CHAPTER V

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

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

* He also reported that the Patuas offered votive offerings to Kalitala.
The Patuas are known by their caste name used as surname, such as Chitrakar, Patua, Chitrakar-Patua, Mal Patua, Bede or Bediya. Now a days there is a tendency growing against using the caste name as surname. For example, Hefzal Chitrakar of Kanachi who obtained the B.Sc. degree in 1972, expressed his desire to give up his caste-cum-surname Chitrakar. He wanted to keep his Muslim name only. Ananta Chitrakar of the village Kirnahar, a famous artist who won a Rastrapati award for his goddess Durga, a masterpiece of work in shola has changed his surname to Malakar, a Hindu surname which conceals his Patua identity. The Patuas of other districts also are adopting only Muslim names or Hindu surnames.

Marriage:

The Patuas are an endogamous community. Endogamy is observed even within the sub-castes. Recently, however, there have been signs of a change of attitude in this matter, especially among the Islamised Patuas who say that there should be no subcaste within the Patua community because Islam rules out such divisions and they are all brothers in Islam("..... all believers are brothers" Koran 49:10) are also eager to establish social relationship between themselves and the general Muslim community through marriage. A marriage between a Patua girl and a Muslim boy in the village Pachchhara was given great publicity among the Patuas in Birbhum and the even was so talked about as if Patua-Muslim marriages are already becoming common. In fact what happened was this: an orphan Muslim boy named Sk. Abdul Azim working at Niramay-- the T.B. hospital at Dubrajpur-- used to stay in a Patua house. He was in love with the daughter of Nefajuddin Chitrakar. The marriage was arranged by

the Patuas. I have met Azim. He requested me not to divulge the fact of his marriage with a Patua to the Muslims of other villages.

Besides the case of Abdul Azim noted above I have come across two other cases of inter-community marriage in the district of Birbhum. Elahibuax, an Islamised Patua of the village Purandarpur was in love with his neighbour, Swarnakar (Hindu caste) widow. Elahibuax divorced his Patua wife and eloped with the widow. The Patua community recognised this marriage but the Hindus did not approve. A dispute erupted in the village and the Swarnakars filed a suit against Elahibuax in the Suri Court. The matter ended with the Swarnakar widow's embracing Islam and the solemnisation of the marriage according to Islamic rites.

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

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

The Patuas state that one man can keep more than one wife at a time though I found no evidence of an actual case. The statement is probably due to the Patuas' anxiety to prove that they are like the Hindus and the Muslims in this respect as in both communities polygyny has social and religious sanction. But actually among the total number of 514 recorded cases of Patua marriage in Birbhum there was not a single instance of marriage of a man already having a wife or of a woman already having a husband. The census of 248 families enumerated by me covering the total Patua population of the district Birbhum reveals no family with two wives living at a time. Hence it can be taken that in the Patua community monogamy is the practised custom.

Marriages are settled through negotiation between guardians. Even if in the rare case of a love affair (as it happened in the case of Kamal and Misri of the village Itaguria) the marriage is settled by the parents. In any case, marriages, that is, the first marriages are settled when the brides and the bridegrooms are very young. Child marriages are not uncommon as the age at first marriage varying between 9 and 15 for girls and between 12 and 24 for males. The maximum number of marriages are consummated within the age range 13-14 for girls and 18-19 for males.

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

**492 cases of marriage among the Islamised Patuas + 22 cases of marriages among the Hinduised Patuas = total 514.
In many cases marriage is fixed at an early age with MBZ or MBD or FBZ or FBD.

