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

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

Most of the Patuas do not possess any cultivable land, domestic animals or poultry to subsist on. So, unlike their neighbours the Hindus, the Muslims or the Santals who remain engaged either in the field or for looking after their domestic animals, the Patuas are free to move about to earn their livelihood by the skill they acquired traditionally in various types of professions. So the male members going out with a bag containing implements for treatment of cows, some with indigenous herbs and scrolls, some with snake, some going out in search of masonry work, some others busy in sana making (carding) or going out for selling tiny toilets and stationary goods, is the common picture noticed in a Patua village.
The Patua women used to go out freely. But very recently, with the growing impact of Islamisation, a marked change is noticed in their attitude towards women's freedom. The Patuas now look down upon the women's going out as a hawker and staying out of home, particularly at night, necessitated when they go in a village fair as a hawker. In the more Islamised villages—Pachchiria, Kalitha, Itaguria and Kanachi, the Patua women of comparatively wealthy families, now a days refrain from going out as their Muslim neighbours do not like it. But it is to be noted here that in spite of this change in attitude the Patua community as a whole cannot keep their women confined at home due to their poverty. In actual practice, in interior villages like Digha, Bonta, Pankurhans, Chandpara and Shibagram, the Patua women, go out to earn their livelihood as they used to do in the past.

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

There are few families, particularly in the village Madian, Sardha and Shibagram who have studios for making scrolls and idols of gods and goddesses. They do not wander in search of job. Other artisans who do not possess any studio make the images of goddess Durga at distant villages during the autumn season. Rest of the year they wander with scrolls or as a go-vaidya (cow leech) or practise abracadabra.
Few families who possess some agricultural land, cultivate their own plot of land; some others work as agricultural labourer in the rainy season and in the autumn. They also practise other Patua professions during the lean period of the year.

Life Cycle:

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

Pregnancy:

The general belief among the Patuas is that when a person dies his or her body is destroyed but the soul is imperishable. The soul hovers in the atmosphere maximum for seven days and within these seven days the soul of the deceased person enters into the womb of a married women of the Patua community only, preferably one among the near kin. Pregnancy is caused due to thus entry of the soul.
Among the educated Patuas and due to the impact of family planning propaganda in the rural areas this traditional belief is changing. They now consider that male sperm is responsible for pregnancy. Pregnancy is determined by the cessation of the monthly course. Some minor symptoms such as vomiting etc., indicate conception. The old women, if there is any, understand the conception from these symptoms. The expectant mother usually informs her husband at the earliest opportunity.

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

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

Rice, that is the regular diet is given on the fourth day after delivery. Her meal includes egg, meat or fish curry, if possible, and 'chire' (flattened rice).

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

**Ekika: name giving ceremony:**

The name giving ceremony among the Patuas is known as Ekika. According to some people it is known as Akhika. This is a Muslim term for name giving ceremony. The Hinduised Patuas also call it Ekika. Of course, the more Hinduised Patuas like Mohan Chitrakar of Ahmedpur and Ananta Malakar of Kirnahar used the term 'Annaprasan' like the local Hindus. This is also to be noted that although the Islamised Patuas insist on the Ekika, the Hinduised term 'Annaprasan' and 'Nama Karan' is known to all of them. Some Patuas reported that in the past the term Annaprasana was in vogue among the Patuas.
There is no hard and fast rule for the name giving and first rice taking ceremony (Annaprasana). Both the ceremonies are performed on the same day like the Hindus. In some cases Ekika is observed on the third, fifth or seventh day after the birth of the baby. In the interior areas, particularly those who live in the Hindu villages observe this ceremony at the seventh, eighth or ninth month of the baby. In the village Bonta, the ceremony is observed either on the sixth or eighth month in case of a male child and on the fifth or seventh month in case of a female child. In most of the cases when they observe the ceremony make no difference between the male and the female child. Usually the date for the occasion is fixed according to Panjika—the Hindu almanac. Few Islamized Patuas reported that they get sinni (rice boiled in milk) from the mosque and puts it into the mouth of the baby. In other cases they get sinni from 'mayerthan' (The place of local deity, particularly Goddess Kali) and puts in the mouth of the baby. The maternal uncle must put the sinni ceremonially in the mouth of the baby. If a baby does not have a maternal uncle some distantly related person whom he can address as mama (maternal uncle) performs the rite.

