

# **CULTURAL PROFILE OF CALCUTTA**

**Edited by  
SURAJIT SINHA**



**The Indian Anthropological Society  
Calcutta**

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## INAUGURAL ADDRESS

**Dr. S. N. Sen, *Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University***

THIS Seminar is being held on the occasion of the 69th birthday of Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose. I had the good fortune of being his colleague in the University of Calcutta for a number of years and I know him also as a student of the University. We always looked forward to listening to many of his lectures, as you know he is one of the best speakers on the subjects in which he has specialized. We have always admired him for his scholarship, for his broad humanity and I am really very glad to be present on this occasion. He has completed sixty-nine years and let us hope that he will live long and will be in our midst to give us the benefit of his knowledge and wisdom and provide a shining example to the generations of scholars to show them how a scholar should be.

The second reason for my interest to be present on this occasion is, of course, my association with the study of the problems of this city. I shall remember with great wonder my first day of visit to the city of Calcutta. I passed my Matriculation examination from a village school and then migrated to Calcutta to seek admission to a college and I still retain that sense of wonder and it has been replaced by a feeling of love for this city where I have lived since 1925 as a student and as a teacher. I am not an original resident of this city, as everyone of us knows, very few people of its residents are original residents in the sense that they have been born in the city.

The city of Calcutta has a great charm and it has attracted people from all over India and indeed from other parts of the world as well and they still retain their sense of affection for this great city. My special association with this city apart from my living in this city amidst all its problems, all its processions and all its disturbances, started in the year 1954-55. In that year, under the guidance of my teacher late Prof. J. P. Neogi, I had an occasion of directing a socio-economic survey of the city. The survey went on for 5 years

and we all know the report of that survey which has been published. Apart from the points mentioned in the report, I came to know a lot of many other things about the city which we did not know before, at least I, who have lived in the city for such a long period of time, did not know. So my interest in this city is rather a long term affair and it has grown intimate as a result of my connection with the socio-economic survey. As you know Prof. Bose has written a lot of things on Calcutta and it is only appropriate that a seminar on the problems of this great city should be held in honour of his birthday. This is I think a fitting birthday gift to a great scholar whose interest in the city of Calcutta has been very well known. He has stimulated a large number of scholars by his scholarship and particularly by his unique method of handling the problems of sociological survey of the city.

The city has often been described as a city of violent disturbances. There is no doubt about the fact that we are very fond of disturbances, specially we, who live in College Square area. As you know, whenever there is any disturbance in Calcutta, it will at once be reflected in College Square, just in front of the University building—that is always the case. But it gives one a very false idea of what is happening in the city. We all know the classical definition of news that when a dog bites a man, that is not news but when a man bites a dog, that is news. That is, unfortunately, the case in respect to the city of Calcutta as well. Whenever there is any disturbance it flashes in the newspapers and people who live outside Calcutta, they come to feel that Calcutta is always full of disturbances. In fact, when I was in Delhi, I have often been asked whether it was safe to stay in Calcutta and why I did not leave Calcutta and go somewhere else. But I feel no reason why such a feeling should go abroad about our great city.

When, for example, only the other day we were conducting a Seminar in Darbhanga Hall in the University on "Gandhian Philosophy and its Importance in the Current World"—well, I was just told in the midst of the Seminar by one of the reporters that some of the students had just set fire to a tram car in front of the University. These things go on, we were 'discussing Gandhism just as tram

cars were burning in front of the University. Unfortunately the news of the burning of the tram car got into the newspapers and nothing was published about the discussion on the relevance of Gandhism to the contemporary world where a number of people were busy in discussing various aspects of this important subject. Even when tram cars and buses were burning in front of the University, I have seen many students reading seriously in the University Library, unfortunately, now housed in a very monstrous building, but still a very great Library. And this is how the life of Calcutta goes on more or less steadily and not in a disorganized way. There is no doubt about it that there are occasional disturbances and there are processions everyday in the afternoon and so on, which may upset our nerves. But still the life goes on as usual and there is something charming about life in the city which is housing such a large number of people belonging to so many different groups and speaking so many dialects.

You will soon have a discussion about the large number of dialects spoken in the city and the social problems of so many migrants coming from so many places to this city. These are reports of field study and I am sure that this Seminar will prove helpful in extending our knowledge on this subject. What I was just thinking this morning is that actually do this city possess any utility for the emerging social structure and economic structure of the country? About the economic importance of Calcutta, there is hardly any doubt. It is one of the leading ports of the country and it was until recently one of the leading centres of jobs available, at least in the eastern part of the country. That is one of the reasons why there is so much migrations to the city in search of new jobs. The economic importance is quite obvious but what is disturbing is that in the eastern part of India there is virtually one city; the Durgapur and Asansol urban-industrial complex is yet to attain metropolitan eminence.

The impact of Calcutta on our social structure has got to be studied. I have also no doubt about the impact of Calcutta on our culture. Calcutta has been the leading centre, cultural and intellectual, and it has taken the lead just like all other urban areas in being a centre propagating recent and advanced ideas on various subjects among

the population living in the hinterland of this great city. But the question that was raised by Tagore—what we actually gain by having such a metropolitan city like Calcutta in our country ? There was a time, and I think this is still true, that Calcutta absorbed a large part of our energy. Though it produces a large part of our wealth it also uses up a large part of the amenities of life that are available. For example, you are aware that until recently advanced medical facilities which were available to the people of West Bengal were virtually limited to the city of Calcutta, though the tax payers living throughout West Bengal have to pay for those medical facilities. Educational facilities were more or less concentrated in the city of Calcutta though the tax payers living throughout West Bengal have to pay for these educational facilities. These are questions naturally which are to be raised whether further expansion of such metropolitan areas should be encouraged or not—or whether we should not go for greater decentralization just after providing for cities of an optimum size, and then deliberately plan for the setting up of other urban areas in other places so that the benefits and amenities available from the existence of a city may be made available to all parts of the country.

In Calcutta the problem has grown immense and we are all familiar with the studies made under the auspices of the C.M.P.O. in this city about the different aspects of our problem ridden society. This is quite worthwhile but I feel that many of our problems look almost insoluble and they are being made worse almost every year through the influx of more and more people into the city. The problems appear to be going beyond our resources. So the time has come for us to think about the optimum size of metropolitan areas according to the resources available in our country according to our organizing and managing abilities. These are the factors to be taken into consideration while deliberately planning for a dispersal of cities into other parts of the country. Calcutta is a big problem and let us not make it bigger by allowing an unrestricted migration to this city. The major attraction for migration has been always of course, the availability of jobs in this city. Whatever the reasons, this is slowly changing and you know that unemployment is more or less at the

worst phase in the present moment. I do not know whether this trend would persist. This may be due to a temporary recession or may not be due to that. But there is a plan for the dispersal of industries to different areas and I think this will all be for the good of the country. And with the dispersal of industries to other parts of the country, there will be more decentralization of job opportunities, which is also a very good symptom and there should be more dispersal of job opportunities so that we should be in a position to plan the growth of more cities in other parts of the country. In this way this will enable us to provide more and more amenities for all classes of people. And at the same time this would be within our competence to manage the affairs of such comparatively smaller metropolitan areas. This is a problem, of course, which is not before us in this Seminar. In this Seminar we are going to discuss the social and cultural profile of this city. I think in planning the growth of a metropolitan areas, one must pay more attention to the social and cultural aspects of the people who live in the city or who are expected to live in the city because without such a knowledge, it would not be possible to provide for a good metropolitan centre. This is essential that those who plan such centres, they should have wide knowledge of the social and cultural background of the people who live in the city and who are likely to come to the city in the future, so that when they come to the city, they do not feel lonely or distracted or discontented. We can plan their location, their community centres in such a manner, in different parts of the metropolitan area, so that they would feel more or less at home in the city atmosphere as they use to feel in their village homes. Of course, it is not possible to reproduce the village in the city but we can make it socially and culturally as comfortable as is possible for them to live in the city while they become more or less completely urbanized in the atmosphere of this city.

From this point of view, I am really glad to welcome this Seminar on the social and cultural profile of this city. And from the number of papers which have been prepared, I am really very pleased that so much interest is being taken in this aspect of the city's life. This is likely to increase our knowledge of the social background of the

people of this city and this would be extremely helpful to all future planners not only for this city but for the other city areas which are to be planned in different parts of West Bengal. •

I must thank Dr. Surajit Sinha, organizer of the Seminar, for inviting me to come on this occasion so that I have been able to associate myself with this Seminar which is being conducted to celebrate the 69th birthday of Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, whom I have been admiring from my student days.

Thank you gentlemen.

## INTRODUCING THE SEMINAR

**Dr. Surajit Sinha, *President, The Indian Anthropological Society.***

WITH a population of nearly 4.6 million\* Calcutta has earned national and international notoriety in recent years as a 'Problem City'. People complain about overcrowded slums, poor municipal amenities, general disorderliness, and lack of civic sense of the citizen, student unrest, volatile political climate and so on.

Calcutta also carries an image of a city of furious creative energy which sustained a substantial burden of intellectual and social confrontation with the West for nearly two hundred years through a series of creative responses represented by a galaxy of geniuses in religious and social thinking, politics, creative arts and the sciences.

It is generally assumed that Permanent Settlement, growth of British commercial enterprise and selection of this city as the capital of British India for many decades, gave rise to a group of professionals and white collar job holders in the Government and commercial firms and also to a landed aristocracy as patrons of culture. The indigenous trading castes were diverted from going in for industrial enterprise to concentrate on land holding and transactions in real estate. The local Hindu caste system adjusted to these developments by crystallizing the social category of middle and upper classes, the *Bhadralok* and the *Babu* who are typically disinclined to be directly involved in any productive enterprise. They excelled in the pursuit of conspicuous consumption and placed high value on education and intellection.

Upto the middle of the 1930's the Bengali middle and upper class citizens of Calcutta were accustomed to look upon Calcutta as the cultural capital of India. When the first two decades of Independence

\* Calcutta's population has crossed the 6 million mark according to the latest census (1971).



made the Bengali population of the city painfully aware that Calcutta-based Bengalis no longer played a decisive role in the affairs of the nation, they felt shaky and defensive. Added to this was the growing control of the finances of the city by 'outsiders' or 'aliens'.

There are stereotyped claims and counter-claims about the relative 'urbanity' and 'cosmopolitanism' of Bombay and Calcutta and some consider Calcutta to be more of an overgrown cluster of villages than Bombay.

#### CALCUTTA SOCIAL SCIENTISTS HAVE VIRTUALLY IGNORED THEIR CITY

While some of these stereotypes and general historical notions hang on our mind social scientists in Calcutta have virtually ignored the existence of this city as a social and cultural fact

There are, of course, a few notable exceptions. We may mention here Dr. S. N. Sen's pioneering socio-economic survey of the city (Sen 1960), and Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose's recent survey of the social profile of Calcutta (Bose 1965). One may also come across scattered articles on various aspects of social life of Calcutta in historical journals and other periodicals. But all these do not add upto a substantial coverage in depth.

One may wonder about the reasons for this persistent intellectual apathy. Anthropologists may, perhaps, come out with a ready excuse that their orthodox research habits and procedures constrain them from going in for a study of Calcutta on many counts. First of all, they would prefer to study a community which is substantially different from their own in order to gain a genuine cross-cultural perspective. Then, they would also like to study communities of such size and level as can be covered thoroughly and holistically by intimate personal observation. Calcutta is too large, complex and heterogeneous to be amenable to the standard canons of anthropological research.

This, of course, does not answer why the major university in the city failed to take the initiative to develop a Sociology Department which could immerse itself in the varied socio-cultural problems

of the city. Urban sociologists are not supposed to be inhibited by the size of the city.

I think the answer would perhaps lie in the lack of concern for improving the social conditions on the basis of sustained objective study.

It is out of an awareness of the tremendous inadequacy of our present state of knowledge of the social and cultural facts of Calcutta that we have ventured, on behalf of the Indian Anthropological Society, to initiate an experimental two-day seminar to discuss some of the social and cultural characteristics of this city.

#### THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS' APPROACH

I have already mentioned that anthropologists are habitually wedded to studying simple and relatively homogeneous communities which may be closely observed in total social and cultural context. When they venture to stretch their interest to more complex and massive social aggregates like the city of Calcutta, anthropologists make an effort to organize their research endeavours in terms of a series of observable capsules of social interaction. While some of them are particularly concerned with the systems of social interaction others are primarily interested in the patterns of conventions and symbols of these interacting communities. In spite of their common commitment to scientific objectivity anthropologists differ among themselves in their methodological emphasis. Some would like to observe behaviours only as natural systems, while there are others who would like to combine the tool of controlled comparison with empathic insight. The latter kind often consider the specialists in humanistic disciplines as well as the creative artists as fellow travellers in the common endeavour of unravelling the inner nature of man, his society and culture. It will be clear from the organization of this Seminar that it represents a fair combination of both the approaches.

Anthropologists of both the kinds would first of all like to identify the isolable natural communities in the city such as language and dialect groups, religious and sectarian communities, castes, tribes, neighbourhoods and so on. They will also look at the city as a

characteristically complex pattern of social stratification in the distribution of prestige, economic privilege and power. A city carries forward the latent creative potentialities of the rural hinterland. This is achieved through organization of specialists and professions in all fields. It is generally expected that the city's dynamic demand for efficient specialization will cut across the stable lines of kinship, caste and regional loyalty. In order to regulate an ever growing anonymous population and its diverse activities the city gives rise to a plethora of voluntary associations. While the city harbours specialists in the pursuit of excellence it also accommodates the millions with average creative abilities and interests who sustained the 'mass-culture' thriving on the various mass media such as the radio, cinema and so on.