Levirate and Sororate:

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

Prohibition:

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

Divorce:

The ideal procedure in a divorce case would be to call a "majlish" or assembly in which the village leaders both Hindu and Muslim should be present. They would first try to dissuade the couple from divorce and on their failing to do so a Maulvi should be called into write out a "talak nama". But actually these formalities are not observed. Divorces are very common, and sometimes on any flimsy ground. A very common cause is non-delivery of dowry (e.g. money or cycle or wrist watch) promised to the bridegroom at the time of the marriage.
Adultery and indolence on the part of a wife are also causes for divorce. A wife cannot formally divorce her husband, but she can bring about divorce by persistently refusing to live with her husband. It usually happens like this: the wife leaves her husband's home, comes to her father's house and stays there refusing to go back to the husband or she is not allowed by her parents to go to her husband's house, forcing the husband ultimately to divorce. According to general report the usual cause of such a course of action taken by a married woman is ill treatment and oppression in the husband's house often by the latter's parents. Conversely, when a husband wants to put pressure on his wife's parents for money or desires to divorce her, he sends the wife away to her parents' house and does not allow her to come back. Sometimes a divorce is accomplished just by sending a post card informing the parents or the guardians of the wife that she has been divorced. The study of marital status reveals, 166 cases of divorces for 514 cases of marriage. Thus the ratio of divorce to marriage is a little higher than one to three. Two males and two females among the Hinduised Patuas and 66 males and 66 females among the Islamised Patuas were divorced once. Only one male among the Hinduised Patuas and 12 males and eight females among the Islamised Patuas were divorced twice. Five males were divorced thrice and one female four times. Two males were divorced six times and one female as many as seven times.

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

TABLE-17

Number of marriages among the Patuas in Birbhum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Marriages</td>
<td>No. of Marriages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GRAND TOTAL: 22 + 492 = 514

TABLE - 18

Number of Marriages among the Patuas in Birbhum
(Break-up of Table- 17)

The Table 17 shows that out of 22 cases of marriage among the Hinduised Patuas 3 males and 2 females were married more than once and 8 males and 9 females were married only once. Out of 492 cases of marriage among the
Islamised Patuas 163 males and 168 females were married only once and 85 males and 76 females were married more than once. The break-up (Table 18) shows that 66 males and an equal number of females among the Islamised Patuas were married twice, 12 males and 8 females were married thrice, 5 males were married 4 times, 1 woman 5 times, 2 males 7 times and 1 female 8 times.

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

Clan:

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

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

**Change of Residence**

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAMILY TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(62.90%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE-20: Economic Status of Member by Size of Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Size</th>
<th>No. of household</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Population %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13(5.24)</td>
<td>6 (46.15)</td>
<td>7 (53.85)</td>
<td>13 (100.00)</td>
<td>1 (2.17)</td>
<td>12 (26.09)</td>
<td>13 (28.26)</td>
<td>46 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23(9.27)</td>
<td>21 (45.65)</td>
<td>12 (36.09)</td>
<td>33 (71.74)</td>
<td>1 (2.17)</td>
<td>12 (26.09)</td>
<td>13 (28.26)</td>
<td>46 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>46(13.55)</td>
<td>51 (36.96)</td>
<td>25 (18.11)</td>
<td>76 (55.07)</td>
<td>16 (11.59)</td>
<td>46 (33.34)</td>
<td>62 (44.93)</td>
<td>138 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>37(14.92)</td>
<td>46 (31.03)</td>
<td>27 (18.24)</td>
<td>73 (49.32)</td>
<td>34 (22.98)</td>
<td>41 (27.70)</td>
<td>75 (50.68)</td>
<td>148 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>49(19.76)</td>
<td>62 (25.32)</td>
<td>32 (13.07)</td>
<td>94 (38.37)</td>
<td>67 (27.35)</td>
<td>84 (34.28)</td>
<td>151 (61.63)</td>
<td>245 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>36(14.52)</td>
<td>49 (22.68)</td>
<td>23 (10.65)</td>
<td>72 (33.33)</td>
<td>60 (27.73)</td>
<td>84 (38.89)</td>
<td>144 (66.67)</td>
<td>216 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>22(8.37)</td>
<td>33 (21.43)</td>
<td>18 (11.69)</td>
<td>51 (33.12)</td>
<td>52 (33.96)</td>
<td>51 (33.12)</td>
<td>103 (66.88)</td>
<td>154 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>12(4.84)</td>
<td>23 (23.96)</td>
<td>11 (11.46)</td>
<td>34 (35.42)</td>
<td>28 (29.16)</td>
<td>34 (35.42)</td>
<td>62 (64.53)</td>
<td>96 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2(0.81)</td>
<td>4 (22.22)</td>
<td>2 (11.11)</td>
<td>6 (33.33)</td>
<td>4 (22.22)</td>
<td>8 (44.45)</td>
<td>12 (66.67)</td>
<td>18 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 &amp; above</td>
<td>8(3.22)</td>
<td>23 (24.47)</td>
<td>5 (5.32)</td>
<td>28 (29.79)</td>
<td>24 (25.53)</td>
<td>42 (44.68)</td>
<td>66 (70.21)</td>
<td>94 (100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>248(100.00)</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>1168</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(27.23) (13.87) (41.10) (24.48) (34.42) (58.90) (100.00)
The Table-19 shows there are 156 (62.90%) simple or nucleus families and 92 (37.10%) joint or extended families.