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

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

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

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

Recently the Patua community has undergone some changes. Except few families in the district Birbhum, the Patuas openly express their views in favour of Islam and swung towards Islam. As a result, in the villages Kalitha, Itagaria, Pachcharia and Kanachi the new generations of the Patuas are having only one Muslim name. The outlook of the Patuas living in the villages near urban areas have also been changed in this direction. In the interior villages like Sardha, Bonta, etc. the practice of having two names is still persisting. The other change of views regarding community/also affected the social behaviour of the Patuas. They used to drink liquor in any social gathering,
festival and ceremony including this name giving ceremony. This was considered as their traditional custom. But now the Patua community has become very strict about drinking publicly, and drink of liquor during the name giving ceremony or annaprásana (taking rice for the first time) has been abandoned.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindu name</th>
<th>Muslim name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sukumar Chitrakar</td>
<td>Sukur Chitrakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudarshan Chitrakar</td>
<td>Sukuruddin Chitrakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digvijay Chitrakar</td>
<td>Digribaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janhu Chitrakar</td>
<td>Janai Chitrakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakhu Patua</td>
<td>Allarakha Patua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naren Chitrakar</td>
<td>Nurmohammad Chitrakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamal Chitrakar</td>
<td>Komal Chitrakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shymadish Chitrakar</td>
<td>Somadish Chitrakar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinkar Patua</td>
<td>Omar Patua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodhan Patua</td>
<td>Badaruddin Patua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rashmoy Patua</td>
<td>Rasulbaux Patua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sankari Patua</td>
<td>Sakila Patua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(female)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jaggeswari Patua</td>
<td>Jarina Patua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(female)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ek-kari Patua</td>
<td>Elahi Baux</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. The sign = indicates the name of same person.
Amulets for protecting a child:

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

The initiation ceremony among the Patuas is known as Khatna —— circumcision. This is a Muslim term and every Muslim must do it. Every adult male Patua in the district of Birbhum has undergone through this rite including the Hinduised Patuas. Mohan Chitrakar and Ananta Malakar who have decided to embrace Hinduism in its truest sense, told me that henceforth they would cease to follow the practice of Khatna—— a distinct Islamic rite.

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

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

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

Marriage:

The Patuas do not have any religious or supernatural belief about marriage. All of my informants believe that it is a social custom practised through generations in order to start sex behaviour which is part and parcel of life. Premarital sex relationship is an offence and adultery is considered as a crime but can be expiated by giving a community feast and paying a fine. One informant opined that one should marry to maintain the continuity of one's line and a male child is preferred because he would perform death-rites of his parents. It seems the practice of celibacy is unknown to them.

Age of Marriage:

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

Monogamy is the practised type of marriage among the Patuas. One of the informants said that according to Islam there is no bar on polygyny and one Patua may have four wives at a time. But according to the Patua social custom they do not keep as a rule more than one wife at a time. I also did not find a single Patua family where more than one wife is living at a time.

Prohibition and preference:

Marriage is prohibited between brothers and sisters and also between step-brothers and step-sisters. Marriage is also prohibited between members belonging to ascending and descending generations both in the father's and in the mother's side. Although both parallel cousin and cross cousin marriages are common yet they prefer marriage between MBZ and FSD or FSZ and MBD.

The Patuas of Birbhum are for all practical purposes endogamous but they are inclined to establish marital relationship with the Muslims. I have often heard them to say, "Although there is no case of marriage between a Patua and a Muslim in this area but such marriage are taking place in other areas". But I did not find any such case in "other areas". I came across only two cases of elopment. In one case a Chitrakar of Purundarpur eloped a Swarnakar widow. Later on she embraced Islam and married her Chitrakar lover named Elahibaux. The other case I found in the village Kalitha where a Muslim eloped a Chitrakar woman. But he was censored by the Muslims of the village and had to leave the village with the woman. They stayed together in another
village. After few years he left the Chitrakar woman who returned to her parents' house in the village Kalitha. The third case was a love marriage between a Muslim boy and a Patua girl in the village Pachcharia. The boy was an orphan, who was staying in that Patua family for few years. He is now working in the Miramoy -- a T.B. Hospital and requested me to keep it secret that he had married a Patua girl. But the Patuas take pride in reporting that a marriage between a Patua and a Muslim has been solemnised in the village Pachcharia.