Thus for completing their description of the culture of the city anthropologists would have to collect data through appropriate observable capsules on significant social segments and strata, specialists and professionals and associations. They will have to track down the social organization of the pursuit of excellence as also the organization of the 'mass culture'.

It would be obvious that an adequate anthropological picture of the city of Calcutta can emerge only out of the endeavour of a large team of devoted field scientists who would be prepared to observe the diverse segments and strata of Calcutta's population in depth in the multiple social contexts of home, workshop, office, club, political rally and so on.

Let us make it clear that we are not meeting here to discuss the results of a co-ordinated series of research projects. Ours is mainly an effort to make the social scientists, in general, and anthropologists in particular, aware about some of the problems involved in systematic understanding of the complex social and cultural reality of this city.

#### THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SEMINAR

If we had started on the basis of substantial research, we could have taken up comparison at several levels. How does Calcutta compare with cities of her size internationally, with the other Asian

cities and with cities of comparable population in India ? We could have also asked how Calcutta has emergent urban features which are lacking in mofussil towns, and in the rural hinterland and how Calcutta cannot be adequately described as an agglomeration of villages and small towns.

In this Seminar, however, we will avoid the comparative approach and will limit ourselves to a set of specific problems connected with adequately describing the social and cultural pattern of this city. Here we shall be concerned with four major sets of problems :

a) How does the city shelter diversity on the linguistic, communal (religious) and caste levels ?

b) What is the pattern of the core culture of the Bengali ? How do the dominant Bengali interact with the other groups ?

c) How does the city handle her vast problem of poverty and economic disparity ? How does poverty affect the social and cultural pattern of the slum dwellers ? How do the affluent citizens use their affluence ? What is the impact of grinding poverty and economic disparity on the political profile of the city and in many elements of disorganization such as goondaism, prostitution and mental disorder ?

d) How does the city carry forward creative expressive life in the fields of science, literature and the arts ? What are incentives in the cultural milieu and what are the constraints ?

In all the above topics we are also concerned with describing and assessing what has been happening to the city since Independence. To what extent she is offering greater opportunity for economic uplift and basic amenities of life to the masses ? How effectively the city is welding together diverse social and cultural segments ? How well she is carrying the task of effective involvement of an increasingly greater number in genuine and confident pursuit of excellence ?

We will not expect definitive answers to these general queries in this preliminary endeavour, but will certainly aim at raising a series of significant detailed questions for subsequent intensive research.

## OUR PARTICIPANTS ACROSS THE DISCIPLINE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Many of the contributors in this Seminar are not anthropologists. It has been deliberately planned that way so that anthropologists may expand their horizon by trying to meet academicians and specialists from other disciplines who have their own ideas about aspects of the social and cultural milieu of Calcutta from their special vantage points.

Thus the Seminars will offer a feast of supplementary (and complementary) perspectives from linguists, psychologists, psychiatrists, historians, economists, political scientists, physicists, police officers, artists, dancers, movie makers and critics of art, literature and Music.

As anthropologists we cannot claim competence about the contents of the arts and the natural sciences like physics and chemistry, but we can certainly join the specialists in these fields in facing some basic social problems. What are the incentives to creativity in the various fields in the city and what are the constraints? Anthropologists may try to bring into relief the class, community, kinship, caste and regional contexts of the various professions and relate the general process of modernization in social life with the particular process of modernization in the pursuit of the arts and the sciences. We are accustomed to match the 'conscious models' of society against the 'unconscious' and 'operational' models. In this mode of analysis it is not unlikely that while artists and intellectuals in Calcutta may consciously claim that they are alienated, we may find them firmly embedded in the general social matrix. Similarly, when the artists claim universal modernity of their creative forms, it may be possible to find out to what extent some of them are choosing the passive role of quick adoption of the Western road to modernity avoiding the energy demanding path of seeking universal modernity from a strong home base.

## SPECIAL NOTE

Finally, it is our proud privilege to record that we are offering this Seminar on behalf of the Indian Anthropological Society to felicitate the sixtyninth birthday of Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose,

This is not the occasion to recount all the contributions of Professor Bose in the diverse fields of Social Sciences and specially in anthropology. His focal intellectual interest has been to understand the process of transformation of Indian civilization. As a life-long student of the Indian caste system he has consistently maintained that the system persisted through the millenia mainly on the basis of non-competetive localized mode of production and a social philosophy of interethnic cultural tolerance and that it is irreversibly doomed to disintegrate under the massive impact of industrialization. Yet, when he undertook a sociological survey of Calcutta in 1963-64, he found that reliance on primordial group identities persisted in Calcutta even after nearly two hundred years of urbanization.

"It can be said, therefore, that the diverse ethnic groups in the population of the City have come to bear the same relation to one another as castes do in India as a whole.... Actually the superstructure that coheres the castes under the old order seems instead to be re-establishing itself in a new form.... In Calcutta the economy is an economy of scarcity. Because there are not enough jobs to go around everyone clings as closely as possible to the occupation with which his ethnic group is identified and relies for economic support on those who speak his language, or his co-religionists, on members of his own caste and on fellow immigrants from the village or districts from which he has come. By a backwash reliance on earlier modes of group identification re-inforces and perpetuates differences between ethnic groups" (Bose 1965 : 102).

Professor Bose's pioneering survey raises fundamental issues and also provides clear guidelines for a major area of investigation, namely, we should study the voluntary associations in the city and find out the extent to which recruitment and activities of these organizations are limited to particular groups and communities and to bring into relief the spheres of organized life of the city which are opening upto broad based participation over-riding the barriers of languages, religious denominations, sects and castes.

Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to carry forward some of the germane ideas of Professor Bose through intensive field studies.

We hope that this Seminar will stimulate our interest in that direction. I firmly believe that a genuine social science tradition can grow in our country only out of intense and competent involvement in understanding and solving some of the urgent human problems that surround us. I do hope that this hurriedly organized experimental Seminar will enthuse a sizeable band of social scientists and other relevant specialists to know the city in great depth and to discuss among themselves the results of their findings.

I take this opportunity to mention that our professional colleagues in Bombay and Delhi have shown great interest in this Seminar and we do hope that by placing the proceedings of this endeavour at their disposal we may enthuse some of them to organize a series of discussion groups in the different cities of India in the coming years.

I must put on record our gratitude to the eminent participants from the diverse fields who have responded to our short-notice call so generously. My colleagues in the Council of the Indian Anthropological Society have borne the main brunt of organizing the Seminar. I am particularly grateful to Dr. D. K. Sen, Director, Anthropological Survey of India, for not only permitting us to hold the Seminar in the Survey's Lecture Hall but also for placing the various resources of the organization at our disposal. We are thankful to the entire staff of the Anthropological Survey for their unfailing co-operation. Shri S. K. Sanyal has been responsible for the photographs on the Moslem groups exhibited here. Finally, I must mention my deep appreciation of the fact that Dr. S. N. Sen, Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University has agreed to inaugurate the Seminar in the midst of his many urgent preoccupations.

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## *Session 1*

**A CITY OF CULTURAL PLURALISM AND  
THE BENGALI CORE**



# 1

## A CITY OF CULTURAL PLURALISM AND THE BENGALI CORE

*Calcutta shelters over 6 million people according to the latest Census. The Bengali speakers, who form nearly 2/3 of the population dominate the cultural profile of the city. The overarching Bengali culture has its impact on the non-Bengali population with extensive practice of bi-lingualism and the growth of Bengali dialects accommodating the linguistic peculiarities of the immigrant non-Bengali groups. Yet Calcutta typically preserves many cultural niches—ethnic linguistic, religious—in distinct residential zones. A vivid example of Calcutta's proneness towards preservation of ethnic and cultural diversity is the existence of nearly 60 endogamous caste like groups among the Moslems in this city. Although the Sakta temple of Kalighat draws the non-Bengali residents as pilgrims in large number, the various primordial groups tend to remain considerably isolated in day-to-day social interaction. One of the potential areas of social tension in this city is indicated by the existence of mutually negative stereotypes between the Bengali Hindus vis-a-vis some other groups like the Bihari, Assamese, Oriya, Marwari and Moslems. The paper on 'Changing Bengali Elite' indicates how Bengali intelligentsia have moved in recent years towards various shades of Marxist orientation in place of the dominant theme of nationalism in the century preceding Independence. The social base of the intelligentsia, however, continues to be upper caste and middle class.*

# THE LANGUAGE AND DIALECTS OF CALCUTTA DURING THE LAST ONE HUNDRED YEARS

D. N. Basu

CALCUTTA is a cosmopolitan city inhabited by the speakers of numerous languages. Some of them have short stay in this important city, visiting it on occasion and on account of various business. We may omit them for the study of the changing language of Calcutta. We are concerned with the type of the people who have settled here for some years

From the census report of 1961 it transpires that Bengali is the mother tongue of almost two thirds of the population of Calcutta. Among the remaining one third, the census report shows Hindi along with Urdu ranking the highest, Hindi being 19.34% and Urdu 8.98%. But this enumeration is undoubtedly an overestimation, as many of the languages which are not properly Hindi have been considered Hindi. We see Punjabi, Sindhi, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Marathi, Konkani, Nepali, Garhwali, Kumaoni and Maithili, but there is no mention of Bhojpuri, Magahi nor of Awadhi and the other Eastern Hindi languages nor of the other Western Hindi languages like Brajabhasa, Bangaru etc. There is language politics behind the picture. The figure of the Urdu speakers also does not present the true account. Some of the Muslim population living in Calcutta for a long time even since their birth and speaking Bengali very well, sometimes speak a tongue among themselves which they call Urdu. But it is not Urdu. It is the so-called Bazar Hindi, a simplified patois. Thus, instead of *mai āth baje yahā-se jāungā* they say *ham āt bāje hā se jāyegā*. They speak this tongue and call it Urdu due to their sense of unity on the basis of religion. The Muslim community coming from Nadia, Shantipur etc., however, does not speak this patois. They speak Bengali and have not even much of the Perso-Arabic words. For instance they would say *sān* for *snān* and not *gosāl*

which the other type of Muslim community uses. The Oriya speakers living in this city for a number of years can speak Bengali very well, but amongst themselves they speak in Oriya. Oriya is enumerated to be the mother tongue of 61,352 persons, i.e., 2.10% of the people of Calcutta. English is enumerated as the mother tongue of 27,957 persons, or .95% of the people of Calcutta. Evidently the so-called Anglo-Indians also have declared themselves as coming into this fold. But many Anglo-Indians can speak Bengali very well.

In the Census Report, bilinguals are shown to be 7,43,617 in number, a little more than 25% and Bengali as the second language spoken by 1,14,623 is shown next to English 4,95,553 and also Hindi 1,17,548. Apparently this does not expose the correct picture. For, as my information goes, the non-Bengali speakers of Calcutta who have had a maximum six months' stay can understand Bengali well and can also speak in a broken way. But those who have lived in this city for years are mostly good speakers in Bengali. Unfortunately, the Census Report fails to supply any material to support this statement.

The centrifugal change of the language is but natural and Bengali is much varied in the speech of the natives of Bengal. Along with this the Bengali in the tongue of the different non-Bengali speakers of Calcutta indeed presents an interesting motley. It is but natural that the mother tongue of these speakers influences the Bengali spoken by them. To cite only a few instances, the non-Bengali speakers of the Central India, who call themselves forming the Hindi group, pronounce the vowel *a*, which much closer in Bengali than their *a*, as *o*, e.g., *āponār kothā to hāmi suniyeche*, where we also find a few more peculiarities such as, the influence of their *ham* upon Bengali *āmi*, the confusion of the finite verbal personal terminations in place of which they have the participles with substantive verbs. The Anglo-Indians similarly change the Bengali *a* to *o* in many places and they are very fond of certain exclamatory forms such as *āre* (as in *āre bābā* or *āre dādā*) *bāh bāh*, *camatkar*, etc. But unlike the Englishmen they do not replace the retroflex by alveolar. On the other hand the dental series is often changed to the retroflex, e.g., *ṭumi*, *ḍas*, etc. The psychological effect of cultural divergence may

be at work, by which they affect alienation. Often they do not use the finite verbs *tārpōr ārkī*, *kebol mārpiṭ*. The Muslim speakers who can speak Bengali very well similarly affect alienity, sometimes mix up Perso-Arabic words in their Bengali sentences, e.g., *ei āṭ bāje ekṭu nāstā kore cole elām*.

Thus far we have tried to give a synchronic account of the languages of Calcutta on the geolinguistic line, based on the Census figures and the individual studies of the influence of the native languages on the auxiliary and indigenous speech. But the Census figures are inadequate in many respects to furnish us with materials for studying, for example, the ranking of the auxiliary languages of the bilinguals, trilinguals etc., the true nature of the auxiliary languages as spoken by them etc. etc. Nor the individual studies of the mutual influences of the native and the auxiliary have seriously been done by linguistic scholars. I am happy to note here that Mrs. Krishna Chowdhury, a student of mine working in the Census Registrar's Office is engaged in the study of the development of Bengali dialect of Calcutta. Her article entitled "Emergence of Standard Colloquial Bengali" is coming out in the Appendix of District Census Handbook of West Bengal 1961, Vol. I. The success of the work depends on the extensive field work and intensive approach to assimilate the facts and figures, with the literary co-efficient and religious factor and many other census data along with the educational records etc.