Out of the total 243 Patua families (Table-20) 13 families are one-member families - 6 male and 7 female, the latter indicating social tolerance of women living independently which is not found in the local Hindu or Muslim community. Families consisting of 5 members constitute the largest group (19.92%). Next come three-member families (18.55%), 37 families (14.92%) consist of four members; 36 families (14.52%) consist of six members; seven-member families number 22 (8.87%) there are 12 (4.84%) eight member families, eight (3.22%) families of 10 members each, two families (0.81%) of nine-members each and only in one family, the village Shibagram, of 12 members.

The average size of a Patua family in Birbhum is 4.71 (persons). This figure is much less than that for the average rural family in Birbhum. As for the reasons for the smaller size of the Patua family from the physical anthropological point of view, although I did not make any special enquiry about the death rate of the Patuas I tried to get some idea about the extent of child mortality while collecting data on demography. From enquiries and observation during the field work I found that the rate of child mortality was not especially high among the Patuas. From the social anthropological point of view I searched for evidence, ritualistic or other, of infanticide and also about any practice of family planning. I found no evidence of infanticide. On the contrary, the Patuas love children, both male and female. Both are potential earners for the families as can be seen from Table-20. The
Patuas, except two educated families, do not practise family planning. This is also corroborated by the extension workers in family planning in this area. The reason for the small size of the family may be attributed to the Patua habit of remaining away from home for long periods. Both male and female adult members move from fair to fair and stay in public places or the male members leave home in search of work and move from village to village. This wandering nature of the Patuas and the high rate of divorce which keeps the couple apart for sometime are likely factors in keeping the size of the family small.

The Table 20 also reveals that earning members constitute 41.10 per cent of the Patua population in Birbhum. Split sexwise, 27.23% are male and 13.87% are female. The remaining 58.90% are dependants, 24.48% being male and 34.42% female. The Table shows an interesting correlation between the size of the family and the number of dependants. The larger the family, the larger the number of dependants. The larger number of dependants is due to the family being joint, and therefore, with a larger number of children. The number of female dependants is also larger in larger sized families who can be maintained by the larger number of male earning members.

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

A Patua family is established through marriage. The major functions of marriage are rearing of children and regulation of sex life. Extra-marital sexual intercourse is considered as a punishable offence. As the Patua concept of property is individualistic property inheritance is limited to the immediate members of the deceased's family.
Intra-Caste structure:

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

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

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

* The literal meaning of the word is tier.
It is not possible to know a man's sub-caste from his surname nor from the locality where he lives. Though usually one sub-caste lives in one village but cases of different sub-castes living in one locality is not also rare. In such cases the houses of one sub-caste are huddled together. Particular occupations are attributed to each of the sub-castes and when reporting, Patuas referred to the occupations of the lower sub-castes with some contempt. But in fact there is no real taboo on any of the occupations nor any rigid following by the sub-castes of the occupations particularly attributed to them. The process of caste-fission is observed among the sub-castes too. For instance, the Mai Patuas, one of the sub-castes, is sub-divided into four vertical segments with a supposed traditional calling for each, like the Hindu artisan castes. The intra-caste divisions are not uniform throughout the district. There are variations in the statements by the various informants. The most commonly accepted sub-caste divisions are arranged below in an hierarchical order:

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

**Chitrakar Patua**

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

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

Bede Patuas:

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

Maskata Patuas:

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

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

Chitrakar - idol maker and scroll-painter
Patua - scroll-painter
Mal Patua - snake charmer
Bediya or Chile-wandering people who practise
juggling, abracadabra, etc.