There are four hierarchical divisions among the Patuas, namely Chitrakar Patua, Mal Patua, Bede or Duree Patua and Maskata or Chile Patua. Each group is supposed to be endogamous but this is not rigidly practised by them. According to some of the informants the laxity has been due to the influence of Islam.

The Patuas have a kind of regional union which they call "Panchagrami" (Confederation of 5 villages). At the time of selection of bride or bridegroom they prefer to remain within this Panchagrami. But there is no hard and fast rule for this.

It may be noted here that the Patuas do not possess any idea regarding clan.

Dowry:

Previously there was no dowry system (among the Patua) except a token 'bride price but their society is no longer free from the grip of it. Nowadays, dowry is to be given from the bride's side. Many cases of divorce in recent times were due to the non-fulfilment of promised dowry.
Dowry is demanded both in cash and kind. Cash demand varies from Rs. 20/- to 300/-. New garments for the groom are usually provided by the bride's father or guardian. Bicycle is the most common demand from the groom's side. In many cases the marriage takes place on the strength of the promise.

Den Mohar:

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

Methods of selection of bride and bridegroom:

Usually the Patua young men and women do not select their own partners in life themselves. The parents or guardians select brides for their sons and bridegrooms for their daughters. Of course, when they are old enough to have their own opinion, the consent is generally sought before by the guardians. So selection through negotiation is the customary method. After preliminary talks the girl's father and/or maternal uncle along with the headman of the village go to the boy's house and settle the amount of dowry and "Denmohar" with the boy's father or the guardian.
Marriage is preferred within near relatives mainly between cousins and territorially within "Panchagrami" because in any social function the members from these five villages are to be invited. So selection of bride or groom from outside means more people are to be invited, hence the cost would be more. Nowadays, marriages outside this jurisdiction are not very rare.

**Fixation of date:**

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

**Pan Sarbat:**

"Pan Sarbat or Sumat Janani": On this day the father or guardian of the boy visits the girl's house along with two or three relatives or elderly persons. According to traditional custom the boy does not visit the proposed father-in-law's house to see the girl before marriage.
But nowadays sometimes the boy also visits the girls' house on the "Sumat Janani" day along with his father or guardian to see the proposed bride.

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

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

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

Haridra Divas (Turmeric-day):

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

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

Day of marriage:

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

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

Dala Dhara or Holding the basket:

The women, except the widows, draped in red or vermilion colour saris also follow the party and one of them preferably sister of the bride or groom carries a new dala (basket or winnowing fan on her head which contains a new cloth, an earthen lamp, myrobalan, mustard oil, vermilion, turmeric, betel leaf and nuts, iron, cowrie, paisa, durba grass (cynodon dactylon) and a silver coin. All these things are required in the Hindu rituals too. On the bank of the pond three women then bring down the dala with their left hand. They lift and put down the dala seven times in the same manner. Then they put the contents of the dala on earth, except the lamp, iron knife, new cloth and one silver coin. Now they cover these things with a new earthen plate. "Jaimaidada" now stands in waist deep water, makes a circle around him by 'cutting water' seven times with an iron knife, dips with the pot on his head and gets it filled up in one breath. Now he comes out of water, stepping first with the left foot, he also breaks the earthen plate with his left foot. Completing
all these rituals he then proceeds towards "chcharlatala" carrying the filled up Purul on his head. Reaching the "chcharlatala" puts it on the western bank of the token pond. The women also put down the dala in the same manner described earlier on the bank of the token pond. Then the bride or groom sits facing the filled up pot. Water is first poured on her or him by the sister's husband and then by the women present there except the widows. This ceremony is observed on the eve of the marriage day and in some cases in the early morning of the day of marriage.

