Chapter 4
Religious expressions (beliefs, ideas, sentiments) were to be found in the very early period of human history, namely, during the Middle Palaeolithic period, which is dated as c 30,000 B.P. It is not known whether any kind of religion existed even earlier. However, on the basis of reconstruction of burials, it is now clear that the concept of life after death and the unknown prevailed which may have been akin to religion.

As tribal communities are close to nature, they are influenced more directly by the supernatural, than the people in higher societies. Human ability to think encompasses an enormous range of ideas. In the present discussion regarding religion, the author considers a distinction between naturalistic and supernaturalistic ideas prevalent among the two tribal communities.

According to Elman R Service (1966) "Existential ideas can be either naturalistic or supernaturalistic. It is evident that supernaturalism occupies a larger ideological space, and naturalism much less, in primitive society than in modern society."
4.1 RELIGION OF THE BHARIAS

The inherent and deep-rooted longing for tribal unity and solidarity is expressed and strengthened by rituals associated with and arising from occasions like birth, marriage, death and the seasonal festivals. During these occasions other villages within the Patalkot crater area come together to share a communal meal, dance and generally enjoy themselves.

4.1.1 RITUAL CYCLE

The Bharia calendar begins in the month of Poush (December-January). The Bharia people begin this month with the worship of the Elephant God and the event is known as Ganesh Puja. In a festive mood all the Bharia families prepare different kinds of sweets where laddu is a must, which is prepared from Kodeka rice and jaggery. Womenfolk play a major role in the preparation of sweets. Almost every house is expected to participate in such preparation according to their means. In the evening, the Bharias worship images usually made of cowdung. The womenfolk prepare the images of Ganesh in the morning and the deities are worshipped in the evening. Next day the images are immersed in the nearby river which marks the end of the ceremony.

During the second month of Magh (January-February), there are not any significant religious ceremonies. The third month of Phalgun (February - March), locally pronounced as Phagun is characterized by a grand occasion. All the Gonds and the Bharias visit a nearby hill to worship Bara Mahadeo and to take part in the fair that is associated with this ritual. The fair continued for at least three days. The tribal folk
approach the hill top via Tamia on foot. Upon reaching the foot hills they bathe in the river Deno, wear new clothes and then move on towards the hill top. Here they offer coconut as a mark of respect to the God Lord Shiva and having enjoyed the fair they return to their respective villages.

The Bharias observe another festival during this month which happens to be the *Holi* (Festival of colours). The day before the festival male members of the tribe, both adults and children, collect *lokri* (Logs) from each and every house and gather the contribution in a place within the village. In the evening these logs put together are set ablaze. Prior to torching the logs, four to five *Chapattis* (Hand made bread of maize flour), a coconut, some *Ghee* (Clarified butter) are placed over them in order to perform *Hawan* (Sacred fire). The male members sing and dance merrily surrounding the fire.

On the next day, i.e, on the day of the *Holi* the tribal folks concentrate on the *Phag Khela* (i.e, smearing each other with mud soaked in various coloured powders). Thereafter, they bathe to wash off the colour stains from their body and return home to end the festivities.

No festivals are observed during the following two months of *Chaitra* (March-April) and *Baisakh* (April-May).

The month of *Jaistha* (May-June), colloquially known as *Jeth*, is important for a typical ritual which is related to the worshipping of cultivable land. The occasion, known as *Nautrr*, commences with the sowing of seeds in the field. The worship of land is undertaken by the elder members of the family along with the women folk. They offer hens and roosters, betel leaf, flowers, home made sweets to the field. In the
evening the tribals light earthen paniers in the field and then have Prasad which consists of Roti (hand made bread of maize flour) and coconut.

No rituals are performed in the month of Ashar (June - July). But the tribals do observe a special day in Sravana locally termed as Sawan (July - August) to celebrate Raksha bandhan. The women from the tribe who have brothers buy Dhaga (Coloured thread) from the upland Haat (weekly market). The day before and on the day of the occasion they tie these on the wrists of their brothers and serve them sweets. In the evening they all gather in a common place to drink, sing and dance till late night.

This ritual is followed by another ritual known as Kajalian. Two days before the actual ritual, seeds are sown in an earthen pot and kept inside the house sheltered from sun light. They take all care to bring about the growth of yellow pods from these seeds within a limited time period. Then in the presence of all villagers the Bhumka (Village priest, Halku) worship the earthen pot with yellow pods known as Kajalian. The seed sowing is infact done by the Bhumka himself. During the worship, a little milk mixed with Hald (turmeric) is spread over the pot. This is followed by the offerings of coconut and incense sticks. After the pot has been worshipped, it is immersed in the Dudhi river. Having done this, all the villagers gather to join in drinking and dancing. The next ritual is related to the worship of cattle in the month of Bhadra (August - September). They call it Pola- Panchami. The ritual is held on the fifth day of the month. A crude preparation of Laddu (home made sweet) is required on this occasion. So a batter made of maize flour, mahua and water is kept on a
perforated lid of *Patna* (Earthen pot). This pot which is full of water is placed on a hearth, to prepare *laddus* by steam treating the batter. The process is locally termed as *Thetra*.

The author’s informant, Halku (Village priest) informed that *thetra* is prepared in every house which shows whole-hearted involvement of the villagers in the said occasion. In the evening a typical item *Gedri* (Ranpa i.e, high wooden poles used for fast moving) is made. The eldest member of each house worships both the *thetra* and *gedri* and finally the two items are thrown away outside the village. Just one day after this ritual is performed, each family arranges a feast (Barga) according to their means and invite relatives and friends from other villages. They try to arrange meat and liquor for the feast.