Now, passing on to the diachronic linguistic account of Calcutta Bengali, we have to note that the first colloquial speech recorded in writing was undoubtedly the language of Calcutta, the most important city in the nineteenth century. It was "*Ālāler gharer dulāl*" by Pyarichand Mitra who wrote it with a pen name Tek Chānd Thākur. He was the pioneer in the field of using colloquial tongue in a novel but the then standard language was not at first avoidable and we find in this novel a mixture of the colloquial with the standard language. But Kaliprasanna Sinha's "*Huṭom pēcār naksā*" (1862) was written more purely with a Calcutta tongue although as a satire his "*Naksā*" abounded with vulgar words and slangs of his time. It is not possible to give a full account of the development of the Calcutta language in literature in this Seminar. Another student

of mine in the University is engaged in the research in this subject. The dialogues in the novels and dramas also generally present the colloquial language and after Michael Madhusudan, Sir Ramesh Chandra Dutta and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya used the colloquial in some of their social novels. Swami Vivekananda in some of his Bengali works used a very powerful speech of Calcutta.

The Calcutta language belongs to the '*Rāṛhī*' or the West Bengal dialect and it had Vowel Harmony, as in *diṣi* (*deṣi*), *gere* (*giāche*) etc., and Deaspiration, as in *koccc* (*kariteche*), *gēte* (*gāthia*), *banda* (*bandha*) etc., and voicing, for example, *sāg* (*sāk*) etc. and use of distinct form of past participle forms of transitive verb, for example, '*se dile*' but '*se ghumolo*' etc.

The difference between Calcutta tongues with Howrah dialect is to be noticed in the following cases. Howrah '*gechlo*' but Calcutta '*geslo*' or '*gislo*'. Howrah '*dile ne*' for '*dilenā*' in Calcutta etc. etc. Early Calcutta tongue had an extensive use of Vowel Harmony and it had '*Kolkētā*' for '*Kalikātā*', '*bābure*' or '*bāburo*' for '*bāburū*', '*nīsen*' for '*nīṣān*', '*baebhār*' for '*vyavahar*' which in Howrah district is some time pronounced as '*babahar*'. The notable point in the development of Calcutta colloquial is that it was previously uninfluenced by the dialects outside West Bengal.

Upto the first quarter of the twentieth century the Calcutta inhabitants had some integrity who were called "Calcatian", who would boast themselves of their cleverness and fashion, differentiating themselves from the rural people (*pārāgāyer chele* or *geiyā*), but they lacked absolutely in some qualifications of the village boys. The village boys who were simple were often ridiculed for their dialectal lapses. The East Bengal people wanted to avoid carefully their own dialectal peculiarities which when exposed would meet severe ridicule. But later the East Bengal people used to speak amongst themselves in their own dialects disregarding the Calcatians. Gradually, especially after the partition of Bengal, with the huge immigration of East Bengal people in Calcutta, the standard colloquial was influenced by the East Bengal dialects to a certain extent (e.g., the use of *sāthe* in place of *sange*, etc. The lack of certain phonological

phenomena in the East Bengal dialects such as Vowel Harmony, Umlaut etc. would make their pronunciation much closer to the Standard Sadhu Bhasa spelling. This has influenced considerably in the development of the modern Calcutta tongue. A tendency of purism is found in the modern Calcutta tongue. Thus, for *Kolketā*, we use *Kolkātā*, for *Kaerānī*,—*kerānī*, for *bheyerā*,—*bhayerā*, for *dārālum/dārātum*,—*dārālām/dārātām*, for *berāl*—*birāl* etc.

To sum up, in conclusion I can say that Bengali language is supreme in Calcutta, being the native speech of two thirds of the people and the auxiliary speech of almost all the non-Bengali speakers living in this city for some years. But the Bengali spoken by the different speakers is multicoloured, and although the chief type of this is the Standard Colloquial speech which has suffered some change in recent years to include some phonological habit of the East Bengal speakers in the form of purism, there are the dialectal speeches also specially among the illiterates and low literates

#### SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES

The above sketch of the Calcutta dialect is merely an outline. There is really a need of full research on the subject for which full data on the following lines must be available :

(a) The geographical distribution of the non-Bengali speakers along with their nature and period of stay in Calcutta in order to understand the relative compact of these speakers with the Bengali speakers.

(b) The general and special features of the different types of Bengali speeches among the non-Bengali speakers in Calcutta with a note on the influence of their respective native speeches on Bengali.

(c) The dialect variation of Bengali in Calcutta based on the various dialectal origin of the speakers (categorized according to the periods of their uninterrupted settlement in Calcutta) also on the education basis (the male/female criterion is also to be considered).

(d) The special words and usages (slangs, not vulgar) of the different classes and ranks in the society,—such as the school and college

boys and girls, the uneducated low-cultured people, the staunch political speakers and slogan makers and their impact in the gradually changing Calcutta dialect.

(e) The gradual changes in the written speech of Calcutta stage by stage,—the various influences and tendencies.

The Standard Colloquial, the recognized written speech in the modern days, however, can not as a whole be taken as the speech of Calcutta. The writers in this language who hailed from East Bengal sometimes left traces of un-Calcutta speech. Even Rabindranath had a few peculiarities such as *elem*, *jāntem*, *jānine* etc. unsubscribed in the Calcutta speech, although these uses exerted some influences in the Calcutta speech of some highly sophisticated classes of today.

A few samples of the Calcutta dialect through the ages are given below showing within brackets the modern puristic tendencies illustrated by words generally in use to-day.

*“āmra dībyi snān kare ekkhānā telciṭe maylā kāpaṛ parluṁ ār iurope, maylāgāye, nā-neye (snān nā kare) ekṭi dhapdhape pośāk parle (parla)”*.

*“bhūṛi nābā (nāmā) badhajamer pratham cihna”*.

*“sekele pūrāgēye jamidār ekkathāy daśkroś hēṭe ditū, dukurī kaimāch kāṭṭā buddha cibiye chārta, 100 batsar bācta. tāder chele pilegulo kalketāy āse, caśmā cokhe dey, luci kacurī khāy, dinrāt gāṛi caṛe, ār prasrūber baemo haye mare, ‘kalkettāi’ haoyār ei phal !!”*

*“porā badyio balenā je, dūr kar oṣudh, jā, dukroś hēṭe āsge jā.”*

*“paścimī cāṣā serbhar chatu khele; tārpar patkoke (kūoke) pātloi khāli kare phelle, jal khāoyār coṭe.”*

*Kalkātār karcā* (Ananda Bazar, 15th February, 1970).—*“gata māśdui, āgāmi ekmās baiṣpārū kalej strit elākāy phupṭāth balte kichu to thākei nā—pāye calār rāstā parjanta bedakhal haye jāy. itimadhye phupṭāther deyāl ghēṣe jākiye baseche sthāyī dokān. tār gā ghēṣe ek lain dhārābāhik dokāndār—tāder trānk, porṭmaenṭo; ābār tār opare ek*

*lāin. dokān. ubhay diker ei agragati tathā āgrāser cāpe mānuṣjan hātāpath hāriyeche.*”

*Hutom pāecār naksā.*—“*kukurgulo kheu kheu kacce (karche) dokānīre (dokānīrā) jhāptārā (jhāp) bandha kare ghare jhābār ujjug (udjog or ujjog) kacce—gurum kare naṭār top pare gaelo* (this is still so pronounced, although written *gelo*) *dhākār bīrkṛṣṇa bābu (kṛṣṇa was pronounced kriṣṭyā by some Calcuttians which gradually became keṣṭa) cakbājārēr paelānāth bābu dalapati bāburo (bāburā,—illustrating vowel harmony nicely,—compared with dokānīre above, as in duṭo, tinṭe, cārṭe) o ducār (ducārjan) gāiye bājīye ostadrāo āsben.*”

“—*megher karṃar karṃar ḍāk o bidyuter cakmakite kṣude kṣude chelera mār kole kuṇḍulī (kuṇḍalī) pākāte ārambha kalle (kārīla) muṣaler dhāre bhārī ek paṣla biṣṭi (brṣṭi=brīṣṭi) elo.*”

“—*pacā nicu o ābe (licu o āme) bhare gaelo.*”

“*rāstāy lokāranya (dhanya is dhanyi but lokāranya is not changed) cārdike dhāker bādyi (bādyu), dhunor dhō (dhōyā) ār mader durgandha* (possible it was pronounced as *durgando*, but in writing it is not shown, as *bandha=bando* above is also not shown).

*Prācyā o pāścātyā* (Swami Vivekananda)—“*o tomār ‘pārlement’ dekhlum, ‘seneṭ’ dekhlum, bhoṭ, baelaṭ, mejariṭi, sab dekhlum, rām-chandra ! sab deṣei ai ek kathā. śaktimān puruṣrā je dike icche, samājke cālācche, būkigulo bherār dal.*” (dekhlum is still not dekhlum, but *cālācche* is written *cātācche*).

“*purāṇer asurguloi ta dekhi maṇiṣyir (maṇuṣyer, mānuṣer) mata, deblagulo ta anekāṃṣe hīn. ekhan jadī bojha je tomrā debatar bāccā (bācchā) ār pāścātyerā asur baṃṣa tāhalei dudeṣ beṣ bujhate pārbe.*”



# **CASTE AMONG THE MUSLIMS OF CALCUTTA.**

**M. K. A. Siddiqui**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**THE** concept of caste is basically opposed to Islamic ideology. Caste is "a hierarchy of endogamous groups organized in a characteristic division of labour" (Sinha, 1967 : 94) while Islam stands for perfect equality of all individuals and groups in the spheres of society and religion.

Early Islam brought about radical change in the society under its influence and put its egalitarian principles into practice so that the traditional foundation of Arab hierarchy, as shown by Ibn-e-Khaldun, the philosopher historian of the 14th century A.D., was completely shaken (Grunebaum, 1961 : 199). Birth as a basis of superiority or inferiority was absolutely irrelevant and piety alone came to be regarded as a criterion of individual distinction (Quran : S.XLIX 13-15 : 1407). The distinction between colour, race and region was rendered out of question in the light of Quranic injunctions.

But with the passage of time, as Islam spread to distant lands, some sort of stratification re-emerged into the fold of the Muslim society and took various shapes and forms, according to nature of adjustment with regional traditions, under situations of contact with other civilizations and in the context of historical developments. As for example veneration to the Prophet led to the development of kinship with him as a new criterion of nobility. Such categorization as 'Arab' and 'Ajam'; 'Sarih' and 'Mawali' also led to conflicts which have sometimes resulted in the victory of the under privileged, as for example the Mawalis in Iran secured the equality of their status with the Arabs. The stratification was, however, strengthened by the introduction of a practice of limiting marriage relationship within a specified range of kins known as '*kufv*'.

In India, a land of elaborately stratified society, known as caste, very few sociological studies of the Muslims, who constitute a considerable part of the population, has been made. However, right from the middle of the 19th century a number of glossaries of castes and tribes on various regions of India, based on census reports by such administrators as Elliot (1844), Ibbetson (1883), Risley (1892), Crooke (1896), Nesfield (1885), Thurston (1909), Iyer (1909), Rose (1911), Russel and Lall (1916) etc. have suggested the existence of a number of Muslim groups of various backgrounds almost analogous to *jatis*. A number of Social Scientists like Max Weber, Hutton, N. K. Bose, M. N. Srinivas have, through their various writings suggested the existence of some caste attributes in Muslim society in India. In recent times Ghaus Ansari (1956 and 1961), Z. Ahmed (1962), Raghuraj Gupta (1956) and a few others have attempted at either synchronic or diachronic study of the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh and report the existence of caste or caste-like features in their society. A few more recent studies of the rural areas of West Bengal and of Southern Bihar by Bhattacharya (unpublished) and Ali (unpublished) do not rule out the existence of certain features of the caste system among the Muslims in those areas. Special mention is necessary to a study by Zillur Khan based on both the Eastern and Western wings of Pakistan in which he contends that stratification of Muslim society in India and Pakistan is based on inherent gradation in Islamic society in its historical development and would have been so even without the social environment (Khan, 1968 : 133). The development of caste among the Muslims, more or less similar to those among the Hindus, is seen not as a result of acculturation but based on the assumption that Hindu and Muslim peasants remained isolated in the worlds of their own until India won independence from British rule. The contention of isolation will not stand scrutiny in the light of social history. Khan, however, neither denies the egalitarian principle of early Islam nor does he disprove the existence of rigid stratification of Muslim society in the sub-continent.

#### THE PROBLEM

The present study is an attempt to observe how the Muslim society is like in a cosmopolitan situation with reference to the

dominant milieu or the 'situational model' i.e., the system of caste. A city is usually considered a melting pot of castes and ethnic boundaries. This should be true to a greater extent in regard to a cosmopolitan city like Calcutta. Also Islam is seen as essentially an urban religion, unfolding itself in an urban milieu (Grunebaum, 1961 : 173). If the characteristics of rigid stratification, based on birth, are not of fundamental importance they should disappear particularly among the Muslims of Calcutta.

#### METHOD

When I approached the field of my study I had no set notions about the problem, although some idea of the village I come from, in the southern suburb of Bhagalpur, in Bihar, had left an impression of hierarchical pattern among Muslim groups that could not be explained in terms of Islam alone. The village I have referred to is multi-ethnic<sup>1</sup>. Each group or *beradari* roughly occupies a *tola* or locality and observes strict endogamy and restricted commensal relationship. In case of female it was extremely rigid to the extent of interpollution. I had naturally to take note of not only the distinguishing features of the Muslims as a large social group but also of the larger matrix within which they are situated. It was of relevance not to lose sight of the historical background of the groups that compose Muslim society.