Banskata - carder; so called because the teeth or 'Sana'
of the tool they use for carding are
bamboo spikes.
Maskata - their occupations are illegal abortioning, removing cataracts and also animal taming.

Bazikar - road-side juggler and expert in fire workd.

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

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

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

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

Rajbansi Mal or Nara Bagdi Mal - cultivator
Poto Mal - scroll painter
Sani Mal - carder
Sapure Mal or Snakar Mal - snake charmer.

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

* Pakhi- Bird, Mara-killing, killer, hunter, catcher.
  cit. Pakhmara- bird catchers; Perhaps they may be identified with the "Bediya". A Statistical Accounts of Bengal, p.p.333 by Hunter, W.W.
Bajune Mal - drummer; regarded as holding the highest rank within the sub-caste as they beat drums before the gods and goddesses.

Saidu Mal - Agricultural labourer

Bora Mal - practise abortioning in the rural areas and juggling.

Bhogo Mal - wanderers; practise juggling and abracadabra.

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

The Patuas in general even now consider idol making and scroll painting their traditional and honourable occupations. The occupations like those of cow-leech, carder, teacher, mason or hodman, house painter, etc. are also considered as honourable occupations. Some of the old traditional occupations, e.g., maskata, chile, snake charming, roadside juggling and showing of animal tricks and abracadabra are now a days considered as shameful. There is a tendency to conceal these occupations from neighbours.
The unstable state of the community is also reflected in the social structure of the Patuas. They had adopted the caste structure under the influence of the Hindu social organisation. But for some time now a tendency towards intra-caste fusion has been mounting as the Patuas are swinging towards Islamic ways of life. A good number of Patuas expressed the opinion that there should be no hierarchical divisions among the Patuas, as all believers in Islam are brothers and equal. They are now thinking of breaking the sub-caste endogamy. Though only two inter-sub-caste marriages have been solemnised so far, the Patuas believe that there will be many more such marriages in near future. The restrictions on inter dining among the sub-castes are rapidly losing force. The Patuas have held several meetings in their Panchagrami* in which they discussed proposals for bringing all Islamised Patuas into one social fold, provided they give up occupations like maskata and snake charming and social customs like drinking and smoking ganza or marijuana in public during festivals or during marriage ceremonies and death rites. The young Patuas say that the community had adopted the caste division from the Hindus but now under Islam there should be no divisions among Patuas. The young men declare their determinations to eradicate the intra-caste divisions among the Patuas when they assume leadership of the community.

* Chapter on Political Organisation.
Political Organisation:

"In its widest sense the political organisation of a people embraces, on the one hand, the whole complex of institutions by which law and order are maintained in the society, and, on the other, all the institutions by which the integrity of the group is maintained in relation to neighbouring communities of a similar kind and protected against attack from without. Thus political organisation includes the legal institutions by which the juridical rights of every member of the society are safeguarded and his juridical obligations enforced (v. Law p. 146), the organisation of local, i.e. village, town, tribal subdivision, government, and the system of tribal or national or state government." 23

This definition in the "Notes and Queries on Anthropology" was kept in view while collecting data on the political organisation of the Patua community. As the Patua community has been swinging to and fro between Hinduism and Mohammadanism it has lost many of its original characteristics. About the traditional forms of the political organisation data were collected by the narrative method from old village leaders. Cases of settlement of disputes, long past as well as comparatively recent, were collected to ascertain the actual behaviour of the Patuas. Careful enquiries were also made about "Samajik Schools " mentioned in the "Tribes and Castes of West Bengal". For this investigations were

extended somewhat beyond the jurisdiction of the present field of enquiry. Efforts were made to collect data from remote and inaccessible villages tracing the traditional organisation.