Next they observe *Dipawali* (Festival of light) in the month of *Kartick* (October - November). On the first day fasting is observed by the male members of the village for the whole day and the women fast on the following day. In the evening of the second day when the cattle return from the field the female members of the family put *Tika* (a mark of vermillion) on the foreheads of their cattle and then touch their feet. They also dress the female cows with peacock feathers and bells. Then *Roti* (hand made bread), vegetables, and water are offered to the animals. But they do not offer any food to hens and cows. After offering food to their cattle, they end fasting. In the evening all the houses are lighted up with earthen paniers.

No ritual is observed in the last month of the calendar i.e, *Aghrayan* (November - December).
4.1.2 ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The Bharias believe in various natural and unnatural situations and are very much in awe of souls of deceased people.

"Ritual action engages people and groups not only with spirits but also with each other in segmentary social relationships". (Shalins, 1968). Therefore, it is not strange if the Bharias persistingly believe that the spirits of their ancestors are benevolent to them. In case of a death in Patalkot, the mourning period usually lasts for ten days and during that period the relatives of the deceased offer food (Kodu-Kutkti) in a leaf cup and leave it in front of the deceased house. They worship their ancestors regularly and also especially on the day of Dipawali. On that auspicious day they offer a black chicken to their family God in the name of their ancestors. They believe that their ancestors are some sort of perpetual angel guards keeping a vigilance on them.

They commonly believe that a man is reborn in his grandson and a woman in her granddaughter. They also believe that the soul (Spirit) of bad people are not allowed to remain in Bhagwan's (God's) abode after death. But the soul of people immediately after death are allowed entry into God's kingdom and after a few years they are reborn. To keep the departed where they belong, to keep them in good order and to keep them satisfied, stones (resembling prehistoric menhir) are set up while care is taken to ensure that the dead are not offended.

The Bharias erect bamboo poles in memory of the deceased person after the funeral feast. A piece of cloth is
tied at the end of a bamboo pole and this structure is placed upright within the courtyard of the deceased's house.

4.1.3 **RITES OF PASSAGE**

Rituals have social consequences as the nature of the society would have some influence on the nature of the rituals. All families of the world in which every society has some sort of rituals connected with birth, marriage, and death. Naturally, the Bharias of Patalkot also have rituals connected with all these as well as the change from childhood to adolescent status.

4.1.3.1 **BIRTH**

Among the Bharias, a child birth is considered as the re-entry of their immediate ancestor into the family once again, a belief partly shared by several Hindus of India who worship their ancestors. A Bharia girl comes to know about menstruation (*Chouka - ke - Bahar*) and conjugal life from her older friend who is already got married. Like other non-tribal caste women, the rules of avoidance during menstruation is applicable to the Bharia girl also. She is kept in seclusion inside a corner of her house and she is not allowed to touch any house hold objects and her food is served by the other female member of the family or her mother. She is treated as unclean and has to live and sleep separately as long as her period lasts. After it is over she takes purificatory bath and resumes her household duties.

The author's informant Sanba's wife informed her that during menstruation no husband is allowed to perform any sacrifice. At the same time wives are not allowed to touch water pot, hearth, utensils, grain bins. Even, they do not enter
the cattleshed. The husband of a menstruating woman must not perform sexual intercourse with her because it is believed that if a person violated this rule he would become impotent. Even the husband cannot go for hunting though he can go to the field for ploughing. These taboos observed by the Bharias are not common among the non-tribal groups.

In case of child birth no magical help is taken by the pregnant woman to ensure an easy birth. As they feel ashamed to have a baby in front of others so it takes place inside a corner of the house. This is the room where a fire is kept burning all day and night. The new mother is not allowed to go outside the room as a protection against evil spirit. The *Sutnmat* (Midwife) should be a Bharia, only in difficult cases may a Gond woman be called for assistance. This midwife offers her service free of charge. Only a piece of cloth is sometimes offered to her. There is no such restrictions on new born's father's movement. After gaining strength the mother resumes her usual house hold work.

There is no such purificatory rites and no name-giving ceremonies in the Bharia community. The name is given any time after birth mainly for the reason that the Project-tribal office can maintain the register.

4.1.3.2 MARRIAGE

Uusually the Bharias do not select their own brides or grooms. However, marriage by service is practised when the boy is not able to pay the bride price. The prospective son-in-law who serves for his wife's family is known as *Gharglan*. During the author's stay at Patalkot one particular intrusion was made by a boy who intruded in girl's family and by serving the
family he got his wife. Widow remarriage is also common after an affair. Sukulu of Sikhabha village fell in love with a widow after meeting her in a weekly market. They decided to live together and settled in the Gujjadongri village where the widow lived with her former husband, Gillu and a Spastic daughter.

There are no fixed auspicious days for marriage. Generally, the Bharias prefer winter season (November - December) and try to select a day after the weekly market because that is a convenient day for marriage for everybody concerned. For the betrothal ceremony the girl’s father invites the father of the boy with his friends and relatives for a dinner. The actual marriage day is fixed on that day by a Brahmin (Highest caste) from the upland. This is the only occasion when a Brahmin is called from the upland.

As the marriage party reaches the girl’s house with some presents Lugra (like wedding cloth) for her, turmeric water is thrown on them (Turmeric powder is considered as auspicious to the Bharias just like it is considered by Hindus and other non-tribals). This is the binding ritual of the betrothal when the girl recognized by the boy’s family and considered as the bride of their boy.

