within brahmakhanda.}\]
Dharmarāja with yama is apparent in many places of west Bengal where festivities in connection with the gājana of dharma are known as festivals of dharmarāja yama (namaste bahurūpāya yama dharmarājaya). A study of dharmaṅgālas reveals that while praising their lord, the devotees have invariably taken help of many of the purāṇic incidents. He is even shown as protecting prahlāda from hiranyakāśipu, sheltering prhuva, protecting pāṇḍavas, saving the chastity of prauḍā, or acting as the charioteer of Arjuna, or killing rāvana and saving sītā, and his role in vrndavana as a cowherd boy in dalliances with cowhered girls. In the popular imagination, the yama seems to have taken a composite character absorbing the characteristics of kṛṣṇa. Interestingly enough many of these episodes which are presented by the paṭuās in their paintings and accompanying songs are also found in dharmaṅgālas. Hence, it will not be unreasonable to assume that the dharma cult which created a deep impact on contemporary socio-religious life in rural Bengal, created an impression on the religio-cultural attitude of the paṭuās.

This popular cult of dharma also received patronage from the followers of Islam because dharmarāja is depicted as protector of Islam as well. This is clearly evident from the

24 Ibid., pp. 90-96.
section entitled Niranjaner Rūṣmā occurring in the Śūnya 
purāṇa of Rāmāi pandita, where followers of the Dharma cult 
are found to have rejoiced at the destruction of the 
Brahmanical temples by the Muslims. They considered this as 
right treatment against the brahmanised caste structured 
society. In the same section it is stated that for the sake 
of inflicting punishment on the wicked brahmins, the Lord 
Dharma assumed the form of Khodā. Other gods following 
Dharma were reborn under Islamic garb: Ganesā became Gāzī, 
Kārtikeya īkāzī, Śiva Adam (Bābā Adam) and Durgā Eve (Hāwā 
Bibi). The Muhammad Mangalā patas are unique examples of this 
type. One can find in these patas the depiction of Muhammad 
as front piece in the Mangala sequence. Such ideas evidently 
evoked much interest among the patuās due to their peculiar 
religious orientation mentioned above.

Whatever might be their initial intention that led them 
to paint the gods and goddesses taken from Hindu pantheon or 
depicting the syncretistic icons, the basic urge in the core 
of the hearts of the folk painters, seemed to be the faith on 
ethical and moral way of life. That is the reason why almost 
all the scroll paintings including the secular ones end with 
a moral note. Troubled with the complications of caste 
hierarchy of the Hindu society, they dreamt of an ideal 

society of jagannāthapurī, where equality of man exists and
everybody is entitled to be treated similarly ignoring the
caste distinction.

There is, therefore, no doubt that the citrakaras as
community shared the religious sentiments of both Hindu and
Muslim faiths highlighting the aspects of law, justice,
equality and fraternity common to both the religions. This led
them to live 'in a state of midway' between Islam and
Hinduism. But this is not true in the case of other artisan
groups, such as Ācāryas and the śūtrādhara, who continue to
be Hindus.

socio-religious behaviour:

A study of the socio-religious behaviour as practised
today by the patuās throw interesting light on their religion
and the behavioural pattern.

We take our data, mostly from the districts of birbhum
and midnapur, where there is the maximum concentration of
this community, and the people are living in traditional way
of life. The data have been collected primarily from two
religious groups, one from the villages where Hinduistic
elements are more dominant, and the other which are more
Islamic. In regard to the religious beliefs, we are therefore
depending on the Hindu based citrakara communities coming
from Chandpara, Panuria and Ahmadpur (Birbhum), Naya and
Thekuachak (Midnapur) and Kalighat (Calcutta) on the one hand
and Islamised villages like Itaguria and Ayas (Birbhum) and
Akubpur and Nankachak (Midnapur) on the other.