Kshar Mati:

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

The ritual 'Kshar Mati' is observed immediate after the performance at 'Chharlatala'. After the bath of the bride/bridegroom at 'Chharlatala' the women take up and carry away the 'dala' with contents mentioned earlier on the head of one woman while other three women hold it at the time of lifting. Then they go to the house of a Bagdi or a Dom and put the 'dala' either in the verandah or in the courtyard of the house after holding up and placing it down for seven times. They ask for kshar (ashes of burnt leaves) and betel leaf and nuts from that house and put these things in that 'dala'. After collecting this kshar they bring back the 'dala' and
observing the same manner of holding up and placing down for seven times, it is kept in the bride's/bridegroom's house. On the day of marriage when the bride/bridegroom takes bath at the 'chharalatala', this 'kshar' is given to them to cleanse their body before bath. Ceremonially, the sister's husband first rules a little amount of this 'kshar' on the body of the bride/bridegroom. In some cases this 'kshar' is kept and given to the bridegroom to cleanse his body on the day of 'Astamangala'.

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

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

Barlatra: (Journey of the bridegroom's party)

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

Dress:

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

There is no fixed time for the marriage ceremony. It may take place either in the day or at night but generally in the afternoon, particularly in the more Islamised areas. In no case the marriage takes place at a late hour of the night.
The Kaji comes and supervises the preparation of the "Kabil Nama" on 'Denmohar'. Then he asks the groom to perform 'OJU' and sends 'Egin' (The witness on the bride's side is called Egin and that on the groom's side Vakil) to ascertain from the bride whether she is agreed to accept the proposed "Denmohar" or not. The Kaji reads out a few passages from the Holy Koran and prays for the grace of Allah. He then asks the groom whether he knows "namaj". If so, the bridegroom would perform two "Rekat of Nafal Namaj". If he does not know, the Kaji relieves him from doing the 'namaj'. Then the Kaji along with witnesses from both sides asks the bride in Arabic Language "Would you accept Mr. X son of Mr. Y as your legal husband"? She gives her consent thrice. The same thing is repeated to the groom and the Kaji secures his consent thrice. Then he would offer a glass of sharbat to the groom who would drink two-thirds of it. The rest of the Sharbat in the same glass is offered to the bride by the Kaji. Then he blesses the couple and prays to Allah for their happy married life and declares that the marriage is now complete.

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

The Kaji then leaves the place and is followed by a man with "Sidha" (presents or remuneration) which includes materials for a full meal in a new gamcha (towel), the new mat, the new cloth on which 'namaj' was performed and Rs. 2.00 as his fees. The Kaji does not eat anything at the Patua House.
Jautuk (Bestowment of dowry):

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

Samarpan: (Act of giving away):

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

Basar: (Ceremonies at a bride chamber)

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

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

A marriage feast is arranged on that day. The Patuas and both the Hindu and the Muslim neighbours are invited. In some villages Muslim invitees take food cooked separately by a Muslim cook; in other places uncooked food stuff are sent to both the Hindu and the Muslim houses. Generally food items include rice, curry, fish, goat meat or beef and sweets. But as the Patuas are very poor community, they cannot always serve all these items in their marriage feasts. Many of bride's near relatives, specially her "Jamaidâda" and younger brothers and sisters accompany them.

Badhu Baran: Reception of the bride)

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

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

Dwiragaman: (Ceremonies in connection with return journey)

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

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

Second marriage:

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

Divorce:

Divorce is very common among the Patuas. The right to divorce lies only with the male. The grounds for divorce are (1) adultery (2) insubordination (3) disliking of each other (4) non-receipt of promised dowry (5) sterility and (6) impotency.

The traditional custom is to call a meeting of the leaders of the Patua community to which some times the leaders of the Hindu and the Muslim communities of the village are also invited. They hear the case
and at first they try to dissuade the parties from being divorced. If they fail, the "Talak Nama" is written by an "Imam" or "Maulvi". The husband would utter 'Talak' thrice before the assembly. If the wife is adjudged guilty she will have to return the money of 'Denmohar' but she rests otherwise. In most cases, however, divorce is gone through without all these. Sometimes divorce is done simply by writing a postcard of "Talak" to wife.