On the day of the marriage, the courtyard of the bride’s house is cleaned neatly by smearing cow dung and water. After that, a marriage booth is erected with branches of trees. All the villagers along with the friends and relatives of the bridegroom attend the ceremony. Bride price is paid shortly before the wedding. The price is fixed at rupees forty to fifty. In addition, the bride’s father pays for liquor and the wedding dinner. The rate of bride price varies according to the economic condition of the family.
So far as the Bharias are concerned, it is not necessary that the bride be sexually mature at the time of her wedding. The marriage rites which are performed at the wedding of a virgin girl are simple. Weddings, as stated earlier, generally take place on the day after the weekly market. Though they have been living in close proximity with the Gond, specially in the villages, Ghatlinga, Rated, the Bharias do not allow any inter tribal marriage. If any occurs through love-affair they do not allow the couple to stay within Patalkot and the couple are banished from Patalkot for ever.

The day following the bridegroom's anointing with turmeric is considered as the actual wedding day. In the early afternoon of the wedding day, the groom has to take bath and the turmeric is rubbed off. He has to clean himself and dress in new clothes. The bridegroom party called Barat march in procession to the bride's village. The wedding procession is always accompanied by musicians of their own group.

Meanwhile the bride is being bathed in the backyard of her house and dressed up in new cloth and silver ornaments for the wedding by the female member of her family. While the bridegroom stands at the entrance of the courtyard, the bride's mother pours water over the groom's bare legs. It is the expression of welcome to bride's house.

Next, the bridegroom is carried on to the marriage booth by his brother in law. At the same time the bride is also carried on by her brother in law. The bride's face is covered with cloth. They sit side by side in the wedding booth. The ritual is conducted by the Bhumka (Village priest) who put a pot full of grains in front of the couple. In the mean time the mother of the bride is asked to sit down with
outstretched legs. Both the groom and the bride are placed on her lap. A ten paise coin is placed over the grain in the pot and the bride is asked to spread the grain on the floor while the bride groom keeps it again within the pot. Next, the elder members of both the families give presents—mainly one or two rupees in the bride's hand. The village priest offers *Hawan* (Sacred fire) pouring clarified butter, incense into a small fire, and sprinkle liquor on it. After that the *Bhumka* takes a strip of cloth and ties a small amount of grain from the pot, ten paise and a little turmeric in a corner of this cloth, one end of this strip of cloth is tied to the bridegroom's loin cloth and the other end to the bride's *Lugra*. Then the bride's mother or the elder female member of the bride's village bring water to wash hand of bridegroom and bride. This time, the guests demand liquor from the father of the couple. The brides mother prepares a dish of *Kodu-Kutki* and lentils, turmeric, salt and water (*Khicheri*). The couple eat from the same plate. After their meal they wash their hands, a woman member of bride's famly pours water over their hands. The water is not allowed to drop on the floor but is caught in a plate. Meanwhile, the village priest, drinking steadily, finishes his drink from which he has sprinkled a few drops on the fire. Thus the ritual is completed. Now the priest leads the young couple three times around the wedding post when the bridegroom clutches with his left hand the little finger of his bride's left hand after which they enterd the bride's house where they sit down on a sheet of a cloth spread on the floor. Now they are considered to be married.

Soon after the ceremony, the relatives of the bride begin to serve liquor. At a wedding, everybody gets a drink, men, women and even children.
A wedding is an occasion of public enjoyment, a social affair, when the guests meet all their kith and kin, when public affairs discussed and new matches are arranged.

The entertainment continues till late in the night. Bride and bridegroom have been separated after the blessings of the guests. They do not see each other for the whole night. In the morning the groom's party leaves for home with the bride accompanying her now spouse.

When they arrive at the bridegroom's house, his mother welcomes the couple at the gate and serves them a meal of Kodu-Kutki and pulses. After that all the guests are liberally entertained with liquor and later a meal is served. They sing and dance till late at night.

Married life usually begins for the young couple on the same day as the wedding guests leave. The following night they sleep together for the first time in the hut which has been prepared for them. If the girl is still immature she is allowed to return to her parents. Conjugal life is postponed till she comes of age, when her husband comes with relatives to take her to his house.

4.1.3.3 DEATH AND FUNERAL

The last inhabitants of the old stone age used to bury their dead in the floor of the caves they occupied, which is a sign of spirituality. The caves of Mendip have yielded several pieces of bones related to some ritualistic functions. These were possibly associated with a human burial dated about 9000 BC.
During the author's stay in Patalkot she observed that the Bharias used to bury their dead and put boulders over the grave. Their *Marghat* (Burial Ground) is situated inside narrow ditches, far inside the wild solitude nature of Patalkot.

When a death occurs and they seem to realize the loss, they are going to suffer. The women begin to cry loudly and this sort of mourning seems to be a sad song which they lament in a rhythm. A messenger is sent to the deceased's kinsmen and relatives in other villages. All the neighbouring people come to the deceased's house and the women join to sing dirges while the men sitting outside the huts are not ashamed to shed tears.

Some part of the ground in front of the house is cleared up by the female relatives. By this time a few young men are sent to the burial ground to dig a grave which will contain the corpse easily. The body is carried outside, which then is undressed for the bath. All the valuable silver ornaments are taken off. A man's body is bathed by his male relatives and woman's body by women. Before this the body is smeared with oil and turmeric. After bath, the body is covered with a new cloth and the hair is combed. If new cloth is not available, used one is used by them. The village priest acts as master of the ritual. Two long poles and five rungs are tied with bark ropes to form a cot on which bundles of grass is placed over which a cloth is spread and the body is laid on it with face looking up. After covering the body with another cloth, it is fastened to the stretcher with strings tied cross-wise over the body. The villagers, relatives including men and women accompany the funeral procession but the women and children are not allowed to follow it to the actual place of funeral. One
of the kinsmen carry an earthen pot keeping some edible vegetables inside and follows the funeral procession. When the procession reaches the Marghat, they circle round the grave three times. Then the relatives lift the body from the stretcher and place it inside the grave for eternal rest. The earthen pot with vegetables and a few coins is placed on one side of the corpse. Then all the kinsmen along with the villagers put soil on the grave. After filling up they place boulders on the grave and thus a mound of boulders is formed over the grave. They left the pyre, on which the body has been carried to the burial ground. After the funeral, all the participants take bath in the nearby river.