From the survey of the socio-religious life of the patuás
living in these places (see Appendix I) there is no doubt that
the patuás as class have adopted the usual rites and rituals
around the entire cycle of their lives, as are practised by
their Hindu counterparts. From the pregnancy to death, the
patuás in general, whether Hinduistic or Islamised, share more
or less the same sorts of rites and rituals. Indeed the rites
and rituals observed by these people are queer mixtures of
Hindu and Muslim practices. While they observe the khatmā
or
the essential Muslim circumcision rites, they simultaneously
observe the Hindu annaprasana rites. Their marriages are
solemnised by Muslim Kazis but they follow Hindu marriage rites
like gātraharidṛā, badhuvarāṇa, dvirāgamaṇa, aṣṭamāṅgala etc.
Their marriages are fixed according to Hindu pānjikā where
the months of Bhādra, Āśvina, Kārtik, Pausa and Čaitra are
avoided as inauspicious months. The Muslim practices like
denmohor, talaq or divorce are however, observed by the
citrakaras. In case of death, the rituals are Hinduistic but
the funerary is usually done like the Muslim and the prayer
is conducted by the maulavī. The practice of giving rice, dal,
new clothes, pān suparī and cowrie, symbolic form of money
with the dead body is an interesting rite. The śrādha or
Kambarkara (Muslim terminology) ceremony among the Patuas are reminiscence of Hindu rituals. They even observe pollution for a few days. Our data show that in case of the Hindu citrakaras of Ahmadpur in Birbhum as also Rajib and Biplab Chitrakar of Akubpur in Midnapur had to depend on the priests sent by Bharat Sevashram Sangha for performance of the last rites or their parents, since the local brahmins refused to do so. The women of the community wear śāṅkhā (conchshell bangle), sindur or vermilion and they stop using these after the death of their husbands.

In regard to religious festival the Patuas perform Id-uz-joha after observing Ramjan fastings, Sab-e-barat and Id-ul-Fitar like Muslims. The richer section observe these days with go kurbani, or adding meat to their daily humble diet. The citrakaras mainly of Birbhum, though claim themselves as descendents of Viśvakarma, are not found to worship Viśvakarma which is mainly done by the karmakaras and sutradhara. Though they do not perform the Puja, they observe the day by ceasing to work and by cleaning their implements and marking them with vermilion. The Patuas do not have any ceremony connected with the major pujas of Durgā or Kāli. But the rituals connected with these ceremonies are

found to be observed by them. They wear new garments and maintaining distance as outcasters visit the mandapas to do the pranāmas. At places they are even seen giving votive offerings. They do the same in respect of Śāni, Śītalā and Manasa. But Laksmī Pūjā is invariably done by them on several occasions. One such occasion which seems to be very popular among the Patuās, is observed on dāk Sāhkṛntī day, on the last day of the month of Āśvina. Like a true Hindu believer the Patua observes a ritual which is known as Garu Parab. Unlike a Muslim, among whom go kurbānī is an essential custom, Patua on the day after Kālī Pūjā worship the cows by washing the feet of the cows fourteen times with water.

Whatever might have been the customary rituals, there is no doubt that the Patuās do not worship any image of god or goddesses, and they are not accustomed to the peculiar ritualistic performances attached to these worships. But what is interesting is that though they do not know the dhyānamantra of the gods, they can make idols as per the specifications of the mantra. They, however, do not mark eyes of the idols, which seems to be the privilege of the Hindu priest who does it before starting the pūjā. Such custom of refraining themselves from marking the eyes of the idols obviously is a measure taken against pollution of the deities. But it is

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interesting that there is no taboo for them to make images. Besides their knowledge and understanding regarding iconic forms of Hindu divinities is understandable. Noteworthy is also the fact that most of the citrakaras know the Koran only superficially; some of them know only the first kalma while few others can recite or recognise the second or the third.

**Occupation pattern** : Like the peculiar socio-religious position of the citrakaras, their occupational pattern also does not seem to have established itself on a firm base (see Appendix I). Indeed, in the context of the socio-economic life, the rootlessness of their existence is very much apparent. The male folk follow two types of occupation: the main and subsidiary. Apart from scroll painting, the main occupation includes idol making and the decoration on walls with painting and engraving on walls in stucco of which idol making is most important. subsidiary craft pursued by the male members of the citrakara community include snake charming, preparation of fireworks, tinkar, govaliya or quack veterinary, bamboo works etc. The data available from our survey shows that women folk of the community are sometimes found to be engaged in making toys dolls and also paintings on the ceremonial vessels or seats. Besides, the Patua women are often seen peddling alta (lac-dye), cheap cosmetics and bangles. One notices at this stage that the Patua community are at times forced to accept any type of profession for their poor economic status. But this deviation from their traditional
professions is never liked by the traditional pathus. At least in one case in the village of Chandpara, a patha has been found being excommunicated because of the acceptance of the snake charmer's profession. In spite of this, it has been found that they cannot help practising these in a clandestine manner due to utter poverty.