The study has, therefore, to be both synchronic and diachronic, to the extent possible, to yield profitable result. Considering the vastness of the problem the present study is in the form of a reconnoitre and reliance has been laid for the present on eliciting information from leaders and noted individuals of respective groups often verifying them from other sources. Besides recording genealogies wherever possible a random sample of hundred families were taken to see the extent of endogamy in the groups concerned, while in case of smaller

1. The term ethnic group has been used here and in subsequent pages to mean groups distinguished from other similar groups socially, biologically and in certain aspects of culture in the same sense in which Dr. S. C. Sinha and Prof. Mackim Marriott have used in their works.

groups it could be easily ascertained, as many members knew about most of their group members.

A general distrust of a Government official and a belief in Government endeavours to harm them was a shocking experience I had, but my community identity as well as sincerity of purpose was of help in eliciting information. The hope of getting the history of their group recorded made my informants more communicative with me.

The work would have been impossible without the inspiration as well as guidance I received from Dr. Sinha to whom I owe a deep sense of gratitude. I am, however, solely responsible for any shortcoming in the study, which I emphasize again to be of tentative nature

### 1. *Ethnic composition*

Though the population of cosmopolitan Calcutta is predominantly Hindu, majority of whom are Bengalis, Muslims form a substantial part, forming 12.78 per cent of the total population (1961 census). About 70% of the total Muslim population is Hindustani speaking. The areas of their concentration roughly follow regional and linguistic affinities, besides an area where relatively affluent groups of various regional and linguistic backgrounds live. This is around Mechua-bazar, Colootola and Canning Street comprising of 23, 40 and 41 ward numbers<sup>2</sup>. Other concentration lies in the central districts comprising of 50, 51, 53, 55, 57 and 60 ward numbers around Park Circus up to Tapsia; south western districts extending from Kidderpur to Metiaburj consisting of 73, 74 and 75 wards. Smaller pockets of Muslim population in the city are situated in wards 31, 32 and 33 roughly comprising parts of Narkeldanga, Rajabazar and adjacent areas, also a little north wards in Belgachia and B. T. Road in ward No. 5. Smaller settlements are situated in Cossipur at the northern extremity and at southern end in Tollygunj.

In course of their long association with the city extending over a century a Hindustani dialect has emerged among the Muslims that contains Bengali as well as English vocabulary and syntactical

2. The ward numbers given are the same as they formed the basis of 1961 census,

elements. This is spoken among older inhabitants and has been termed as 'Gulabi Urdu'.

Besides coming from all the major regions of the country they are divided into a number of groups of various backgrounds such as common descent, common occupation or common history of origin. A broader division is on the basis of sects that often cuts across all other divisions, but sometimes coincides with regional and ethnic boundaries making it more rigidly organized than otherwise.

The picture of the ethnic groups classified on the basis of backgrounds occupational or otherwise regionally are as follows :

### *I. Foreigners :*

- (1) Afghans
  - (i) Jalalabadi
  - (ii) Qandhari
  - (iii) Ghaznavi
  - (iv) Mazarsharifi
- (2) Iranians
- (3) Arabs
- (4) Tibetan, Chinese and others

### *II. Indians<sup>3</sup> :*

- (1) *North West Region*
  - (i) Pakhtoon
  - (ii) Peshawari :
    - (a) Sayed—*priest*
    - (b) Awan—*Muleteer*
    - (c) Kakazai—*tribal*
    - (d) Kalal—*potter*
    - (e) Kashmiri Peshawari—*traders*
  - (iii) Kashmiri—divided into a large number of occupational backgrounds.
  - (iv) Panjabi—
    - (a) Rajput
    - (b) Jat

3. Indians here include the people of the Indo-Pak subcontinent,

(2) *Western Region*

(i) *Rajasthani—*

1. Groups wearing *ghaghra* of specified colours
  - (a) Shekhawati—red skirt—nilgar
  - (b) Madi—black skirt—nilgar
  - (c) Manihar—bangle makers
  - (d) Sonar—gold-smiths
  - (e) Lohar—black-smiths
  - (f) Dhobi—washermen
- 2 Groups not wearing *ghaghra*
  - (g) Besati—hawkers and traders

(ii) *Gujrati—*

1. Sectarian-cum-ethnic groups—
  - (a) Dawoodi Bohra—trading
  - (b) Imami Ismaili Shia—trading
2. Groups sharing sects with others
  - (c) Halai Meman—trading
  - (d) Kachi Meman— „
  - (e) Sunni Bohra— „
  - (f) Athna Ashari Bohra—trading

(3) *Southern Region :*

(i) *Tamils—*

- (a) Maraykar—seafaring traders
- (b) Rowther—horse-riding traders
- (c) Labbai—agriculturist, priests, servants, etc.

(ii) *Malayali—*

- (a) Thangal—Sayeds (very few in Calcutta)
- (b) Musalliyar
- (c) Mapilla
- (d) Rowther
- (e) Keyie

- (4) *Northern Region*—Consisting of the valleys of the Ganges and the Jamuna—extending from Haryana to U.P., Bihar and the Gangetic delta.

(i) Groups claiming foreign origin—having no traditional occupation and not organized on the basis of caste panchayat—represented in all sects and most regional groups :

- (a) Sayed
- (b) Sheikh
- (c) Moghal
- (d) Pathan

(ii) Groups of indigenous origin, recruited from superior ruling and fighting castes, coming from particular areas with some sort of caste organization often taking shape into formalized associations :

- (a) Qaum-e-Panjabian (Delhi)
- (b) Qaum-e-Panjabian (Anwla)
- (c) Rajputs
- (d) Jats
- (e) Malik

(iii) Groups with traditional occupations, with traditional caste organization of varying strength :

1. Groups that do not pursue traditional occupations in Calcutta but continue to do so elsewhere :

- (a) Momins (Ansari) weavers
- (b) Ranki (Iraqi) Kalal or distillers.

2. Occupational groups that continue to pursue traditional occupation, besides adopting other occupations, have generally strong caste organization :

- (c) Darzi (i) Bengali, (ii) Non-Bengali
- (d) Kharadi or wood workers
- (e) Qasab or butchers—Qureshi

- (f) Chik—butchers of goat & sheep
  - (g) Rai—green grocers
  - (h) Besati—pedlers of stationary articles etc.
  - (i) Mansuri—cotton carders
  - (j) Churihar—shishgar—glass bangle makers and dealers.
  - (k) Nikari—fish mongers
  - (l) Dafali—drum makers, priest of several castes and guardian-worshippers of special spirit.
  - (m) Hajjam—barber as well as surgeon
  - (n) Dhobi—washermen
  - (o) Mirshikar or chirimar—trappers of and dealers in birds.
  - (p) Mirasi—musician
  - (q) Qalander—
  - (r) Faqir—beggers and mendicants (shah)
  - (s) Patwa—painters.
3. Pastoralists—dealers in animals and dairy farmers :
- (t) Sheikhjee—khatal owners and dealers in milk or dairy farmers
  - (u) Meo—dairy men and dealers in milk
  - (v) Ghosi—khatal owners and dealers in milk
- (iv) Groups engaged in 'unclean' occupation—on the borderline of Islam and Hinduism—
- (a) Lal Begi—sweepers

This by and large covers the entire Muslim population of the city. A few smaller groups might still have remained unidentified in the city's Muslim population yet the main factors in their ethnic composition have been shown. Separate population figures of the respective groups are not available but it is evident that numerically most dominant group is that of the Momin, followed by the Rai, and the Qasab. The Imami Ismaili Shia, the Mirshikar, the Mirasi and



the Nikari are among the smaller groups. Economically more dominant are the Gujrati groups, the Qaum-e-Punjabian, Dawoodi Bohra and the Ranki, the last mentioned virtually monopolize the hide and skin trade. Momins have also attained substantial economic prosperity and have asserted well enough to take their due share in the leadership of the community.

Before we go into the details of the various aspects of the groups relevant to the present topic, it will be appropriate to present here a brief composition of the Muslim population on the basis of nationality, regional and linguistic affinity and affiliation to sects as well as to mystic orders.

#### NATIONALITY

A major differentiation in the Muslim society is between the citizens and the aliens, in the political sense of the terms. The foreigners do not constitute a single group; they are rather divided on the basis of nationality. The Afghans alone are in sizable group. They remain apparently unaffected by the changing spacial distribution of the Muslim population within the city due to the impact of socio-political conditions of the country. Thus they continue to inhabit the areas that had to be vacated by Muslims in general during the last two decades or so.

The Afghans are mostly in money lending business and appear to have little contact with others beyond the sphere of their business activities. Even when they live in predominantly Muslim localities, the stamp of foreignness on them does not allow the idea of neighbourhood, that Islamic Great Tradition enjoins upon its followers, to develop, between the Afghans and the citizens of the country. Cases of marriage between the Afghans and other categories of Muslims are very rare, and a few cases are available to show that such a marriage does not grant the Afghan the fuller rights and obligations of a kin within the family of the bride. The woman gets alienated from the family of her orientation. Afghans do not take part in any of the welfare activities of the Muslim community in the city. Mosque and biannual congregations alone are the places where they generally

come together. More or less the same is true of the Muslims of other nationalities.

#### REGIONAL BACKGROUND

There is considerable degree of exclusiveness on the basis of regional backgrounds. Regional groups with linguistic affinity interact a little closely because of the obvious reasons. Thus we find that the Tamilians and the Malayali with Dravidian linguistic background are closer to each other than to the rest. This mainly reflects in exclusive residence wherever possible, collaborations or assistance in business and often rendering or abstaining from help in local welfare activities etc. The language of interregional communication is Hindustani or some form of Urdu.

#### SECTS

A variety of sects, sub-sects and socio-religious movements characterize the Muslim society in Calcutta. Being an urban centre of considerable importance, Calcutta serves as a centre for the dissemination of ideas including those based on religious trends of thought. Some of the more dynamic sects demonstrate considerable activity directed towards propagating their sects among other Muslims. I will briefly mention the main sects that exist and operate in the city and the popularity of various sects among different levels. The sects are as follows

##### 1. Sunni

###### (i) Old schools

- (a) Hanafi
- (b) Shafei
- (c) Maleki
- (d) Hambali

###### (ii) New schools

- (a) Bareilvi
- (b) Deobandi

## 2. Shia

- (a) Athna A'shari
- (b) Dawoodi Bohra
- (c) Imami Ismaili Shia

3. Ahl-e-Hadith (wahabi)—a unified group, claiming to be strict followers of the Quran and the tradition (shariat).

4. Ahmadia (Qadyani).

Besides these sects, a group is noticeable among the Muslims which believes in the futility of sectarian divisions and is critical of the system that vivisects the Muslim society on flimsy grounds, the group derives inspiration from a few eminent scholars like Shah Waliulla who is particularly noted for toning down the animosity between Shia and Sunni sects. Largely western education and development of a feeling of unity among all Muslims in recent times are responsible for the creation of such a group, yet it remains most unorganized and often appears in the form of collective consciousness at sophisticated levels.

Sunni are by far the largest sectarian group accounting roughly for 80 to 90 per cent of the Muslim population followed by the Ahle Hadith and the Shia. The Ahmadia and the Imami Ismaili Shia are the smallest, consisting of about 50 families each. The mosques or community centres as in the case of Imami Ismaili Shia, serve as rallying points for the members of the sects. Generally each sect has its separate mosques, some of which are more exclusive than others. This exclusiveness is more marked in case of the three Shia sects as well as the Ahmadias, the last mentioned is the youngest of all and has regular agency for propagating its religious peculiarities.

The sects cut across regional and ethnic divisions and are strong dividing force in the society to the extent that intersect marriages within the same ethnic group, though permissible, are strongly discouraged. Emergence of new sects are discouraged and often resisted.

Sectarian divisions are more marked among groups—within the first block that are not wedded to traditional occupation and are

least organized on the basis of caste councils than others. The division is more marked among the Sayed and the Sheikh than among the Moghal and the Pathan. The groups within the next block i.e., those drawn from higher Hindu castes are affected by sectarian divisions in a different manner. A few sects are exclusive to this block as for example Dawoodi Bohra and Imami Ismaili Shia sects are almost exclusive to this category. The Memans and the Qaum-e-Punjabian are almost exclusively Sunni. The sectarian affiliation of the groups within the category is largely related to the history of their recruitment to Muslim society or the story of their origin. The subsequent categories i.e. those consisting of those with fixed occupational background are least affected by sectarian divisions. However, recent movements like Deobandism and Barelvism appear to be widely affecting the 'clean' occupational groups as they are doing the categories above them.

#### KHANQAHS

Besides sects quite a number of hereditary mystic orders or khanqahs tracing their origin from or affiliated to various orders or '*silsilas*' characterize the Muslim society. Most individuals, though not all, either specially rever any of such *silsila* or have themselves registered as its devotees. Some people do not consider such an attachment to silsilas necessary, for many it is a must for individual salvation. They are generally viewed as sources through which one has to approach God, but it is considered by orthodox sects as against the very essence of Islam which abolished all via media between man and God.