By this time the women members of the deceased’s family, and the woman folk of the village who followed the procession up to a certain distance return to the mourner’s house. They clean the house with fresh cowdung. After cleaning they all take bath.

When the accompanying male members of the procession return they all sit outside the house and drink some liquor. Money is collected from all for the liquor. Food is prepared to some other fellow villager’s house but not in the deceased’s house because that particular house is considered as impure. Before leaving that house all sit together and decide the actual day of the funeral feast.

The mourning period continues for ten days. During this period they offer food (Kodu-Kutki) in a leaf cup and place it in front of the hose for the soul of the deceased.

On the day before the actual funeral feast, all the relatives of the deceased come to the house and help to clean
it thoroughly. All the used earthen pots are thrown away. New hearth in prepared and the house is smeared with cowdung and clay.

On the day of the feast all the kinsmen tonsure their heads and shave off thin beards. Finger and toe nails are pared. The women only pare their nails and later all take bath in the river. Halku, who is the head man of the Rated village, usually takes the leading role on such occasions. A pot of water is carried to the deceased's house from the river by the village priest and sprinkled over the guests who assemble in the deceased's house. Water is also sprinkled in every corner of the house in order to purify it.

The dinner is served on leaf plates. When all the guests have received their share of food, then on request of the headman, all start to eat their food. Before dinner is announced each guest gets a cup of liquor and more if he so desires. Food prepared for the feast mainly include milk prepared from Kodu-Kutkt, pulses, and goat meat which is cut into very small pieces to provide for all the guests. Whatever their economic condition, the Bharias try to entertain the funeral guests as lavishly as they can. After dinner, all the men and women spend the night by singing and dancing.

4.1.3.4 WORLD VIEWS

Significant contributions on world view has been made by Clyde Kluckohn and Dorothea Leighton (1949), about the Navaho way of life. Forde (1954), in his "Introduction to African Worlds", said that world view is expressed not only in the belief system but is also derivable from customs, rituals, and actions. Next, Mandelbaum (1955a) uses Redfield's model and
brought three types of relationships to describe world view - Man to man, man to nature, and man to the supernatural relationships.

Geertz (1968) differentiates between ethos and states that "a peoples' ethos is the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood, while world view is their picture of the way things..... are, their concept of nature, of self, of society." Later many authors like Jones (1972), Haimendorf (1969), Bose (1971) contributed their views on the said matter.

The concept of world view is instrumental not only in deriving an inside view of culture but also in providing an overall statement agents of change.

The ideas and beliefs on supernatural beings play an important role in the life pattern of the Bharias of Patalkot. It is observed that this spiritual beliefs mirror the structure of their society. In each and every studied villages there are sacred places where the villages perform various types of rituals, sometimes alone, sometimes through Bhumka, the village priest.

These people consider themselves either related to, or perhaps decended from, some particular plant or animal species or inanimate objects of the nature. The relationship is manifested ritually (totemic belief).

Bharla priest named Halku used to worship or offer puja on behalf of his clan men and he is very much proud of his position and fully aware of his duties. He is responsible for making all the sacrifices regarded as major from religious point of view at village level. He is considered as the mediator.
between the deity and the villagers and it is his duty to fix up the date of the ritual and the sacrifices.

There is no definite concepts which the Bharias of Patalkot entertain concerning the universe and the world. Majority of them do not give much thought to such speculations. Only the intelligent persons like Bhumka, Patel have a fairly clear idea about the universe, though the concepts are not at all uniform everywhere.

The beliefs of the Bharias are largely influenced by local and individual interpretations and are based on, to some extent, Hindu religion. This is due to interactions, taking place in the Haat, weekly market, when the Bharias of Patalkot come up for attaining those markets.

In the village Ghatlinga, the rites and rituals performed by the Bharias are greatly influenced by their Gond neighbour. With these Gond neighbour the Bharias started visiting Bara Maha Deo and Chota Maha Deo (the highest and the next highest hill tops of Panchmari hills). It is believed that they are the almighty God protecting the life and property of these tribal folks. Every year during the festive day, thousands of tribal people take pains to reach those hill tops on foot (many miles of walk through the jungles and hilly ravines) for offering pujas.

Though the feeling of God is not so strong in them but the very existence of Him is known to them. Because of constant fear, a sort of feeling developed in them to believe in natural calamities, ghosts, giants, or kind of Gods like Mahadev, Bhimseru, Bajrangball. They believe that ultimately deaths or serious diseases are due to the curse of those
unnatural powers. So, in case of illness, unknown to them, they arrange a sort of rituals in order to offer gifts of coconut, *Morga* (Rooster), *Agarbatti* (Incense Stick) to that power through their village priest.

Inside the Patalkot area, specially in the Rated village, a temple of *Hanumanji* was established two months before author's visit. Another priest Jammunsi, next to Halku used to offer coconut and water specially on Saturday for the welfare of the village.
4.2 RELIGION OF THE KORA

The kora religion has a great effect of Hinduism. At the same time they retain their aboriginal characteristics to a great extent which is reflected in their beliefs in God, nature, ancestor worships and in life crisis rites.

According to Risley "In matter of religion koras affect to be orthodox Hindus, worshipping the regular Gods and calling themselves Saktas or Vaishnavas according as they incline to the cult of Kali, Durga, Manasha or to that of Radha and Krishna. Manasa, the heavenly patroness of snakes and Bhadu, the virgin daughter of the Pachete house, are their favourite deities. Their village and household deities are Bhairab Thakur, Gram Deoti, and Kudra to whom goats, fowls, pigeons, rice, sugar and plantains are offered on no fixed dates, and are divided between the worshippers and the Deogharia Brahmins, who serve them as priests and keep in order the shriner (Kudra than and Bhairabthan) of the village gods. In Manbhum, the koras do not employ Brahmin but a member of the caste, styled the Laya and Naya in further east. They are served by Barna Brahmins."