Some changes form the tradition:

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

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

The dowry system has been introduced recently, as a result of which the average age of girls at marriage is rising. According to many, this system among the Patuas began since 1963 when Nakphuru of village Kalitha offered dowry to a matriculate Patua for his daughter's marriage. The traditional custom was that the bridegroom should pay dowry for bride. Taking dowry in cash and kind from the bride's party is a traditional custom among the caste Hindus. Now, in the district Birbhum as well as in whole of Bengal this custom influenced the Muslims and other low caste Hindus who had bride price.
Some changes in terminology are also gaining currency among the Islamised Patuas, particularly who live by the side of the Muslim villages. They are trying to introduce the term "Alem tala" instead of chharlatala - the place where traditional marriage is performed.

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

Marriage songs:

In every marriage the Patuas sing songs. These songs are sung by the women inside the house or in the courtyard. The males do not participate in such songs. Excluding the widows both unmarried and married women, only from the Patua community form a music party, sit together and sing abusive songs in chorus. One of them beat a drum. There is no other musical instrument to accompany the songs. The length of the drum is 24" in length and the diameter is 9". This type of drum is found in all the Patua houses except very poor families.

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

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

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

(Free Translation)
Oh! Akulia (name of the bride) the behaviour of your parent's village
Would not be allowed in our village.
Oh! daughter of a prostitute of Itaguria we will not allow you to stay in this village.
Oh! merchant of a town, come and enjoy Akulia
Oh! villagers of Kanachi, come and drive out Akulia beating her with broom stick,
Spite upon her, upon the parents of Akula, relatives and villagers of Akulia.
Akulia you are the daughter of an ass, dog, cow etc."

These are the lines repeated changing some words here and there.
Death Rites:

Death occurs due to some disease—is the general belief among the Patuas. In their narration, they denied the existence of any supernatural power which may cause the disease or death. But this is only a partial and not the whole truth about their belief regarding disease and death. No doubt, being influenced by modern scientific ideas they expressed such views about disease and death. But in actual practice, in their life, whenever anything happens beyond their knowledge, they succumb to their deep-rooted superstition and belief that some supernatural power is responsible for such happenings.

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

When a Patua is about to die all the relatives in the house and the neighbours from the villages are called in. Each of them drop a little sharbat (sugar mixed in water) in the mouth of that dying person.
Some remain engaged in preparing a bed of straw on the floor. A pillow made of straw is also given. Then the dying person is placed on that straw-bed with the head in the northern direction. The clothings are untied and the black thread around the waist is cut. In the case of women they undo the hair and spread over the pillow in the northern direction. At the upper end of the pillow a basket or winnowing fan is kept which contains five poa (approximately 116 grams) of rice and musuri (lentil) and kālaī (leguminous seeds, yielding pulses) of some quantity, besides these a little quantity of pan (betel leaf) supari (betel nut) and a cowri are kept in it. The belief is that whatever things are given at the time of death would go to the other world along with the soul. The cowri is given as a symbol of coin with which the deceased may purchase his or her requirements.

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

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

After having the last look at the face of the deceased by the relatives, they arrange for the last bath of the deceased. A pitcher of water is boiled with seven kul (zizyphus mauritiana) leaves; the boiled water is then mixed with forty pitchers of cold water, the dead body is fully undressed and placed on a wooden plank in a slanting position so that water may roll down easily. In case of a woman the bathing is performed only by the female relatives in a covered area. They brush the teeth of the deceased seven times with seven neem twigs (margosa indica) cleans the body thoroughly with soap. The belief is that the deceased should not carry any earthly dirt in the other world. They sprinkle perfume (golap jal and atar) profusely over the dead body. The body is then covered with three new white pieces of cloth. One piece covers the head to serve the purpose of a cap. The second piece is torned in such a fashion that it gives the shape of a 'punjabi' to cover the upper trunk of the body; the third piece covers the lower part of the body like a lungi - the usual dress of the local Muslims. No stitched cloth should be used for the purpose of covering the dead body. Oju, a Muslim ritual of cleaning the body before namaj, is get performed thrice by the deceased. The body is now covered fully by a
new piece of white cloth and the body is tied by three strips of new white cloth at the neck, waist and ankle.