The mystic orders most prominent in the city are Qadria, Naqshbandia and Chishtia, named after their founder saints; the first one has a large khanqah in central Calcutta with other sub-centres at Kidderpur and Baniapukur, while the chiefs of other silsilas known as *pir* visit the city from all parts of the country and rally their devotees, known as '*moreed*', around them. Certain ethnic groups specially rever certain silsilas such as pastoralist groups generally rever Naqshbandia, the Qalanders derive their name from Qalandaria silsila to whom they are specially devoted. The Lal Begi derive

their name from a Turkish saint Lal Beg. Being a hereditary representative of his silsila a *pir* exercises considerable authority in the socio-religious life of his *morced* and is a rallying centre for them including a large number of Hindus. *Pirs* are mystics rather than theologians and are believed to be having hereditary powers rather than acquired characteristics. Both these factors do not generally coincide in a single individual.

The history of origin (recruitment) of most ethnic groups in the second, third and fourth categories is linked with one or other of the silsilas in respect of which they have special ritual to perform either in the form of '*urs*' or '*fateha*'

It is worth noting that founders of the mystic orders, either in the city or outside are exclusively from the category that claims foreign origin most of whom are Sayeds.

#### GREAT TRADITION

All Muslims share belief in five fundamentals namely unity of God, prophethood of Mohammad, *namaz*, fasting in Ramazan and payment of *zakat*. The Shia sects add to these the sixth point i.e., belief in the hereditary *Imamate* in one form or other.

It is difficult to estimate the proportion of people who actually perform the ritual aspects of these fundamentals, particularly the *namaz*, but a sense of belongingness to a particular congregation, as a unit, exists. Excepting the three Shia sects as well as the Ahmadiyas who, even taken together, are a microscopic minority, all others meet together at least in biannual congregations. The daily and weekly congregations of Ahle-Hadith are usually separate but Sunni and Ahle-Hadith can visit each other's mosque with greater freedom even on ordinary days.

No centralized agency for the levy and collection of *zakat* exists in Calcutta. Some charitable organizations like orphanages, *madrasahs* and welfare agencies including hospitals come with appeals for funds and are responded to with *zakat* funds. The bulk of the cost of religious-cum-primary education given in *madrasahs* and mosques to children of the poor is largely met with *zakat* funds offered by

individuals. At the primary stage such an education is largely free from sectarian differences. A number of such *maktabs* are run by the organizations or panchayats of various ethnic groups and preferences are given in the institutions to one's own group. The institutions run by the organizations of wider character also receive considerable attention.

#### ATTRIBUTES OF CASTE

The ethnic groups are variously called as 'qaum', 'beradari', 'jat' or 'zat' and jamat. While these terms have various meanings, they are applied to the groups by themselves strictly in the sense of *jati*<sup>4</sup>. The difference in terminology reflects only regional and linguistic variations. Qaum is generally used by the groups from the North-Western region including Delhi and Punjab. The Gujrati from the western region use the term jama't. Ethnic groups from the northern region as well as Rajasthan use both jat and beradari to denote their groups. It is worth mentioning that the term beradari is also used to mean a small range of kins inside an ethnic group within which marriage relationship is usually confined. It is in this narrower sense that the term is more often used within the groups in category I while all the rest use the term to mean the entire ethnic group in the city or elsewhere.

#### NATURE OF ETHNIC GROUPS

The groups are of the nature of descent groups with or without occupational background. Even those among them who have given up traditional occupation to adopt others are bound together on the basis of their former occupational background and are one with those sections of their group that continue to pursue the same. Each group has a name which its members use as surnames a little more frequently

4. "A *jati* is a named group usually spread over a wide territory roughly occupying *vis-a-vis* other such categories the same position in the caste hierarchy of a region. Members of a *jati* roughly have the same traditional occupation and may have such rituals and myths in common". Bernard S. Cohn 'Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society' in *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, pp. 3-28.

in the urban situation than elsewhere. A conscious attempt to adopt a suitable surname where it did not exist is an interesting feature as in the case of butchers, cotton carders and grocers. Some other occupational groups have decided to adopt the surnames of groups in the higher scale such as the Maliks from Bihar started claiming Sayed as their title, the Churihar and even the Chirimar have resolved to adopt Siddiqui as their title. Surnames are the symbols of equality of status within the group and prestige without.

The members of most groups are in living contact with the area of their origin. Some are more while others are less. South Indian groups are, generally, in more intimate relationship with the areas of their origin than others. Excepting a few Malayali families most others remain in Calcutta detached from families, their marriages take place usually at home. A few cases of marriage between Malayali Muslims and others in Calcutta are exceptions. Tamils in spite of their long history of contact and relative prosperity remain attached to home where they go back for marriage and family life. The comparative attachment of a group to the area of its origin indicates normally in the same proportion its detachment from the social environment of its habitat in the city.

#### ENDOGAMY

Each ethnic group is endogamous and it is from amongst ones' own group that actual, or potential kins come. While class considerations also come in the establishment of marriage relationship and within most ethnic groups, particularly where material advancement is not uniform, marriage sub-groups occur. Inter-ethnic marriages, in spite of similarity in class status, are severely discouraged. It is only in the higher level i.e., groups in first block that intermarriages take place more frequently, particularly among the smaller sects like the Shia or the Ahmadiya. At all other levels it meets with discouragement ranging from mere disapproval to ostracism, depending upon the strength of the *jati* panchayat. Some sort of sanctity is attached to the purity of descent as is evident from the use of such terms as 'sudh' as against 'bisser' or impure; 'najib-ut-tarfain' and 'sahihunnasl' as against 'birrc' or 'birrahe' i.e. of mixed descent.

The former i.e., the 'sudh' or pure among all groups enjoy greater prestige than the 'bisser' or mixed ones. The 'sudh' try to keep their marriage relationship with the 'sudh' and the 'bisser' or 'birre' have no other alternative but to remain within their sub-groups.

Hypergamy is allowed to the groups in the first category particularly to Sayed and the Sheikh, but their progeny do not get the full status of their father and are known as 'Sayedzada' or 'Sheikhzada', who are supposed to establish kinship only with people of similar status. Material advancement of such people in a city often appears to make good for the inferiority of their status but the social stigma does not go easily.

The belief in the purity of descent presupposes impurity of its violation or of a polluting nature. In spite of emphasis on egalitarianism the collective conscience is unfavourable to inter-ethnic marriages and generally disapproves such cases, of course in varying degrees at different levels. The rationale for this is varied at various levels ranging from mere compliance of customary practices and necessity of occupational training to the permissive character of the Quranic verse which is interpreted to mean that groups are intended to demonstrate distinction between each other

#### CASTE COUNCILS

A jati council or panchayat is a normal prerequisite for a jati. In Calcutta we come across such panchayat organizations of varying strength at different levels. There is striking absence of any such organization in all the groups in category I, where the groups maintain themselves through collective sentiment and status consciousness. In the second category group panchayats in the form of formalized group organizations are come across where membership is involuntary, but leaders are elected. Economically dominant as the groups within the category are, their organizations generally combine welfare activities for the group with other regular panchayat activities. Linking the panchayat with larger councils elsewhere, maintenance of demographic details of group members as well as mosques and burial grounds belonging to the group are among their main functions.



Their organizational and functional features assume the pattern of guild-cum-caste councils although all of them do not necessarily follow a particular line of trade. Defiance and violation of caste norms are not very rare but by and large the tradition of the respective groups are maintained.

Among most groups in subsequent categories the panchayats are stronger. The occupational groups that continue to pursue traditional occupation, at least partially, have most effective panchayats generally with hereditary leadership. As the members of each such ethnic groups, are drawn from a wide area in the region, they form several panchayats, each based on a particular village or group of villages. Several such panchayats in case of a single ethnic group form a larger council in a sort of confederation on all Calcutta level. In case of Qureshi there are 12 such panchayats while the Rai have 22. The head, called *Sardar* or *Choudhry*, is assisted by *Charidar* or staff bearer for corrective and other purposes. Unwritten conventions relating to convening of meetings and their deliberations exist and are observed. The head yields enormous powers and in most groups such as Qureshi, Chik, Mansuri, Churihar, Dafali, Qalander and also Lal Begi is hereditary. A few like the Rai have recently started electing leaders. The village or area based panchayats in Calcutta remain, on the one hand, in living touch with the areas they come from and work as units of larger councils in the city. The councils among Momin (Ansari) and Ranki (Iraqi) have considerably weakened. However the strong tradition of panchayat reasserts itself when an eventuality arises among the members of these groups. The councils of purely Bengali groups like Darzi and Nikari are weak but nevertheless present.

At regional level the Rajasthani ethnic groups have strong panchayats that function when members assemble on the occasions of crisis relating to life cycle of a member and ostracise and readmit members. The Malayali have an association of voluntary nature but assumes certain amount of responsibility for the entire group. The Tamils have no such formal association but the Peshawari have a common panchayat for Awan, Kakazai, and Kashmiri Peshawari, the Sayeds and Pakhtoons are excluded who have none. The united

panchayat of the Peshwari groups has come in vogue since these groups have started intermarrying under the pressure of the political situation as a result of which they are more or less cut off from the area of their origin.

In short caste panchayat is a must for all groups that follow traditional occupation, 'clean' or 'unclean' and is generally capable of asserting itself effectively. It is also present among the groups drawn from superior Hindu castes but generally with reduced strength; it is absent from the groups in category I.

#### FOOD AND POLLUTION

The most common pattern of interdining is one confined to one's kin group or known range within the ethnic group. The size of the ethnic group also determines the range and composition of usual commensal groups. The symbolic ritual equality of the members of an ethnic group is expressed in such terms as 'tat' or 'chatai' upon which such members can sit smoke and eat together. The expelled members lose the title to such an equality. Such a phenomena is observed among the Qureshi, Chik, Mansuri, Dafali and such other groups with occupational backgrounds. Distinction between beradari and non-beradari are usual, though not always in matters of seating arrangements which generally follows class pattern. Among economically higher classes interdining, in all aspects, follows class pattern with considerable bias in favour of kins and ones' own ethnic group. Among regional groups this has regional bias instead of ethnic but in case of Rajasthani groups caste men cannot be ignored.

The idea of interpollution in matter of interdining is limited to 'clean' castes with regard to the 'unclean' ones. Restrictions in interdining either among the groups in category I, II, or III or in respect of each other is not generally observed and stated to be non-existent. Members of groups within these categories do not eat or drink with the Lal Begi; the latter can, however, receive all sorts of food from the former. The Dafali who work as the priest of the Lal Begi or the Qalander who sometimes live in their neighbourhood refuse to accept food or water from Lal Begi. Among groups in other

categories, the women are believed to be observing more restrictions in interdining than men.

#### RANKING

Ranking is both a matter of a large measure of consensus and of practical operation. The realism of urban situation tends to bring about its own influence felt in the sphere and it will be futile to search for perfectness and consistency of an ideal system of ranking on the basis of our model among the Muslim society in Calcutta. The composition of various categories in terms of their comparative numerical strength is also an important factor to be noted in this connection. In the absence of exact figure of each category it is not possible to quote numbers but it is not difficult for a careful observer to note the greater amount of concentration in the category consisting of groups with clean occupational background reaching over 80% of the total. Yet it is possible to observe a consistent system of ranking. Descent is an important factor in assigning rank and those of foreign origin enjoy higher privilege and prestige. The Sayeds are almost by common consent assigned the highest position with privileges of hypergamy. Those who enter into kinship with Sayeds, on account of descent, enjoy similar status. The position of *pir* who command greatest respect and veneration of their disciple is always and invariably occupied by the people of the first category. In this respect the rest of the subsequent categories are in the position of clients in relation to the former (Table I).

Certain occupations are rated higher and others lower and in this respect the groups with ruling and fighting background claim higher position next to category I. Their economic position in the city often persuades them to assume position only below the Sayeds and equal to the rest in the category. Foreign descent however remains a matter of respect for most in the category and the fact that their position is that of clients to the former category their place in the hierarchy comes only next to category I, to which there is more or less a general agreement.

Groups with fixed traditional occupation implying varying degrees of manual work and suggesting a large measure of dependence on

### TABLE I

*Ethnic groups with/without caste organization hierarchically shown with sect\* affiliations*

Hierar- chical order	Sect	Groups without caste organization	Groups with formalized/weak caste organizations	Groups with traditional caste/ sectarian organization of considerable strength
1	2	3	4	5
I	Sunni Shia Ahl-e-Hadith Ahmadia	Sayed Sheikh Moghal Pathan		
II	Sunni	<i>North W. Region</i>	<i>Northern Region (Gangetic Valley and Delta)</i>	
		Kashmiri	Qaum-e-Punjabian (Delhi)	
	Ahl-e-Hadith	<i>Northern Region (Gangetic Valley and Delta)</i> Mallok	Qaum-e-Punjabian (Anwala) Punjabī (Rajputs)	
	Ahmadia	<i>Southern Region (Tamil)</i> Maraykar Rowther Lahbali	<i>North W. Region (Peshwari)</i> Awan Kakazai Kulal Kashmiri Peshwari	<i>Western Region</i>  Dawoodi Bohra Imami-Ismaili Shia
			<i>Southern Region (Malayali) "</i> Musalliyar Mapilla Routher Keyer <i>Western Region</i> Meman (Kachi) Meman (Halai)	
III	Sunni		<i>Northern Region (Gangetic Valley and Delta)</i> Momin (Ansari) Ranki (Iraqi)	<i>Northern Region (Gangetic Valley and Delta)</i> Qureshi Chik

**\*No hierarchical order has been shown within the sectarian organization.**

TABLE I Contd.