On a survey in different rural areas, where idol making and scroll painting do not provide minimum subsistence, the citrakaras are found even accepting the jobs of mud-cutters and agricultural labourers on daily wages. Even Sudarsan pathua of Itaguria, Birbhum (see Appendix I), has taken up odd jobs like decorating rathas (rathacitran), walls and floors of houses. He also does colouring work for many government and civil quarters in and around Suri. His sons, Fakir and Kabir, expert in the colouring job, have however, not taken up the traditional occupation of patha painting.

The assorted settlers of the pathus of the Kalgput area, migrating mainly from the districts of 24-Parganas, Hooghly, Howrah and Midnapur illustrate occupational pattern of varied types. In recent times the choice of occupation has taken a new turn, since our survey has shown that there is a tendency among the younger generation to accept the modern occupations, rather than the traditional ones. Instances are too many, at least among the artisan communities of Kalighat, where a large number of youngsters are working in the motor workshops, a few in the electrical department, and some like Niranjan Pal after
completion of the academic qualifications from Mitra Institution and Asutosh College is working in a central Govt. office at Calcutta, but there are still a large number of families in Kalighat who are whole time engaged in pata painting and modelling of clay images. They are found even illustrating the covers of manuscripts, drawing the pictorial and calligraphic portions of the calligraphic charts called Rasīpatṭa, on orders. Paran pal of Kalighat is using his traditional skill in a modern block making concern where he works as an engraver. Needless to say that such deviation from traditional occupation is forced upon them which has led them to embrace any sort of alternative profession available.

sense of security: The above study reveals that the Citrakaras from the earliest time had never enjoyed honourable socio-economic status. They had to accept the jobs of any kind for meeting the bare necessity for their survival. Thus for economic and social security the community had to accept varied professions and shelters of different religious.

But does this oscillation of religion give the pataś necessary social and economic security they are seeking? An analysis of the social situations as have been collected during our survey from two different locales may give us some insight into this.

We take example of the Citrakara community of Kalighat and the those of Ayas village in Birbhum. Our survey in these two places have revealed that while the Citrakaras living near and around Kalighat temple for the last two hundred years
are invariably Hindus, (most of them adopt new the surname pal like shrish chandra pal, son of illustrious painter rajani chitrakar), the paTuas of Ayas maintain their leanings towards Islam. We have tried to ascertain the causes of their religious affiliations, and their respective economic positions. For acceptance of Islam the paTuas could not offer any legendary or satisfactory reason. Going deep into the problem we could find that economic and social security was perhaps the main cause which allured them to come closer to the religious groups as stated above. It has been noted earlier that the citrakaras of Kalighat have deviated in course of time from the age-old profession of scroll making and clay modelling and various other professions through social and economic evolution. The economic mainstay of this community is making of clay images to meet the demands of both the pilgrims and the local market. Besides living in a city they have opportunities to accept various other professions. The citrakaras of Ayas on the otherhand living in a caste Hindu village are often ostracised by the Hindus and live a life of frustration and drudgery. Their age old profession has failed to give them the required economic support for a living and hence the traditional activities such as scroll painting and idol making are becoming to them more and more uneconomic. On the other hand being Muslims they are not only treated equally by the other Muslims, they can earn better living by accepting masonry profession which is somewhat traditional with the Muslim inhabitants.
A closer analysis makes it apparent that their leanings are more towards Islam than towards Hinduism. They, no doubt, follow some Hindu practices, but these are more like social customs than religious rites. In a Hindu dominating area, the patuās are engaged in idol making, scroll making, shola work, garland and mat making. They even earn money by singing songs of goddess Jurgā, or of the divine cow, etc. In an Islamised village, such as that of Ayas their profession is mostly masonry in addition to the making Tājī. Instead of singing the songs of Hindu gods and goddesses the patuās at times are found earning money by singing jārī song. In the social customs however such distinctions are not so emphasised. As for example in the marriage ceremonies, the patuās do not perform any such rite like yajña or sampradāna, but they are found to have practised various strāchāra including badhuvarāna. In the social and religious life, they mix up socio-religious practices of both Hindus and the Muslims. They observe the major religious festivals of the Muslim, but the Hindu rites and rituals evoke in them the mystic admiration and sentimental feelings.