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

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

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

After the janaja two persons get down in the grave which was dug up earlier. Depth of the grave must not be lesser than waist deep. Two persons from the surface of the grave lower down the corpse steadily. The other two persons hold the corpse and softly place it at the bare bottom of the grave. The clothes which were put on the corpse were not removed but untie the three knots, fastened before carrying the corpse. The corpse is laid on a new mat made of tal (Palmyra) or Khejur (Persimmon) leaf on its back in the north-south direction with the head to the north.

The bamboo hier (Khatuli) on which the corpse was carried, is fitted with bamboo poles in the grave, at about one foot below the surface of the grave. A new mat is spread out over which straws are strewn carefully to cover the opening of the grave so that no earth may fall on the corpse. The assembled persons praise him and say that he owes to nobody and he is free to leave this earth. Then the nearest relatives, first put each a clod of earth thrice on the straws, then others present similarly put clods of earth on the straws. There is no taboo in this respect. Any one present there, of any caste and creed may put earth into the grave, if he desires so. I was present in four such occasions of burial and put earth like other Patuas and Muslims. After ceremonial placing of earth some people cover the grave with heaps of earth, raise a mound up to waist height and plaster the grave neatly with mud.
After that rice, pulses and vegetables, kept at the upper end of the deceased's head are distributed among the poors present there at the time of burial.

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

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

Satarbhatat:

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

The Patuas believe that it would be good for the departed soul if they can give a feast to the beggers and the holy Koran/on this day.
Sraddha:

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

The rituals in connection with death ends with the observance of Kambarkara. The Patuas are of opinion that if fund permits they should perform 'Sraddha' every year or after two to three years on the same date on which the death occurred in the same manner.

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

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

On the 11th day in the morning a Napit (barber) was called in who shaved his beard and moustache and not hair, and nails were pared. The barber was given a new gamcha and 50 paise only.

As local Hindu priest was not available, Mohan sought help from the Bharat Samaj Sevak Samgha - a Hindu organisation, who sent a Brahmin from Burdwan, who performed Smaadha rites.
After shaving Mohan took bath from a pond near house. His wife and other members also bathed inside the house with water brought from a nearby tube well. It is to be mentioned that Ahmedpur is a developing village and the market area near the Railway Station assumed a look of the town. Shops developed on both sides of the Ahmedpur-Suri Road, Mohan owns a small shop of soldering (tinamith) on this road and resides at the rear portion of the shop. They usually take bath with tube-well water inside the house.

Mohan sat on a small mat made of kushgrass* facing the east wearing a clean dhuti (cotton cloth) and the upper part of the body was uncovered. The Priest, who sat by his side uttered mantras in sanskrit. A sidha or rice, oil, vegetables, salt, sweets worth one man's consumption for a day Rupees Two, a red bordered new sari and a new umbralla were kept on a winnowing fan.

There were five 'pindos'— a conglomerated mass prepared out of sun baked rice kept on a banana leaf. This was boiled by Mohan in a new earthen pot in the open courtyard. This part of obsequies is known as 'Pinda dan' or the sacrament of food-offering to the names of forefathers. Mohan took one by one lump of rice and placed on a kush grass in front of him after uttering mantras along with the priest. Water was also taken in the depression of the palm and offered to the deceased forefathers pouring on the lumps after uttering mantras along

* Kushasan is a small mat made out of Kushu grass used by the Hindus for sitting upon by holy persons or during the performance of a holy rite.
with the priest. After this the Sraddha or obsequies was over and the lumps or conglomerated mass of rice were dropped in the nearby pond. The 'Sidha' or things which were placed on the winnowing fan were taken by the priest. The priest did not eat anything in that house. No one from other communities were invited at the Sraddha ceremony. The Hinduised Patuas of Ahmedpur and Mohan Chitrakar's relatives who embraced Islam were invited at the Sraddha ceremony of his mother. Both Hinduised and Islamised relatives took food on the occasion at Mohan's house. Meat and fish were not cooked on that day. Only vegetarian food and sweets were served. Mohan's wife cooked food for the invitees but served by Mohan's sons. After this ceremonial feast, the death rites of Mohan's mother was over.