Hierar- chical order	Sect	Groups without caste organization	Groups with formalized/weak caste organisations	Groups with traditional caste/ sectarian organization of considerable strength
1	2	3	4	5
			Darzee Nikari Patwa Besati	Rai Mansuri Churihar Hajjam Dhobi Mirshikar Dafali Qalander Faqir (Shah) Sheikhjee Meo Ghosi <i>Western Region</i> Nilgar (Shekhawat and Madi) Manihar Sonar Lohar Teli Dhobi
IV	Sunni	.		<i>Northern Region</i> ( <i>Gangetic Valley</i> <i>and Delta</i> ) Lal Begi (Sweeper)

others are factors in assigning a subsequent position to them in the hierarchy. There is confusion in the hierarchical position of each group *vis-a-vis* other in the category but the position of the category as a whole is not much in dispute. Their influx in disproportionately large number in the city and enormous swelling of their rank tells its own story of suppression and depression both socially and economically. Considerable number in each group in the category, having freed themselves from the traditional bondage has gained economic prosperity and due to change in the political set up has assumed

leadership of the Muslim society. Yet in spite of this change their clientship on the one hand of the *pirs* from category I and the stigma of service to others through traditional occupation, past or present, remains. It is at this point that some of the most virulent caste mobility movements are observed and manifest themselves in adopting pure Arab surnames and pedigrees, while social systems of a few groups retain the basic structural elements of the jati. There is, however, passive acceptance of the lowest position by the Lal Begi in the last category on account of their being unclean, who often experience difficulty in getting their dead buried in the common Muslim burial ground.

Summing up we note that the composition of Muslim society is mainly based on a number of ethnic groups members of which are recruited from birth. It is impossible for an individual to be legitimately called a Sayed, a Momin, a Rai, a Qureshi or a Lal Begi without having been born into the respective groups. These are therefore closed groups in the form of a jati, known as either qaum, beradari, jamat and zat, most of whom have their own stories of origin and generally have common rituals to perform in the form of *fateha*, *urs* or *tazia* or any such thing. Relationship between these groups are basically tolerant.

Certain elements of restriction in interdining are present, though there is a good deal of laxity in interdining between the higher and the intermediate blocks and the ideal norms of the caste system in this regard is not elaborate. This is not only due to the egalitarian influence of the Islamic Great Tradition but also to the compelling factors of urban life in a cosmopolitan situation.

The basic elements of a system of ranking similar to the caste system is present. Most groups are aware of others particularly in a regional framework, though not all of them about every other. The four categories or blocks starting from Sayed and others of foreign origin are hierarchically arranged. The positions of the highest and the lowest are agreed by more or less common consent. The position of the two intermediate blocks also become clear when we take into consideration the generally agreed principles on which the hierarchy is based. These are descent and nature of occupation.

The suggestion of the existence of hierarchical order generally receives an overt denial due to the influence of the Great Tradition but it is seen in the covert behaviour as well as in certain aspects of the belief system. When the anomalies between ideals and practices were clearly shown the Muslim respondents agreed about the real situation.

Sectarian groupings align various groups cutting across ethnic and regional boundaries, but this is the characteristic feature of the upper categories, particularly the first one, others remain largely unaffected. In spite of existence of caste like hierarchy and sectarian segments certain basic principles of the Great Tradition in the sphere of religion, in the form of mass congregations give a sense of unity to the decisive bulk of the Muslims in Calcutta.

A good deal of corporateness is present around the mystic orders or *khanqah* under the leadership of *pirs* who belong to the first block, particularly the Sayeds and the Sheikhs.

The jati panchayats or councils are absent in the highest block, they are present in a weak form in the next block and are generally very strong among groups in the subsequent blocks.

Although there is conspicuous absence of the myth underlying the Hindu varna system, yet the model is found to be unconsciously followed and is structurally operative in the Muslim society. Besides the egalitarian character of Islam with its own story of human origin, the time and space factors contribute to the situation. This means to say that certain factors are at work which are directed against social and political inequality and these are more operative in the urban situation than elsewhere.

Thus in spite of the forces at work a caste-like system is functionally present among the Muslims of Calcutta and this system is roughly in harmony with the Islamic Great Tradition while operating within a larger milieu of Hindu dominated Indian society without much evidence of internal conflict.

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# INTERGROUP STEREOTYPES AND ATTITUDES IN CALCUTTA

S. C. Panchbhai

'A PREMATURE metropolis', 'a city of grinding poverty' with an 'economy of scarcity', 'a city in transition' or 'a predominantly adult male city',—these are some of the adjectives that have been used to describe the identity of Calcutta. These generalizations are based on some scientific observations. One may also add from one's impressions about Calcutta that it is a city of contrasts or a city of extremes, or that it is a conglomeration of unevenly related, imperfectly urbanized heterogeneous sub-cultural populations, lacking a composite character. But impressions sometimes take the form of stereotypes if they are not supported by systematic knowledge. And, stereotypes, as we know, have the power of conviction. They affect our attitudes and behaviour even when they are devoid of objective validity. Let us take the example of intergroup stereotypes in Calcutta and see to what extent they reflect the intergroup behaviour.

The people that compose the population of this city belong to various linguistic and religious denominations. Except for their 'official and commercial interests' when they have peripheral interaction with the people of other groups, most of them remain usually confined in their cultural islands (Bose 1958). As most of the non-Bengalee minorities seem to have little access to or acceptance in the Bengalee society, and have, of necessity, to stick to their own ways of life, there has been little acculturation among them and almost no sense of belonging to this metropolis.

A feeling of cultural and intellectual superiority coupled with 'a strong sense of local patriotism' (Bose 1958) in the Bengalee mind creates a paradox. The Bengalee wishes a non-Bengalee to remain as he is (Bose 1965) but at the same time feels critical about him

for maintaining his ethnic identity and not acceding to the Bengalee way of life.

One may advance the frustration and scapegoat theories or some other sociological, economic or political reasons to account for this state of affairs but one thing is clear that all these contribute to inter-group antagonism. This situation creates a vicious circle by giving rise to inter-ethnic prejudices which further widen the gulf between communities and create more barriers for social harmony and cultural synthesis.

A brief sketch of some psychological aspects of this intergroup situation in Calcutta will be helpful in understanding the socio-cultural profile of this city. The observations made in the following pages are based upon two small sample surveys conducted during 1958 and 1965.

#### METHOD

*Subjects :* Though more individuals responded to our questionnaire, responses only of 300 subjects (Ss) in the 1958 study and 425 in 1965 study were included for statistical treatment. The Ss in the first study were mostly male students of the Calcutta University and some affiliated colleges. They constituted a sample of 100 Hindu Bengalees and 50 each of Hindu Bihari, Hindu Uttarpradeshi, Muslim and Christian communities. Those in the 1965 study belonged to the following experimental groups :—

<i>Group No.</i>	<i>Identity</i>				<i>N</i>
1. Hindu	Bengalee	male	service-holders	(college)	= 50
2. "	"	"	students	(university)	= 50
3. "	"	female	"	"	= 50
4. "	"	male	"	(college)	= 50
5. "	"	"	"	(school)	= 50
6. "	Hindi-speaking	"	"	"	= 50
7. "	Marwari	"	"	"	= 50
8. "	Punjabi (combined)	"	"	"	= 25
9. "	Bihari	"	"	"	= 25
10. "	Uttarpradeshi	"	"	"	= 25

*Procedure :* The check-list type questionnaire used in the survey contained a list of adjectives or 'verbalized social stereotypes', and names of some major groups to which the adjectives were to be applied so as to describe their typical group-characteristics. It was administered in Bengali and Hindi, individually as well as in group situation, but each subject was required to give his individual opinions.

In the 1958 study the questionnaire had 100 adjectives or trait-names—equally divided into favourable and unfavourable, and the subjects were required to select 20 most appropriate adjectives for each of the following 9 communities : Bengalee, Bihari, Uttarpradeshi, Oriya, Punjabi, Madras, Hindu, Muslim and Christian. There was no preference scale, and only those trait-names were considered for analysis whose frequencies reached 50 per cent or higher level in the individual sample's selection.

In the 1965 study there were only 50 adjectives in the questionnaire—similarly divided into half favourable and half unfavourable, and the Ss were asked to select 10 traits for each of the following categories : Adivasi, Bengalee, Bihari, Assamese, Oriya, Marwari, Muslim, Nepali, South Indian and Indian. A preference scale was also introduced for allowing the Ss to express their social preferences by arranging different categories of groups in the order of preference for association. In this way there were two types of responses from the Ss : (1) the attribution of traits or stereotypes to different groups or people, and (2) the arrangement of these groups or people in the order of preference. The methods under which these two types of responses were elicited have been termed here as the 'trait-method' and 'preference-method' respectively.

For the statistical analysis all the frequencies of different stereotypes selected for each category of people by the Ss of an experimental group were summed up and split into the favourable and the unfavourable. To get the ratio of favourable stereotypes to the unfavourable ones in a group's selection for a category of people, the sum of the favourable stereotype frequencies was divided by the sum of the unfavourable ones. This gave us the Favourable-ratio (F-ratio) on the basis of which the categories were ranked. An F-ratio of 1,

therefore, meant that there were equal number of favourable and unfavourable stereotypes in a group's selection.

The preference-method similarly gave the preference-scores termed here as Favourable-marks (F-marks). The calculation of these marks was done in the following way. The category or group that was preferred most or placed first in the preference scale was allotted as many marks as the number of groups being arranged under this method. And, with a gradual reduction by one mark in the successive selections the least preferred or the last placed got one mark. The aggregate of such marks attributed to each category by an experimental group was found out for placing the different categories of groups in a rank order.

It may be hypothesized that the F-ratios and the F-marks are directly proportional to the degree of favourable disposition towards the category of people to which they are applied by an experimental group. Once this is established, they can then be interpreted as the indicators of the levels of identification or degrees of ethnocentrism and prejudice.

Intragroup and intergroup correlations were found out to see how far the two responses—stereotypes and preferences, of an experimental group or the same type of responses of two comparable groups towards a particular category, were related.

As the data from 1965 study were subjected to a more detailed analysis most of the observations made briefly in the following pages are based on them.

## RESULTS

Though each of the 10 experimental groups' responses were recorded separately in a more detailed study (Panchbhai : unpublished) and as dealt with individually in Table 3, they have been treated in Table 1 and 2 under two broad linguistic divisions—Bengalee and non-Bengalee, each representing five experimental groups. This gives us a rough approximation of the picture of different communities in the Bengalee and the non-Bengalee minds. It is observed that but for some minor deviations, the non-Bengalee sub-groups

have shown a remarkable identity in their opinions about some out-groups, more particularly the Bengalee.

Let us now take the individual categories of people against whom the opinions and attitudes of our Ss were recorded and see how they look like through the eyes of the two Calcutta populations.

The most frequently selected 5 stereotypes for each community have been presented in Table 1. A closer scrutiny of these stereotypes and their frequencies shows that the two populations have reached maximum unanimity in their stereotypes of such categories of people against whom they have either extreme antagonism or extreme favourable disposition. The Muslim have been placed at the one end and the Nepali and the Indian at the other of the unfavourable-favourable continuum. The maximum disagreement between the two populations is in the case of the Bengalee, the Bihari and the Assamese, showing that their point of views in respect to those communities are poles apart and almost contradictory. It is also noticed that because of the lack of homogeneity in the non-Bengalee population its samples are less consistent in their stereotypes of less familiar groups like the Assamese, the South Indian and the Oriya.

Comparing the two populations on the basis of their scores—F-ratios and F-marks, assigned by them to different communities one gets further access into the intergroup situation (Table 2).

*Adivasi* : On the whole the Bengalees have attributed to them more favourable scores than the non-Bengalees, showing that the former have more favourable opinion about them than the latter.

*Bengalee* : The Bengalee Ss have assigned nearly 4 times more F-ratio for their own community whereas the F-ratio given to them by the non-Bengalees is less than 3/4. Within the Bengalee population the highest ratio for the in-group has been given by the University students and the lowest by the school students. Among the non-Bengalees the maximum ratio has been assigned by the Punjabis and the minimum by the Hindi-speaking and the Marwari samples. The Punjabis and the Marwaris have expressed similar attitudes in their preferences by assigning the Bengalee the highest and the lowest marks respectively.

TABLE 1

*The stereotypes most frequently attributed to different groups by the Bengalee and the non-Bengalee subjects*

(Numbers indicate percentage frequency)

By the Bengalees		By the non-Bengalees	
<i>Adivasi</i>		<i>Adivasi</i>	
Courageous	77.6	Courageous	72.0
Simple	72.4	Backward	62.8
Backward	66.4	Shabby	56.4
Liberal	52.8	Laborious	52.8
Faithful	49.6	Cruel	42.4
<i>Bengalee</i>		<i>Bengalee</i>	
Gentle	75.2	Sorvicominded	66.7
Literary	67.2	Cowardly	60.0
Hospitable	61.6	Jealous	59.2
Peace-loving	58.0	Selfish	50.8
Patriotic	53.6	Quarrelsome	47.6
<i>Bihari</i>		<i>Bihari</i>	
Shabby	49.2	Courageous	53.6
Backward	46.0	Friendly	48.4
Conservative	42.0	Simple	45.2
Narrow-minded	38.4	Gentle	43.6
Cowardly	37.2	Hospitable	42.4
<i>Assamese</i>		<i>Assamese</i>	
Provincialistic	44.0	Laborious	40.0
Narrowminded	42.8	Hospitable	35.2
Quarrelsome	41.6	Gentle	34.0
Hostile	38.8	Conservative	33.2
Jealous	38.0	Straightforward	29.2
<i>Oriya</i>		<i>Oriya</i>	
Cowardly	58.0	Cowardly	36.8
Backward	54.0	Shabby	33.2
Simple	48.8	Conservative	32.4
Conservative	43.2	Friendly	31.6
Peace-loving	36.8	Hospitable	29.6
<i>Marwari</i>		<i>Marwari</i>	
Businessminded	73.6	Businessminded	70.0
Selfish	60.0	Industrious	55.6
Opportunistic	57.2	Selfish	53.2
Greedy	50.8	Cowardly	48.0
Narrowminded	44.4	Greedy	47.2

TABLE 1—Contd.

