P R E F A C E

The idea of a systematic study of the Patua Community occurred to me after I had been in contact with them for some time during another investigation not specifically connected with the Patuas. There were two things which stirred my curiosity about the Patuas. First, their intermediary social position between Hindu and Muslim; and second, aggressive assertion by one group that they were Muslim and not Hindu and equally aggressive assertion by the other group that they were Hindu and not Muslim. And of course the fact there was little previous sociological study of the Patua Community was also an incentive.

In course of the work I received generous help from more persons than I can possibly name here to acknowledge my debt to them. The most numerous group among them must remain anonymous. I mean my Patua friends scattered all over West Bengal and many non-Patua villagers, most of them poor, who gave me shelter, hospitality and other help during my field work. A few get mentioned in the body of the paper, but the larger number remained unnamed. To all of them I acknowledge my debt. I include in this also those Patuas who offered resistance to my attempts to elicit information because such resistance itself was a factor in the composition of the communities total mentality which was under-study.
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( Binayendra Narayan Bhattacharyya)