The Hindus believe that offering Pinda or ceremonial offering of conglomerated mass of cereals to the names of forefathers at Gaya is a great virtuous act and without it the soul of the deceased is not salvaged. On my query whether Mohan would go to Gaya for the salvation of his deceased mother, he replied that he would not go to Gaya because his fund would not permit to take up such a long journey and the Hindu priests might not allow him to perform the rites as he was not aware of the clan of his family. He was also aggrieved at the refusal of the local priests to perform the rites at a Patua house. The priest who performed the rites also rebuked him when he could not say the clan name (Gotra) properly. He was in a dilemma on the question of remaining in the Hindu fold or to join his Islamised brethren.
This case of Mohan Chitrakar’s mother’s cremation and performance of Shaaddha exactly in a Hindu manner, demands special attention. The revealing factor is that a Patua remained a Patua—an outcaste, even after such enthusiastic effort on his part to be regarded as a Hindu.

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

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

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

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

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

For almost all religious activities the Patuas follow Panjika—the Hindu calendar book. They also count the year from the month of Baisakh (May-June) like the Hindus. Both Id and Visva Karma Puja are the major festivals among the Patuas. Due to the impact of Islam the Visva Karma Puja is not observed publicly, particularly in the Muslim dominated villages. Similarly Id is not also observed publicly, particularly in the Hindu dominated areas.
Nababarsha (New Year's Day):

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

Id-ul-Fitar:

This is observed on the 1st day of the month of Shawwal according to the Muslim calendar. The Patuas do not know the purpose of this festival but observe Id-ul-Fitar like the local Muslims. Although they reported verbally that they participate in the special namaj on that day but from observation it was found that only few Patuas in the village Pachcharia participated in special namaj at the mosque. The Patuas in general observed the day by adding meat of chicken or goat or cow to their normal diet. Some of the Patuas participate in go-korbani or cow sacrifice along with the Muslim neighbours.

Durga Puja:

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

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

**Snake catching ceremony:**

On the day of Vijaya Dasami— the day for the immersion of the goddess Durga in the month of Asvin (September-October), the Patuas, particularly Mai Patuas and Bede Patuas go out for ceremonial catching of snakes.

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

After the sacrifice is made to Manasa the participants take food and then go out for ceremonial catching of snakes. There is no fixed direction for the commencement of the journey for the purpose. They must catch a snake venomous or nonvenomous, big or small on this day. The purpose
of this ceremony is to ensure good luck in catching snakes throughout the year. This particular day is known as the 'Day of Jatra'—which means a day when a solemn ceremony is performed on the eve of a journey to make it a lucky one.

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

Dak Samkranti:

The meaning of the word 'dak' is invocation or cry and the word 'Samkranti' means transit from one zodical sign to another, as well as the last day of every Bengali month. This ceremony is observed by the Hindus on the last day of the month of Asvin (October). The belief goes that Lakshmi—the goddess of wealth, hovers through the paddy field on that night.
Early in the morning of the day of 'Dak Samkranti' the male members of the Hindu agriculturist plant a stick of reed in the mid-field where Bakchur Paddy* (Oryza sativa) is grown. The belief is that the stick would fertilise the paddy flowers. The adult female members of the Patua community abstain from cooked food and take soaked mug (Pigeon-pea) or Kalai (leguminous seeds yielding pulses) on that day. After the sun set, one female member except widow, from each family fetch water in a new small earthen pitcher from the field where the piece of reed was planted in the morning. Care is being taken to avoid the touch of that stick of reed. If any one touches the stick will suffer from headache which will not be cured throughout the year. This water is given to the cows or buffaloes if they have any. The Patuas also take few drops of that water which as to their belief, would protect them from poisoning. During the last quarter of the night of Dak Samkranti the adult male members of the Patua community go to the Bakchur Paddy field along with the Hindus and raising their faces towards the sky let out the cry 'Phule Otho'— be abundant, be abundant. The belief in the rural area is that the cry 'Phule Otho' in the night of Dak Samkranti has a magical power to induce a bumper crops.