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

The village is the basic social-political-religious unit. According to the leaders, the Patuas had a name for their village organisation but it has ceased to be in use. At present they call it Panchayat or Sabha like other people who use these terms for similar institutions. Every Patua village has a 'Morol' or village headman. Initially a 'Morol' is elected by the villages sitting under a tree or in an open space in the village and then the post becomes hereditary. If a 'Morol' dies without any issue or if a 'Morol' is guilty of adultery or breach of trust and loses the confidence of the village and is dismissed, a new 'Morol' is elected in his place. The 'Morol' in consultation with other elder members of the community selects two to five elderly persons according to the size of the village to form the village Panchayat.

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

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

Panchagrami:

Apart from dealing with appeals from the decisions of the Panchayat, the Panchagrami has some socio-economic functions. There are large-sized cooking vessels in the custody of the Panchagrami. These vessels are purchased and maintained with funds created out of the money realised as fines. Any Patua can borrow these vessels from the Panchagrami on occasions of marriage, death rites, or any festival without any rent.

Gandush:

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

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

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

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The territorial distribution of three Panchagramis are given below:

**Panchagrami around Madian**
1. Madian (Birbhum)
2. Tarachi
3. Ayas
4. Jhaupara
5. Shibagram

**Panchagrami around Kalitha**
1. Sardha (Birbhum)
2. Jhaupara
3. Kalitha
4. Ayas
5. Bonta
Every Patua whom I have questioned about the "Samajik School" mentioned in the (census 1951) "Tribes and Castes in West Bengal" (pages 309-310) replied that he had no knowledge and never heard of any Samajik School as the Tamluk-Kalighat-Tribeni Samajik School or the Birbhum-Kandi-Katwa Samajik School. From my long association with the Patuas I feel that the Patuas are not likely to have such sophisticated names for their social organisations.

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

- **East** - Belul (Murshidabad)
- **North** - Kalitha (Birbhum)
- **South** - Bhuri (Burdwan)
- **West** - Pachchiara (Birbhum)

Previously, the units of the Patua political organisation—the Panchayat, the Panchagrami and the Gandush used to function properly. But due to the Patuas oscillation between Hinduism and Mohammedanism the organisation has gradually weakened and at present the Gandhush is not functioning. 'Samaj bandhan' (social cohesion) has decayed and the whole
community is in disarray", observed old leaders like Narendra Chitrakar of the village Bonta. Although a territory is defined for marriages and social communication. Social communication in fact has been much attenuated between the Patuas of the villages Pachchiara, Panuria, Itaguria, Kanachi and Digha and the Patuas in rest of the district because the former claim to be more Islamised than the others.

Administration of Justice:

When a case is settled by the Gandush the Raja gets as fee Rs.3.00 the Mantri Rs. 200 and the Bhadrak Re. 1.00 out of the fine realised from the offender. A feast is usually given in the village of the offender. In a case of inter-village or inter-Panchagrami dispute the feast is given in the Raja gram (King village) to which the members of the two villages involved are invited. If a family is ex-communicated by the Gandush the offender in order to be exculpated must give a feast to all the members of the villages within the Gandush. In such a case the feast must be given in the Raja Gram (King village). In the case of an inter Gandush dispute the meeting should be held in the Raja Grams of both the Gandushes. But no Patua could cite any actual case of inter-Gandush dispute. Formaly the disputing parties had to deposit Rs. 10.00 each with the headman (Raja) of the Gandush. The party who was found guilty would lose his deposit while the winning party would get back his. The forfeited amount went to the Morols of the Gandush. Either they divided the money equally among themselves or had a feast with it. The deposit system is now abolished. The travelling expenses of the Morols are to be borne by jointly the disputing parties.
The Patua method of truth finding by ordeal known as 'Phal chata vichar' was in vogue until 50 to 60 years back, according to Panchanan Chitrakar of the village Median, Baku Chitrakar of the village Sardha and Naren Chitrakar of the village Bonta.