4.2.1 RITUAL CYCLE

The author collected data on the above topic from different persons of different villages.

(1) Sombhu Kora (age 60 yrs.) of Kurumsha village.

(2) Dharam Kora (age 72 yrs.) of Sundardanga

(3) Uttam Kora (age 27 yrs.) of Sundipur-Korapara.

(4) Jiten Kora of Dighir Par.
**Chapter 4**

**Chaitra (March - April):**

The occasion is called *Baha Parab*. They worship *Shiva*, called by them as *Bonga Buru*, on 31st Chaitra i.e., the last day of the month. Epidemics are considered as an evil happening which caused due to wrath of evil spirits for which the puja is suspended for that year. It is performed in individual's house where the head of the family acts as the priest. In the afternoon they worship the deity with incense sticks, vermillion, *Atap* rice, mustard oil and liquor. Chicken is also sacrificed. All the elder members of the family observed fasting till the puja is completed. Day before the occasion *Handla* (Rice beer) is prepared by the female members of the family keeping herself on fasting till the liquor is prepared.

Before sacrifice, the chicken is fed with liquor. Mango eating is a taboo till the puja ends. For this particular ritual, fruit is not offered to the God, although mango has, by this time come to the market.

**Bhadra (August - September):**

This is a clan worship which was primarily conducted by the members of the *Shapu* (Snake) clan. Now-a-days the puja is decentralized and becomes compulsory among other clans like *Jhanp Potra* (Frog), *Kisher* (Bird), *Haro* (Turtle) *Shadom* (Horse).

After consulting the yearly calendar the Koras of Birbhum perform the *Manasha* (Goddess of snake) *Puja* which they call Boga puja. They prefer to fix the fifth day (*Panchami*) of Bhadra (August - September). They do not need a *Brahmin* priest since the concept of idolatry is not common among the koras. They in fact worship a small mound of earth which
symbolizes Boga i.e., Manasha. On that auspicious day the worshipper observes complete fasting. Then they take purificatory bath and settle an earthen pot full of water with three or five mango leaves inserted in it, inside a small (7" x 9") hut. This hut in miniature form is specially built and is considered by them as the abode of the Boga. The above hut is always built in front of the above mentioned mound. As a ritual, they used to place five different flowers among which lotus and shoe flower (China rose) are compulsory on that earthen pot which is decorated with five vermilion dots. As such they do not decorate with designs on the floor.

In front of that mound brown or black goat is sacrificed and its head is cooked separately with Atap rice (Parboiled rice).

This cooked Prasad (food items offered to the deities) is then distributed among the male members only. Whereas, the flesh of the body is cooked separately in the house-kitchen, which is being distributed first to the female members and then to the friends and relatives. Naturally the meat is consumed with rice. However, it has been reported by the informant that fruits and Atap rice are also offered. While performing this puja, like the Hindus, the incense sticks are also used.

The recent inflation has marred the grandeur of this festival to some extent. The economic condition does not allow all the villagers to be entertained with delicious cooked items. Although, community drinking with country liquor still exists in the evening of that day. Now a days, kora musicians are very difficult to get hence musical programme are curtailed to a great extent.
Kartick (October - November)

The Kora of Birbhum observed Kaltpuja in a peculiar manner. Influenced by the local caste Hindus they used to clean their houses in the morning of the puja day. Usually it is performed in the courtyard of each household (those who can afford) where the Than is located. A fowl is sacrificed in front of the Ghat (Earthen pot full of water, smeared with vermillion). Three Mango leaves are inserted inside it beforehand and flowers and incense sticks are used. Fruits and Atap (Parboiled) rice also offered, which is distributed as prasad later on.

No Brahmin priest is appointed. Binoy Kora of Kora-para village himself worshipped the Goddess along with Mahadev on behalf of his family. In the evening each household is illuminated with earthen lamps like the Hindus.

Another puja (Gidi Bhara) is also performed on the last day of this month (Kartik Sankranti). Before performing this puja they would not be able to harvest the paddy and would not even consume newly harvested rice. They collect tuft of new paddy and use a new earthen pot to make flattened rice. Then head of the family offered it on a banyan leaf to their ancestral deities, Pilchu Buro and Pilchu Burt. Before offering this, the head observed fasting.

This concept of Pilchu Buro and Pilchu Burt is a borrowed one due to influence of the neighbouring santals.

Poush (December - January)

On the Makar Sankranti day, the Koras of Birbhum
usually worship *Tusu Puja*.

Rice cakes, sweets made of milk and rice are prepared like local Hindus. Usually females sing *Tusu* songs.

After that the idol of the Goddess *Tusu* is immersed in the river or nearby tank.

According to some kora people this ritual is observed to avoid cold wind for which they used to lit fire of *Dol* (a kind of grass) and enjoy the heat. Partly the above ritual has got a similarity with the *Makar Sankranti* of Hindus.

**Magh (January - February):**

Probably Hindus have influenced greatly the Koras of Birbhum who take special attention to organize *Saraswati puja* (Goddess of knowledge) in their own community. In fact, the author has observed in kora-para village that the koras imitate very nicely in so far as *Saraswati puja* is concerned. Like the Hindus who fast during the worship the Koras do not take any food till the *Pushpanjali* (offering of flowers to the goddess) is offered. After the puja they take *prasad* to break the fast. Then they are allowed to take their traditional food like rice, puffed rice, liquor.