The Patuas believe that there must be rain on the day of Dak Samkranti and if there is no rain on that day the entire world would be destroyed by the loud hissing and venom of angry snakes. A drop of rain water or even a dew drop on that day makes the water in any field ambrosia. The snakes, snails frogs etc. drink that ambrosia and enter into their pits. Due to the magic spell of ambrosia the snakes etc.

* Bakchur is a very fine variety of paddy, grown in a low lying area in the district of Birbhum.
forget thirst and hunger and go for a long sleep till the 12th day of the month of Jaistha (June-July). During this period the snakes neither drink nor eat nor bite even if a man or frog touches its body. The Patuas consider that it is a good omen for them to see a snake on this day.

On the 13th day of the month of Jaistha (June-July) the snakes come out of their pits and take bath in rain water that drops from Rohininakshatra* and resumes normal behaviour of snakes. The snakes, snails etc. begin to feel thirst and hunger and move about in search of food. According to belief of the Patuas there must be rain on this day and if it fails the venom in the fangs will be increased. The Patuas, particularly Mal Patuas and Bede Patuas observe this day by taking bath in the morning and no other ritual is associated with this rite.

The Patuas of Manbhum perform this rite known to them as Jihoor instead of Dak-Samkranti. They perform this rite more elaborately than the Patuas of Birbhum. They have another function known as Pashar at the Jihoor samkranti night when cowherd take out cows and buffaloes for grazing in the field to moisten their bodies with dew. This will help to keep the cows and buffaloes free from disease throughout the year. They have many legends in this connection.

One story goes: A cowherd boy fell asleep under a tree in the night of Jihoor Samkranti. The snakes were distributing nectar on that tree and a drop of nectar fell in the mouth of the sleeping cowherd boy. He swallowed

* Mohini is the fourth of the twenty seven stars of Hindu astronomy. The name of the wife of the moon god.

that drop of nectar in sleep. As a result the boy slept over seven months from the 1st of Kartick (October- November) to the 12th of Jaistha, like the snakes, forgetting every thing. The boy became healthy and handsome in spite of having no food or drink due to the impact of the drop of nectar.

**Kali Puja:**

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

**Id-uz-joha:**

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

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

**Daha:**

Tazia is known as Daha to the local Muslims. The Patuas also call it Daha. They do not have any 'Tazia' but observe the day as Daha Parab (The day of Daha: festival). Every family is to perform this festival. At night each family prepares 'Polao'-rice cooked at least with five varieties of pulses and fried with ghee. They sometimes invite some friends in this connection but usually the ceremony is confined within the family.

**Sab-e-barat:**

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

A ceremony is observed at night. Each Patua family cook rice or Polao(rice-cooked in ghee) and meat, usually of goat or chicken. The Patuas of the village assemble with cooked rice and meat in a common place usually at a sacred place within the Patua hamlet. All these food ceremonially are kept in a common place. They offer these food to their ancestors. No namaj is performed. The Patua leader of the village prays on behalf of all the Patuas in his house by performing namaj. After the namaj cooked food is served amongst all the Patuas of the village.
Neither any Muslim nor any Hindu is invited in this connection. Candle sticks or pradeeps (indigenous earthen lamp) are lit around the house of each family.

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

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

**Visva-Karma Puja:**

According to the legend, the Patuas are the descendants of Visvakarma, the celestial architect and Chritachi—the celestial nymph. Respect for the Lord Visvakarma is noticed among all the Patuas of Birbhum. More Islamised Patuas of Kalitha, Itaguria and Pachchiara initially pretended that they do not know anything of Visvakarma. But after a long association with them it was revealed that they also have reverence towards Lord Visvakarma, although they do not show any outward expression.
According to Hindu calendar worshipping of Visvakarma is held on the last day of the month of Bhadra (mid-September). The Patuas also observe the ceremony on the same day.

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

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

None of the Patuas in the district Birbhum worship the image of Visvakarma, not even by the Patuas who make idols of Visvakarma for worshipping by the Hindus. But on the day of Visvakarma Puja the Patuas visit the place of worshipping by the Hindus and pay their respect to the Lord Visvakarma.
Garu-parab or Gow-festival:

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

Paush or Pitha Parab:

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

Chhata Parab:

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