By the Bengalees		By the non-Bengalees	
<i>Muslim</i>		<i>Muslim</i>	
Cruel	65.6	Jealous	60.4
Quarrelsome	65.6	Hostile	59.6
Selfish	59.2	Cruel	58.8
Jealous	55.6	Quarrelsome	56.8
Aggressive	55.2	Selfish	52.8
<i>Nepali</i>		<i>Nepali</i>	
Courageous	80.8	Courageous	77.6
Dutiful	72.8	Laborious	54.0
Faithful	60.4	Dutiful	46.0
Simple	51.2	Friendly	44.4
Honest	40.4	Faithful	42.4
<i>South Indian</i>		<i>South Indian</i>	
Gentle	53.2	Progressive	44.8
Progressive	48.6	Literary	40.8
Dutiful	42.4	Laborious	38.0
Industrious	38.0	Artistic	35.4
Literary	37.6	Gentle	34.4
<i>Indian</i>		<i>Indian</i>	
Peace-loving	69.2	Courageous	66.4
Gentle	66.8	Liberal	62.8
Liberal	59.6	Gentle	62.0
Hospitable	58.8	Peace-loving	54.4
Courageous	56.4	Patriotic	54.0

*Note* - In addition to some of the above groups, the 'Hindusthani' (Uttarpradeshi) the Punjabi and the Christian were included in the 1958 study. The most frequently attributed commonly held stereotypes of the Uttarpradeshi in that study were Religious, Hospitable, Friendly, and Peaceloving; those of the Punjabi were Rude, Energetic, Courageous, Dutiful and Industrious and the Christian were considered as Smart, Serviceminded, Active, Luxury-loving and Pompous.

*Bihari* : The minimum ratio has been given by the Bengalee service-holders and the minimum marks by the Bengalee college students. The University girl students and Bengalee school boys have shown least antipathy towards them. Among the non-Bengalees the Punjabis seem to be having the least favourable disposition towards these people.

TABLE 2

*The responses of the Bengalee and the non-Bengalee subjects in respect of different groups*

## BY THE BENGALLEES

	Total stereo- types above 25%	Favour- able stereo- types	Un- favour- able stereo- types	Average F-ratios	Rank	Average F-marks	Rank	Average rank of ratios & marks
Adivasi	18	13	5	1.78	5	263.2	5	5
Bengalee	21	10	2	3.98	2	474.4	1	1.5
Bihari	17	5	12	0.75	7	266.6	7	7
Assamese	16	4	12	0.55	8	202.6	8	8
Oriya	20	10	10	0.96	6	267.0	6	6
Marwari	19	5	14	0.42	9	179.8	9	9
Muslim	20	1	19	0.20	10	126.8	10	10
Nepali	19	16	3	3.17	3	290.4	4	3.5
South Indian	20	17	3	2.56	4	293.4	3	3.5
Indian	19	18	1	7.73	1	296.0	2	1.5

## BY THE NON-BENGALLEES

	Total stereo- types above 25%	Favour- able stereo- types	Un- favour- able stereo- types	Average F-ratios	Rank	Average F-marks	Rank	Average rank of ratios & marks
Adivasi	17	7	10	1.12	7	149.0	9	9
Bengalee	14	4	10	0.71	9	221.6	5	7
Bihari	21	17	4	2.82	3	255.4	1	2
Assamese	21	14	7	1.61	5	189.4	7	6
Oriya	23	15	8	1.49	6	151.0	8	7
Marwari	20	9	11	0.92	8	244.6	3	5.5
Muslim	17	1	16	0.26	10	77.0	10	10
Nepali	19	17	2	3.68	2	235.4	4	3
South Indian	17	14	3	2.11	4	198.3	6	5
Indian	20	20	—	6.53	1	246.0	2	1.5

*Assamese*: No Bengalee group has given them more than 1 F-ratio; generally it is less than 0.5. The non-Bengalees, on the other



TABLE 3

*Rank difference correlation coefficient*

Under trait method			Under preference method			Between trait & preference method		
Between groups	Rho	Level of significance	Between groups	Rho	Level of significance	Within groups	Rho	Level of significance
1 & 2	0.99	.01	1 & 2	0.73	.05	1	0.71	.05
1 & 3	0.94	.01	2 & 3	0.87	.01	2	0.94	.01
2 & 4	0.98	.01	2 & 4	0.88	.01	3	0.92	.01
2 & 5	0.98	.01	2 & 5	0.81	.01	4	0.80	.01
5 & 7	0.79	.05	5 & 7	0.62	Nil	5	0.88	.01
5 & 9	0.99	.05	5 & 9	0.72	.05	6	0.70	.05
6 & 7	0.88	.01	6 & 7	0.84	.01	7	0.65	.05
6 & 8	0.86	.01	6 & 8	0.85	.01	8	0.76	.01
6 & 9	0.93	.01	6 & 9	0.94	.01	9	0.65	.05
6 & 10	0.93	.01	6 & 10	0.88	.01	10	0.64	.05
9 & 10	0.86	.01	9 & 10	0.79	.01	--	--	--

hand, have assigned them more than 1 F-ratio showing that they think of the Assamese in more favourable terms. Their F-marks also point out to the same tendency.

*Oriya* : Though their F-ratios generally indicate that the non-Bengalees have a more favourable image of the Oriyas than the Bengalees, their F-marks do not conform to this trend. The Bengalees though thinking of the Oriyas in a derogatory way seem to prefer them for association.

*Marwari* : The F-ratios though indicate that the non-Bengalees have a little better image of the Marwari, it is not very different from that held by the Bengalees in general. The Marwaris, in a sense, seem to be self-accusing. Many negative stereotypes that are attributed by the out-groups to the Marwari are also shared by the Marwaris themselves. This is manifested in their in-group F-ratio which is the minimum among all the in-group ratios. But for their

almost normal preference for the in-group as revealed through their F-marks, their self-hatred would have reached the breaking point.

*Muslim* . More than in respect to any other community, there is a remarkable uniformity in the two populations' responses towards the Muslim. They have consistently been assigned the last rank by all groups under both methods.

*Nepali* : The Nepalis seem to be the most favourable out-group both to the Bengalees and the non-Bengalees. Their more favourable rank position under the F-ratios, however, shows that they are liked for their positive qualities though not preferred for association to the same extent.

*South Indian* : The Bengalee Ss more than the non-Bengalees not only show more consistency in their reactions towards the South Indians but also more favourable disposition towards them.

*Indian* . All the 10 samples in our experimental population have ranked Indian first under the trait-method but most of them have given the second rank to this category and first to one's linguistic groups under the preference-method. The category Indian, it seems represents an idealistic self-image to every group but when there is a question of choice for association one prefers one's linguistic group.

## CONCLUSIONS

In most cases there is significant correlation between the responses of the comparable groups (Table 3).<sup>\*</sup> The higher level of significance under the trait-method shows that responses under this method remain more consistent than under the preference-method. In other words, there is more unanimity in the individuals, outgroup stereotypes than in their attitudes towards them.

As the intragroup or between-method correlation is also significant in all cases one may conclude that stereotypes accompany the social distance and can be interpreted as the pointers to the direction in which the intergroup relations are moving. Or, what people think about others is generally expressed in their preferences for them.

Though the non-Bengalee communities individually seem to reciprocate the Bengalee attitude towards them, in contrast to the

divergence of shades in the Bengalee attitudes—ranging from the very favourable to the most unfavourable, the non-Bengalees seem to be more unanimous in their unfavourable disposition towards the Bengalees.

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# KALI TEMPLE AT KALIGHAT AND THE CITY OF CALCUTTA

Surajit Sinha

EVEN after the impact of two hundred years of Western education, and urban, commercial and industrial growth in the city of Calcutta the Kali temple of Kalighat continues to attract a large volume of pilgrims, local, regional, as well as from all over India. We were told by the old residents around the temple that the volume of pilgrims has increased considerably within their life time, i.e., within the last seventy years.

The stubborn persistence of the sacred centre of Kalighat naturally poses the following questions : How is this pilgrim centre upholding its sacred eminence by accommodating various pressures of modern development in the city ? What are the trends of change in this adaptive process ? It was with these major questions in mind that a preliminary field study of the changing social and cultural milieu of Kali temple of Kalighat was undertaken by the Anthropological Survey of India in 1967\*.

## THE BACKGROUND IN HISTORY AND LEGENDS •

It appears that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the rural neighbourhood around the Kali temple, with its sacred zone of 595 *bighas* (about 180 acres), referred to as Kalikshetra was predominantly inhabited by the *Sevayats* (manager/devotees) of the temple and other residents connected with temple services and associated activities. A description of the neighbourhood of the temple as late as about 1905 brings the rural characteristics into relief : "A ride of over three miles with a number of perspiring and

\* Field work was done for about a month in May-June, 1967 by Dr. Surajit Sinha, Dr. Baidyanath Saraswati, Dr. Deepali Danda and Sm. Sreeparna Ray.

somnolent Bengali companions brought me to the limit of the tramway line, where I alighted in a crowded suburb of thatched cottages embosomed in the exuberant foliage of Lower Bengal" (Oman n.d.: 4).

If we probe further back in time in history and legends we learn that the temple gained its *decisive significance* due to its association with the legendary site where the right toe of Goddess Sati fell after great Puranic tragedy of *Dakshayajna*. Kalighat (Kalikshetra) is thus one of the 51 famous *Piths* (sanctuaries) of the Sakta sect described in *Pithamala* (see also Sircar 1948). Kalikshetra covered an area of two *Jojanas* (16 miles) from Bahula (Behala) to Dakshineswar within which is situated the most sacred triangle of two miles extent. According to the present *Sevayats* of Kalighat the sacred zone covers only 595 *bighas* around the present site of Kali temple.

Although there is a mention of Kalikshetra and Kalikata in Bipradas Papalai's *Manasa Mangal* (1545 AD.) apparently the temple did not gain a decisive eminence at that time (Ray 1903). There are mentions about goddess Kali at Kalighat in *Chandikabya* by Mukundaram Chakrabarti (1577 to 1592 A.D.) but reference becomes much more prominent in *Ganga Bhakti Tarangini* (published about the 1740 A.D.).

If one follows the genealogical records and associated legends of the Kalighat *Sevayats*, it becomes obvious that the eminence of Kalighat is closely associated with the Moghul patronage of Lakshmi Kanta, ancestor of the Sravarna Chaudhuris of Barisha, the chief patron of the Kali temple. Later on, Kalighat gained importance along with the growth of the city of Calcutta which brought wealthy patrons for the temple, such as the Rajas and Zamindars of Sova-bazar, Hatkhola, Paikpara and so on.

#### SECULAR INVASION OF THE SACRED ZONE

Today the bulk of the residents of the traditional sacred zone of 595 *bighas* around Kali temple are not directly connected with the sacred operations of the temple. The area contains many garages, small factories and workshops, printing press, stationery and other shops and the bulk of the residents have not direct association with

the Kali temple. We may say that there has been a massive ecological invasion of the famous sacred zone by secular functionaries and interests.

Yet, a good portion of the members of the *Sevayat* lineage, and the associated Misra Brahmins and Bhattacharya priests live within the sacred zone. Also, many of the new establishments in the immediate environment of the Kali temple have grown in response to the sacred as well as secular requirements of the increasing flow of pilgrims facilitated by modern transport. One may mention in this connection the numerous stationery and cloth shops, shops specializing in ritual articles, flowers and sweets to be presented to the Goddess, restaurants, hotels and pilgrims lodges. Thus, even under the pressure of secular swamping of the major area of the former sacred zone in the immediate surrounding of the temple, specially along the Kali temple Road, most of the establishments may be related to the growing requirements of the temple-associated activities.

#### THE SEVAYATS AND THE JAJMANS

The *Sevayats* are Rarhi Sreni Brahmins bearing the surname Halдар. They have a very special place in the Kalighat complex. They claim descent from one Sri Bhabanidas Chakravarty, who married Uma, the daughter of Bhubaneswar Brahmachari, a Dasnami Sadhu who was the original *Sevayat* of the goddess Kali in Kalighat. The five major lineages among whom the right for earnings from services (*Seva*) rotate in a cycle, claim descent from the five grandsons of Bhabanidas. These lineages are named as *Bara*, *Mejo*, *Sheja*, *Na* and *Choto* in order of seniority of the five grandsons mentioned above. The present generation of *Sevayats* of Kalighat belong to the 10th and 11th descending generations from Bhabanidas.

The turn for service, *pala*, may be permanently 'sold' or leased out by the original owners to the other *Sevayat* families. Here the convention is that as far as possible the *palas* should be sold within the same major lineage *Bara*, *Mejo* etc. Besides these open transactions, it is said, *palas* are also sold or auctioned in clandestine manner beyond the *Sevayat* lineages.