In the month of *Magh* another puja *Gram Dhotti* is performed by these people. This is celebrated in the community level for protecting the village from the attack of evil spirits.

It is conducted by the *Morol* (Head man) of the village along with one *Chhoridar* (Assistant). For this purpose a fixed place on the eastern side of the *morol's house* is selected. In the Kora para village, Binoy kora does this job very skillfully.
Chapter 4

and money is collected from each family as subscription.

21 kg grain is transformed into rice and one hen and one rooster is purchased from the market. *Handia* is prepared beforehand with one or two kg of rice (collected earlier).

First of all two (one hen and one rooster) are sacrificed and *handia* is taken in a cup and Binoy slowly pours it in the mouth of the sacrificed (but not yet dead) birds. Then both the birds are roasted with rice, turmeric, salt, red chilli and mustard oil in a large saucepan. The cooked *prasad* is taken by all the male members but no female is allowed to take it. They believe that if any female takes it then she will lose her fertility. After that they spend merrily drinking *handia* till late night.

4.2.2 ANCESTOR WORSHIP:

Other than the traditional *pujas* based on their calendar, the koras of Birbhum keep themselves engaged in the worships of their ancestors.

The *Maram Bonga puja* do not follow any date calendar but it is done according to their convenience. *Surya Puja* (Sun God) Colloqually termed as the worship of *Maram Bonga*, is usually done by each and every clan members along with their kin members. It is specifically an ancestral worship which is ideologically very much similar to *Tarpan* [Offering drinking water with *Til* (*Sesnum indicum*) to forefathers, a Hindu custom]. The Koras also offer water to their forefathers after finishing the *puja* in order to establish a relationship between the *Sun God* and their ancestors. The worship is performed in two phases.

**Phase I**: On the day of the new moon, between *Magh* (January - February) and *Baisakh* (April - May) usually they
select their convenient day for the purpose.

On that auspicious day, early in the morning, before sunrise all the clan and kin members take a purificatory bath in the nearby pond and observe Asouch (pollution period observed by the Hindus in case of a death of any clan members). During bath if they hear any bird's chirp then it is considered as a bad omen. For this, they used to get up very early in the morning for taking bath and select a new moon day. After coming from the pond they started cooking rice outside the village in a field (selected and cleared beforehand). At the time of the sunrise a black goat is sacrificed (black is considered as symbol of death). The goat is smeared with vermillion and dipped into the water before sacrifice. Meat is prepared and consumed by them. As returning to the village before sun set is strictly forbidden, they passed time by gossiping and singing in the field with their clan members. Drinking liquor is forbidden before sun-set on that day.

Phase II: Phase I is to propitiating the ancestors. Next phase is to welcome the future generation. In other way they call it Chandra Puja. After returning home when sun sets in the evening, they sacrifice a white goat in the courtyard by striking it on its head with a mace in a single blow. As the black goat symbolizes the dead so it is done outside the village and it represents Asouch (Pollution period). White is for the newcomer. It symbolizes future. Same person would do the sacrificing (both black and white). This person should be an elder member of the clan whose duty is then to narrate the litany of their origin. The meat and rice is consumed thereafter. This time the female members are allowed to take the Prasad (food items offered to the deities) first because they
are the symbol of fertility. They bring new life on earth. So these tribal folks take special care in offering the prasad to the pregnant woman as well. Before going to the field early in the morning they draw designs upon the floor in the courtyard and the drawing represents the story of their origin.

In their ritual cycle the author observed that on the last day of the month, Kartick (October - November) they perform Gidi Bhara, a festival related to harvesting of paddy where they offered flattened rice on a banyan leaf to their ancestor Buro Buri.

4.2.3 RITES OF PASSAGES

4.2.3.1 BIRTH

A girl picks up knowledge of menstruation and conjugal life from older married girls. A menstruating woman is not allowed to do any domestic work. She sleeps alone and after menstruation she must take a bath before she is permitted to take up her household duties. Among the Koras of Birbhum no special rite is observed during pregnancy. But she is not allowed to go outside the house in the night and the husband of the pregnant woman is not allowed to do sexual intercourse with her because they believe that the male would become impotent if he violates the rule.

Birth generally takes place in the house of the husband. Now a days those who can afford send their wives to in-law's house for child birth. In many cases the Koras used the corner of an inner room for the purpose. Those who have enough space, build a temporary structure in one corner of the courtyard for the purpose. This structure is known as Anturghar.
(Place of child birth) by the Hindus. Today many of them go to the Hospital for having their now-born babies.

Ganesh Kora of Kotasur village was born in the Sainthlya Hospital. After three days, both the mother and the child got released from the hospital and from then they observed the pollution period, rites and rituals as usual.

An elderly woman of the **Hadi Caste** is called for the help in delivery. Usually this midwife is well experienced in this affair and she takes help of other women in the family if she desires. She gets a new Sari (Cloth) and food free of cost for two to three days of staying with the mother and the new born baby as her remuneration. She used a new blade for parturition of the umbilical cord. During delivery, hot water, cotton thread, a cup of mustard oil and a coconut is supplied to her. After delivery she cleans the baby and helps the mother to clean herself. Then she buried the placenta in a pit in one corner of the backside of the house and covers it with cowdung manure. The umbilical cord is also buried in the same place after a few days. The room is then cleaned with cowdung, mud and water. An oil lamp is kept lighting whole day and night. A fire in an eathen pot is kept beside the mother’s bed.

The period of pollution is observed for five days or nine days or even twenty-one days in some cases. After five days a ritual known as **Pachuti** is observed by them. A hen is sacrificed by the head of the family to the family deity, mainly **Kali**.

During pollution period the whole family is tabooed from joining in any religious festivals of the village. No rites and ceremonies can also be observed in the polluted house.
Throughout the pollution period the mother is not allowed to come outside the room and do any domestic work. She only takes care of her new born baby.