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

With the deterioration of the socio-political cohesion of the Patua community the roles of the Patua self-governing institutions have become restricted. The Patua Panchayat has no right to interfere in cases of offences against the laws of the land applicable to all. Now a days the Patua Panchayat and Panchagrami deal with cases occurring within the Patua community of adultery, petty theft, petty swindling, personal disputes and disobedience of the decisions of the Gandush against drinking in public, etc. The punishments imposed usually are fines and social boycott. According to some informants beating in public as a punishment was formerly practised in the case of an obstinate offender but now a days this is not possible as the latter may seek help from the police. During the field work I came across one such case. It was alleged that the offender had illicit relationship with the wife of his neighbour and made an attempt to elope with her. He was tried by the Panchayat and ordered to pay a fine of rupees two hundred. The man left the village without paying and for some time

* Phal = share of a plough, Chata = licking, Vichar = trial
moved from place to place. He was then persuaded by some Patuas to return to the village. On the very night of his return to the village the man was brought before the village Panchayat and ordered to be beaten. But after he had been given a few slaps some people who were opposed to the leader protested and in the ensuing melee the man got bold and threatened to go to the local police station and complain against the Panchayat leaders. The threat brought the proceedings to a close. The man left the village again the same night and as far as is known that was the end of the affairs.

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

The subject matter for discussion in that meeting was social reform of the Patua community. Before the meeting Bhakti Patua had a talk with Mr. Kiran Banik, a worker of Bharat Sevasram Sangha, Calcutta. At the meeting the main issue was the question of identity—whether Patuas who were in an intermediary position between Hindu and Muslim should definitely and once for all join one community—the Hindu or the Muslim. According to Narendra Chitrakar who was a Dewan at that time more than half of the Patuas present were willing to join with the Hindus but "Bhakti was a demagogue" and he persuaded the meeting to vote for Islam. He told the meeting that the Bharat Sevasram Sangha might be able to provide priestly services for the Patuas but the priest would be of the class that served only the lower castes. The Patuas were of the opinion that they belonged to the Naba Sayak caste group of the Hindu community and so they must be served by priests who serve higher caste Hindus. The barbers who served
the higher castes did not mind serving the Patuas and touching their feet during such service. So the Patuas must not accept the services of priests serving only the lower castes. They voted for Islam as in their opinion Islam was more egalitarian than Hinduism. In mosques all believers in Islam were treated as equal.

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

According to many Patuas the leadership of the Patua community has deteriorated particularly from the time of Bhakti Patua. It was there were allegations against Bhakti of procrastination in settling disputes and squeezing money from both parties. Charges of bribery were levelled against some of the other Patua leaders also. All this indicated a decay of community cohesion among the Patuas evident also from the fact that no meeting of the Gandush was held in this area after 1952. Efforts to revive the organisation have started recently. Banku Patua of Sardha,
Narendra Patua of Bonta and Samadish Patua of Purandarpur have been trying to re-consolidate the Patua community under the traditional Gandush in this area. Some young educated Patuas like Sukumar and Kamal are trying to break the intra-caste divisions and unite the community as one.

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

**Inheritance:**

Economically the Patuas are a very poor community. The majority are landless. Their livelihoods depend on individuals' skills. The average per capita income per month is Rs. 32.33, below the poverty line.

The rules of inheritance in force amongst the Patuas are based on patriarchal conceptions of family and property. There is no right of primogeniture. Women also inherit from father and husband. The following case of Nakphuru will help illustrate the customary rules of Patua succession which are the same for Hinduised and Islamised Patuas.
On the death of A the property will be divided among b, c, E, G, H and i. The widow (b) will get 1/8th of the entire property. Of the rest of the property, 5/8ths will be equally divided among the sons (E, G, H) and 3/8ths equally among the daughters, married or unmarried (c, i). After the death of the mother (b) 5/8ths of her property will be divided equally among the daughters (c, i) and 3/8ths among the sons (E, G, H.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

When looking into the economic life of the Patuas one notices a certain casualness in their attitude towards property. Generally speaking, the community does not seem to have a strong acquisitive