



A Matter of Rats: A Short Biography of Patna

Amitava Kumar

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It is not only the past that lies in ruins in Patna, it is also the present. But that is not the only truth about the city that Amitava Kumar explores in this vivid, entertaining account of his hometown. We accompany him through many Patnas, the myriad cities locked within the city—the shabby reality of the present-day capital of Bihar; Pataliputra, the storied city of emperors; the dreamlike embodiment of the city in the minds and hearts of those who have escaped contemporary Patna's confines. Full of fascinating observations and impressions, *A Matter of Rats* reveals a challenging and enduring city that exerts a lasting pull on all those who drift into its orbit.

Kumar's ruminations on one of the world's oldest cities, the capital of India's poorest province, are also a meditation on how to write about place. His memory is partial. All he has going for him is his attentiveness. He carefully observes everything that surrounds him in Patna: rats and poets, artists and politicians, a girl's picture in a historian's study, and a sheet of paper on his mother's desk. The result is this unique book, as cutting as it is honest.

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