On the day of the purification (either on the 5th or 9th or 21st day after child birth) Pachuti is observed. In many cases name giving ceremony is also held on the same day. The Napit (Barber) is called in for paring off the nails of all the family members. He demands new cloth, rice and money.

The mother and the baby are given the purificatory bath. After cleaning the whole house and courtyard with cowdung, mud and water the head of the family sprinkles water (in which basil leaves are dipped) all over the house and the members of the family. The new mother and the baby are allowed then to come outside and sit on a mat spread beforehand in the courtyard. One of the elder members of the house puts rice grains in a cup of water (one grain representing the child and others in the name of the ancestors of the child on the father's line) one by one at a time uttering the name of the ancestors like child's grandfather, uncle. If all the grains float on the water and when one grain touches the particular grain representing the new born it is believed that the child will be like that ancestor and will follow his path. The name is usually selected by the parents of the child and the child is blessed by all the members and relatives of the family and also by the assembled villagers. A feast is given to the guests with rice, meat and liquor.

The first rice-eating ceremony called Bhujna is performed when the child is six to seven months old. An auspicious day is selected for the occasion by the elder members of the village. On the said day the child is given bath and the kin members are invited. Preferably child's maternal uncle
feeds a little sweetened rice (specially prepared with milk and offered to the family deity) and after this the child is blessed by all the elder members of the family.

4.2.3.2 MARRIAGE

The Koras practiced monogamy strictly. Adult marriage is common and in no case the age of the girl is under fifteen. Normally they prefer marriage by negotiation between two families. If the marriage is by personal choice i.e. by affairs between two lovers, both the family and the village community will intervene and settle it. The loss of freedom in the choice of spouse is counterbalanced by the ease with which a marriage can be dissolved. Divorce is easy and the decision of the tribal council (Panchayat) is final.

If pre-marital sex relation is established between two lovers then the community head ask them to get married. If the boy refuses to marry that girl then the boy is punished by the community with a fine (token) and Handla (Rice beer) for the adult male members of the village.

Cross cousin and parallel cousin marriage is forbidden. But a man can marry his deceased wife's younger sister. Bride price was common earlier. Now-a-days, it is not practiced. Like the neighbouring Hindus, marriage does not take place in the months of Chaitra (March - April), Bhadra (August - September), Ashwin (September - October) and Poush (December - January).

Both love marriage and marriage by negotiation are practised. For negotiation a Suridar (Middle man) is appointed. Before marriage family members of the bride along with the middle man go to the boy's house for giving Mala Tusum (Blessings) to the boy and similarly the boy's elder family members visit the
girl's house. On that day the exact marriage day is fixed.

The marriage party comes to the village accompanied by musicians playing drums (Madal, Dhamsa).

Prior to marriage proper, the bride and the groom are annointed with oil and turmeric paste (Gaye Halud) like Hindus.

On coming to the bride's village with his father, relatives, his friends, suridar, village headman, the bridegroom salutes the village deities. The bridegroom brings sari (long piece of cloth) for the bride's mother known as Ma Sari, a Dai Sari for the midwife who was present during the birth of that girl, a white dhoti for the bride's brother (Sala Dhoti). As soon as the party reaches the bride's village they are cordially received by the bride's family members.

Mandua Chumba (Marriage booth) is erected in the courtyard. Two male members from the boy's party and two female members of the bride's family go for bringing water in an earthen pitcher from the nearby pond along with a big knife, sickle, turmeric, mango leaves and cowris. On the next day, the bride is carried on the lap of the wife of groom's elder brother and taken round the marriage booth three times. Similarly the groom is carried on the lap of his sister's husband and taken round the marriage booth three times. Next, both the bride and groom stand face to face and the groom puts three vermillion marks on the parting line of the hair of the bride with his left finger. Similarly, the bride do the same on groom's forehead known as sindurdan.

After the completion of the marriage the bridegroom's party returns to their own village with the bride and an
unmarried girl (mainly bride's cousin) who gets a sari as gift from the bridegroom. The marriage party along with bride is also cordially received by the groom's mother and other elderly members. On the eighth day after marriage the groom visits his in-law's house with the bride, a custom taken from the neighbouring Hindus. Then a Dhoti (New Cloth) is presented to the groom by bride's father.

After staying two to three days they return to the groom's village and a normal conjugal life is led by the couple from this time onward and thus the ritual connected to marriage ends.

4.2.3.3 DEATH AND FUNERAL

Usually they call a doctor for the final detection in so far as death is concerned. The koras usually bury their deads. But like the Hindus now-a-days they burn the dead body.

The body is washed and then smeared with honey and oil by the female members of the family inside the house. Then the deadbody is carried out in the courtyard by the nat relatives and is placed on the bier in north-south direction which is prepared before hand with the help of two bamboo poles and keeping a number of bamboo splits across the poles and tieing them with the help of ropes. Those who can afford purchase Khattyya (Bamboo cot) from the nearby market instead of making bier. A new loin cloth is used to cover the body which is then tied up with ropes to the bier. Neighbours and relatives help to collect necessary items for the cremation. The grandson of the deceased is the first member to lift the bier among the pall-bearers. In case of his absence the elder son would do the same. During the course of the funeral procession the members like the Hindus utter Bala Hart, Haribol (name
of Lord Vishnu) for several times.

The females are not allowed to take part in the funeral procession. After reaching the burning ground they placed the body on the pyre keeping the head in North, prepared beforehand with logs of wood. All the cloths are burnt along with the dead. Before cremation, the eldest son of the dead with a burning twig of a tree walk round the body for three times. After this the pyre is then lighted. After the cremation the participants take bath in the nearby tank or water sources and assemble in the deceased’s house where they bite a leaf of Nim tree. (*Melia azadirachta*) and every body lig a thorn of berry tree on the ground with the belief that he has severed all connections with the dead.