The obvious question will be, why do they follow Hindu rituals in their Islam-oriented religious attitude? It is because of the fact that in Hindu-dominated society they are not only exposed through the ages, but they are basically a part of it. They do not want to shake off their traditional bindings, with Hindu religion, which as a matter of fact has
been almost the norm of life. On the other hand they have accepted Islam purely on defensive ground, which to them was an alternative religion, but was not as alternative social base. Indeed their base in Islamic religion was not solid enough to take themselves away from the root culture which they have inherited through generations. Besides, they are solely dependent on the patronage given by the Hindus and for fulfilling the obligation they remain involved not only with Hindu legends and myths, but days in and around they are busy in reproducing Hindu divinities as part of their profession. This constant association with Hindu thought and philosophy must have had created an impact on the minds of these painters, who were destined to be Muslims by faith and by culture Hindu. The insecure social position in which they were fallen through ages have led them to highlight the moralist approach of equality and fraternity in the personification of Hindu gods, such as Yama and Jagannātha.

From the above study it is apparent that the Citrakaras oscillated from one religion to the other and from one cultural complex to the other complex. But the uniqueness lies in the fact that, whatever could have been their religious affiliation, be it Hindu or Muslim, they not only bring out the social stereotypes, but through their art activity they also try to highlight the ethos out of which these stereotypes have been
Other castes practising folk paintings -
the Kumbhakaras and the Sūtradharas

Apart from the Citrakaras, the professional Paṭuās we
find other craftsmen communities like Kumbhakarās (potters)
and Sūtradharas (architects and wood carvers) practising
painting as subsidiary occupation. Some groups of Kumbhakarās
produce cāla and sarā, while sections of Sūtradharas used to
produce tāsē and pata.

It is claimed that the Kumbhakarās originated from Śiva
and not from Viśvakarmā as stated in Brahmaṇa-vāivarta Purāṇa.
According to the popular story Śiva created the first potter
Rudrapāla from the lock of his beard for moulding maṅgalehāris
required for his marriage. Both the communities of Kumbhakarās
and Sūtradharas have been identified in the Purāṇas as belonging
to the mixed Śudra caste community. Later on the Sūtradharas
like the Citrakaras were expelled from the recognised caste
order. It appears that during late medieval period they
alongwith many other castes "had to give up the sacred thread"

31 Census, op.cit., p. 318.
34 Ibid.
Whatever might be their caste origin, there is no denying the fact that both these communities had to face almost the same kind of economic deprivations like the Citrakaras leading to a degradation in social hierarchy. Difference in the socio-economic status of these three communities is only of degree, because the demand for the basic products made by the Khumbhakāra and the Sūtradharas were going down in the society. But it was not as bad as that of the Citrakaras. It should be noted in this context that due to the lack of patronage, the positions which the Sūtradharas and the Kumbhakāras were enjoying earlier could not be the same in the later period. One may recall at this stage that a section of the Sūtradharas used to do tāsa painting in Vishnupur court and as the royal court artisans they were given the honorary title of Fauzdar. Unfortunately it has not been possible for us to trace this school. During our survey we met these persons belonging to this Fauzdar community, but they are not doing this profession excepting one, Sudhir Fauzdar who is now working in the railways. He does not do the work any more, but has not forgotten the traditional skill. The painter groups of Mertala, Kasthasali (Purbasthali.P.S.) in the Burdwan district, who are also known as belonging to the traditional school of painters have given up painting.

The Kumbhakāras on the other hand are producing sarās and cālas in mass scale as subsidiary profession, near and around the cities. But in the remote village they are almost
on the verge of extinction. Growing sophistication and mechanisation in the field of architecture and carpentry and introduction of steel, ceramic and aluminium utensils specially in urban and semi-urban markets have started posing same problems to both these communities which were once faced by the Citrakaras with the introduction of oleographs, prints and photography.

With the change in the socio-economic pattern in urban as well as in rural life, the ritualistic and functional demands of folk paintings have eroded leading to the gradual decay of art tradition. Consequently the community living on this profession has been completely disintegrated. Even the tribals like Santhals, Bhumijs etc. migrating from their original homeland and shifting to industrial and agricultural labourers' job, had to give up traditional tribal values attached to such paintings. During the last three decades, growth of industrialisation, mechanisation and urbanisation, political, economic and social instability, continuous mobility of different ethnic groups have challenged the basic traditional base of rural Bengal along with its value system. As a result, a new cultural complex and set of values are in the process of growth. In such changing milieu the folk painters are struggling hard for their survival.