Pollution period lasts for ten days. During this pollution period (*Asuch*) the members and the relatives are prohibited from taking fish, meat, egg etc. They even do not put oil to their hair during the period. Three days before the completion of ten days a miniature hut (representing symbolically the hut of the dead) is built near the cremation ground and offered cooked rice, curry and water by the elder son of the deceased. Then they left the place and after sometime they return and if they found that a few rice is mixed with the water, it is believed that the soul of the deceased has come.

On the morning of the tenth day the purification ceremony is held. A barber is called in for shaving the head, beard and moustache and also for paring off the nails of the deceased’s sons and relatives. After that all take purificatory bath by smearing turmeric and oil paste.

Usually all the Kora families do not call any Brahmin
priest for performing rites and rituals. In this case usually head of the family, mainly the eldest son of the deceased (in his absence the next-man) performed the rites. But those who are affluent like Binoy Kora of Kora-Para village, calls a Brahmin priest for the purpose (a Hindu impact).

After purificatory bath on the same day a hen is sacrificed in the name of the deceased’s soul in order to get permission from him for performing the ceremony. All these days they keep burning an oil lamp outside the village.

On the same day i.e, on the tenth day after sacrificing the hen they tear the legs of the hen by twisting and offer to the village Ojha (Saman) and request him to reincarnate the deceased’s soul by his occultism. Next is the feast giving ceremony to all the relatives and villagers where drinking rice-beer is compulsory.

A special ritual is performed on the last week of Agrahayan (November - December). The Kora perform a ceremony to unite the soul of the deceased with the spirit of other dead ancestors. For this purpose two efficient elderly members of the deceased family must be present there at the time of propitiation.

A hen is selected and it is fed with food granules. They believe that the hen is the symbol of the evil spirits of their ancestors. So to propitiate those evil spirits they fed it with grains. Next, they select the North-east corner of the courtyard and in the evening sacrifice the hen with a single blow in belief to release the evil souls of their ancestors.

Finally, they perform the annual purificatory ceremony
by offering rice, *Ghee* (Clarified butter) and jaggery to deceased ancestor in the month of *Kartick* (October - November) and *Chaitra* (March - April).

In case of death of a pregnant woman the woman is cremated after the release of the foetus and the foetus is then buried. In case of still birth the little finger is cut off and then buried. If any child is born in the village with a cut mark in his finger it is believed that the particular child is reborn.

In case of child death the pollution period is for three days. No pollution is observed in case of accidental death. A Saman is called to purify the house by chanting occult *Mantras* surrounding the house. In case of death by infectious diseases the dead bodies are buried.

### 4.2.3.4 WORLD VIEW

Equality is the basic organizing principle among the koras. They prefer leisure to work and do not seek long-term rewards because they believe life to be uncertain. Surajit Sinha (1957a) suggests that the ideological system of the tribals covers man to the supernatural, man to nature, and man to man relationship.

Though the author's findings (after visiting a good number of villages in Birbhum) about the religious life of the Kora has some similarities with that of Risley's work but a change in different aspect is also noticed by her. The koras borrowed some of their deities from the neighbouring Hindus, some of the folk deities like *Tusu, Bhadu*, tribal concept of *Burn Burl* are borrowed from the neighbouring Santals and
rests are of their age-old traditions.

In the village Kora para the author observed two Thans (Seats for the deities), one known as Kali Than which is inside the courtyard of Binoy Kora (Morol) and another is known as Garani meaning for Garam Thakur, Sitala, Manasa.

The Gods are classified into two groups namely benevolent and malevolent. Rituals are performed mainly for the welfare of their community and to avoid sickness and death. They believe in the existence of soul after death. All goes to the abode of God. There is some sort of belief in reincarnation but it is not associated with Karma as in Hindu philosophy. Each and every household of the kora village provides one Tulsi Mancha (a structure made of cement or mud for Basil plant) which is considered by them as the seat of the ancestral spirits. Sometimes small earthen horses (offered by them) are kept besides those structures.

There is a predominant belief in magic and witchcraft. In their man-nature relationship, beliefs show that natural universe is to be continuous with the human world of interactions and sentiments.

In their case, man, nature, and the supernatural are all bound within a common bond of relationships. The entire universe is believed to be animated by spiritual beings. Supernatural world falls in the benevolent categories. They consider all human beings are more or less equal. Elders are respected, children are valued. Males generally dominate the social life and their aspiration level is low.
4.3 SUMMARY

As a migratory tribe, both the Bharias of Patalkot and the Koras of Birbhum have experienced an overall impact of its neighbouring communities like Gond, Hindus and Santals. It reflects in various rites and customs observed by them in religious lives.

Leaving their original homeland since decades, they adjust themselves to the new environment for rapid adaptation. But still they retain their originality in many aspects of their socio-cultural lives which are linked to the idea of the preservation of the self in the notion of ritual pollution. Birth, death and menstruation are regarded as polluting events and appropriate rituals have to be performed to restore an individual to the natural ritually purified stage. A common feature among them is the belief in an existence of a multitude of supernatural beings and a recognition of relation between the living and the dead. Their most of the rituals involved social integration and strengthening kinship ties among the dispersed relatives. It is also clear that some of their rituals are related to harvesting of the main crops i.e, after the yield of sufficient foods. Rituals here act as an institution which could function as an information processor among these tribal folks. Members of the same clan or the groups of different villages visited the clan members in these occasions and presumably exchange gossip about local environmental conditions, population size etc. Thus ritual becomes a social custom which acts as a process relevant to qualitative informations about environments.