According to the prevailing traditions of the Haldar *Sevayats* the ancestor Bhabanidas enjoyed the *debottar* endowment of 595 bighas around Kalighat temple as the *Sevayat* of the Deity. As such the Haldar *Sevayats* claim hereditary rights as trustees of the *Debottar* property of Kalimata. The *Sevayats*, however, could not produce any documents in support of their claim and in a judgement delivered by Justices R. C. Mitter and Roxburgh of Calcutta High Court in January 1949, it was declared that the religious endowment of Goddess Kali of Kalighat was a public one and that the *Sevayats* are entitled only to turns (*pala*) of *Seva* (service) and *Puja* of Kali and associated deities.

It appears that the *Sevayat* system has passed through various phases. At the earliest phase, during the time of Bhubaneswar and Bhabanidas, the *Sevayats* were the managers of property of Kalimata and were also Her priests. Later on the Haldars mainly took the managerial role, leaving the work of *Puja* in charge of their Brahman Gurus, Bhattacharyas and Misras.

With the introduction of British legal system the rights of *Sevayats vis-a-vis debottar* property of Kalimata were subject to special scrutiny through a series of prolonged litigations, in which a number *Sevayats*, on behalf of the deity, complained against the operation of the *Sevayat Sabha*.

In 1965 the Calcutta High Court prescribed a scheme for the management of Kalighat Kalimandir. It was decided that all the *Sevayats* shall constitute the Council of *Sevayats* who would be responsible for the organization of *Seva-Puja*. The Council of *Sevayats* would be responsible to the Kalighat Temple Committee, consisting of 18 members as follows :

- (1) Twelve persons to be selected by the Council of *Sevayats*.
- (2) Six members, who shall be other than *Sevayats*, to be appointed as follows :
  - (a) Two Hindus to be nominated by the District Judge, 24-Parganas.

- (b) One Hindu member of the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta, to be nominated by the Executive Body of the Chamber.
- (c) One Hindu member to be selected by the :
  - (i) President, Bangiya Sanskrita Siksha Parishad, Calcutta.
  - (ii) Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University.
  - (iii) Principal, Government Sanskrit College, Calcutta.
- (d) One Hindu member to be nominated by the Bharat Sevasram Sangha.
- (e) One Hindu member of the Calcutta Corporation.

The District Judge of 24-Parganas will nominate the President from amongst the members of the Committee

What is interesting in these developments is that a self-regulating lineage and kinship based association of *Sevayats* has come under the control of a legally framed body including nominees of the Government and of a number of important modern institutions like Calcutta University, Calcutta Corporation and so on. However, many of these modern institutions basically represent Hindu interest. In other words a compromise formula has been evolved accommodating the traditional familial interests of the *Sevayats* with those of the modern Hindu public.

Just as the management has become impersonal and contractual, the relationship between the *Sevayats* and the pilgrims has also become impersonal and transient. The *Sevayats* are very proud of claiming influential Hindus, former princes, zamindars, leading businessmen and lawyers as their former clients. Although some of these claims are exaggerated, there is enough evidence to indicate that before World War I, most of the *Sevayat* families had a few permanent clients of *Jajmans* for whom they were the *Tirtha Gurus* (Gurus for the pilgrim centre). The *jajmans* came to their *Sevayats'* house with their families, stayed for the whole day at their *Sevayat Tirtha Guru's* house, took their bath in the Ganges, offered Puja in a leisurely fashion and took meals at the house of the *Sevayats* and paid them adequate gifts, *Dakshina*. The *Sevayat Tirtha-Guru's* used to be invited in



the *Jajman's* houses in all major socio-religious occasions. There has been a sharp decline in such permanent bonds since World War II. To-day the large influx of *Jairis* try to complete their visitation of the temple quickly leaving little scope for permanent *Jajmani* bonds.

Besides the *Sevayats*, a large number of other Brahmans, including a fair number of Oriyas and Hindi speakers, now help the pilgrims with their Puja in Kalighat temple. These Brahmans are known as *Sathi* Brahmans and they can operate only with the permission of the Council of *Sevayats* on payment of some fixed fees. It is, however, known that a fair number of Brahman *Pujaris* operate without any official permits from the Council of *Sevayats*. These Brahmans not only assist their temporary clients in the standard pujas in the Kali Temple, they also officiate as *Pujaris* for *Upanayan*, name-givings, marriage, *Sradha* and other rituals.

Although income of Kalimata has increased considerably in the recent decades, the number of *Sevayat* families depending upon the earnings of the Kali Temple has also increased from one Bhabanidas Chakraborty to 384 *Sevayats* today. In 1372 B.S. Kali Temple had an annual collection in cash of about Rs. 1,11,000/-. Of this the *Sevayats'* share was about Rs. 55,500/-. Thus, on the average, each *Sevayat*, received only Rs. 144.5 a year. It is said that the *Sevayats* receive considerable extra income from payments in kind given by the pilgrims which is not recorded. Even then it is obvious that no *Sevayat* family can rely exclusively, or even primarily, on income from *pala*. A *Sevayat* may be lucky to have his *pala* on specially auspicious days like the first day of the month of *Vaisakh*, *Akshya Tritiya*, and *Mahashtami* when the number of pilgrims swell many times over that of the average date. The *Sevayats* have, therefore, moved into various secular occupations and professions. Only in a few families, like that of the descendants of Kinaram Haldar of the Bara Haldar branch (born 1813), the present members have attained higher education and have gone in for the higher professions like law, engineering, chartered accountancy, etc. The fate of most of the other Haldars have been more precarious. They have taken up petty white collar jobs, small business, priesthood and so on. In spite of the precarious economic

conditions of most of the Haldar *Sevayats*, they profess to be very proud of their heritage and tradition and are quick to distinguish their level from the *Pandas* of Puri and Deoghar

While the elder generation of *Sevayats* is quite vocal about the sacred myth of Kalighat, about the mystique of the old *Tantric Chakra*, and of how the fate of their families are intimately tied with the blessings of Kali, the younger generation is gradually losing interest in these matters. Some of the elders complained that the youngsters are more influenced by cinema and leftist politics than by the religious activities in the temple

In the midst of a general trend of apathy among the younger generation there are many ritual specialists, specially the Sathi Brahmins, who find the profession of sacred specialist paying enough, to throng around the Kali Temple

#### THE PILGRIMS

The number of pilgrims visiting Kalighat may be roughly estimated as nearly 500 persons a day. The number increases very considerably on Saturdays, Sundays and Tuesdays round the year, more particularly in the month of *Vaisakh* and *Paus*. If an average is worked out, Kalighat may perhaps occupy the foremost position among all the places of pilgrimage in India so far as the visitors are concerned. The large number of pilgrims visiting Kalighat may be accounted for two reasons. Firstly, it is one of the 51 *Shakta Pithas*, and, secondly, it is located in the largest city of India. All our old respondents confirmed that the volume of pilgrims has increased substantially during the last 50 years.

On the basis of random interview of 222 visitors to Kali Temple in May-June, 1967 it was observed that the sample included persons from Mysore, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, U.P., Bihar, Orissa and various parts of Bengal and also a Sikkimese, 3 Nepalese and 2 Chinese. The castes included the entire range of ranks including the "untouchables". Although the visitors were usually vague about their sectarian affiliation, our informants included besides Shaktas, Shaivites, Vaishnavites and also Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists,

The inner precincts of the temple was open to all except Christians, Moslems and menstruating women.

Among the 222 pilgrims interviewed by us 8 had post-graduate degrees, 30 were graduates, 46 undergraduates, 66 just literate, 38 illiterate and 34 did not give any information on educational background. As regard professions and occupation of the pilgrims, they seem to reflect the general spectrum of classes in the country. Among the pilgrims interviewed by us there were doctors, advocates, university professors, school teachers, landholders, priests, policemen, cooks, soldiers, domestic servants, potters, railway coolies, factory workers, carpenters, shoe makers, money lender motor drivers, farmers etc. The number of housewives and unemployed were also considerable. In our sample there was also an ex.M.P. and a trade union leader.

According to the statements of the pilgrims interviewed by us they visit the temple for various reasons. (a) to fulfil a vow; (b) to have *punnya*; (c) to have peace of mind, (d) for the performance of specific rituals, (e) for safety in a long journey; (f) for securing a job or promotion in a job; (g) winning a case; (h) for pleasure and so on.

A good proportion of the highly educated persons and those belonging to the higher professions stated that they came to the Kali Temple for peace of mind. Among both highly educated and poorly educated and illiterate respondents there were many who stated that they came to the temple only for *Punnya* (religious merit) by getting a *Darshan* (sight) of the Goddess.

A large percentage of pilgrims, particularly women and uneducated poor men, visit the temple for the fulfilment of *secular* desires, for cure of diseases, employment, promotion in service, wealth, success in examination, children, even for securing a suitable mate.

Pilgrims also come for domestic ceremonies like name-giving, hair cropping, initiation to the sacred thread, marriage, *sraddha* (funeral purificatory rites) etc. Kalighat continues to give sacred sanction to socially unorthodox and unapproved forms of marriage. In general, Kali Temple provides a venue for simplified performance of elaborate traditional rites of passage.

On the 1st of *Vaisakh*, and also the day of *Akshay Tritiya* of the same month, businessmen of Calcutta, whether Hindu, Jain or Sikh, come to worship Kali placing the ledgers at the feet of the Goddess seeking her blessing.

A large group of clients for the Kali temple are drivers and owners of various categories of motor vehicles. It is a common custom to offer Puja to Kalimata on the occasion of registration of a vehicle and obtaining the renewal of driving license. Some drivers, offer puja every week and it is a common thing to find a photograph of Kalimata above the front window screen of a taxi. The *Sevayats*, *Pujaris*, and Sathi Brahamans and the odd motley of self appointed guides, the shop keepers of ritual articles, the elaborate temple rituals and the grotesque image of Kali all combine together to perpetuate the sacred mystique of Kalighat. It should be noted that although drivers, mechanics, businessmen and others go to the goddess to cover the margin of risk and uncertainty, it does not indicate that these people depend upon the Goddess as a substitute for technical skill and training. It is also known that patients and relatives of ailing patients combine *puja* at Kali Temple with modern medical treatment.

In other words, although the temple attracts modern professionals, one does not get the impression that the existence of the temple distracts the attention of the people from involvement in modern science and technology.

#### REGIONAL AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Although the temple is managed by the Bengali and the Bengali form the prevailing majority of the pilgrims, Kalighat draws visitors from all language groups in the country. Co-participation as pilgrims, however, does not bring the linguistic communities too close to each other, for the pilgrims visit the temple as socially and culturally isolated clusters. All, however, share a common integrative feeling of visiting an important Hindu shrine. Some of the *Sevayats* and other specialists associated with the temple have developed multi-lingual skill in communicating with Hindu and Oriya speaking visitors. In a few cases, they have even picked up a smattering of Tamil.

## ROLE OF MODERN SCIENTIFIC MEDIA

Modern scientific media have helped in the spread of the cult of the Kali of Kalighat over a wide region. Photographs and prints, of image of Kali and publication of books and pamphlets have contributed to the perpetuation and spread of the sacred myth of Kalighat. An organization of genealogists, *Banimandir Anusandhan Bibhag*, printed a complete genealogical chart of the "eldest" lineage of Haldars of Kalighat. Similarly, pamphlets are published specifying the turn (*pala*) of *Seva* among the *Sevayat* families. A famous Bengali writer Abadhut wrote a novel *Kali Tirtha Kalighat* (1965) based on the prevailing legends of Kalighat. A movie version of this book became very popular in Calcutta and in the district towns.

## SUMMING UP

In the midst of secularization of professions of the *Sevayat* families, break down of the old *Jajmani* relationship, massive ecological invasion of the Kalikshetra sacred zone by the growth of the secular sphere, the Kali temple continues to attract the attention of a growing number of devotees. The attraction of the supernatural cult still holds ground.

As the temple has been made quickly approachable to a growing number of pilgrims due to modern transport facilities, a large number of specialists, both sacred and secular, have naturally gathered around the temple in order to cater to the religious and mundane requirements of the pilgrims. A complex network of specialists have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the sacred myth of Kalighat which alone can draw a steady flow of pilgrims. Not only the ritual specialists, but the owners of shops and hotels, sellers of sacrificial goats and even the beggars around the temple are interested in the perpetuation of the myth.

The sacred specialists have shown considerable resilience in accepting and accommodating the dominant trends of change in the larger society such as, changes in the class of patrons and pilgrims, abolition of untouchability, democratization of management and

meeting the new demands for ritual assurance of safety and success in modern professions such as medicine, engineering, law and politics.

I am not professing that it is the secular interests of the temple managers and associates alone which perpetuate the sacred myth. The belief is already there in the minds of the millions, especially the less educated. The ritual specialists only reinforce and crystallize the beliefs.

One of the major functions of this temple is to provide an operational definition of Hindu in a historic phase of rapid social and cultural change. The Hindus are those who are allowed to enter the inner precincts of the temple. This includes all the "Hindu" castes and sects, and also the Jains, Buddhists (including the Chinese) and Sikhs but specifically excludes the Moslems and the Christians. Even after undergoing considerable secularization, the Hindus of Calcutta, Bengal and others, cannot afford to give up such an important point of anchorage for social identity which has naturally existed for such a long time. It is not for nothing that lay Hindu public of Calcutta were disturbed when this decisive temple was being mismanaged through internal quarrels of the *Sevayats* and the High Court responded to the demand of the public by a setting up a Temple Committee in whose management responsible modern Hindu organizations were associated

Yet in the midst of stubborn persistence of this sacred centre everything has not remained the same. An old timer would certainly miss the leisurely harmonic cultural whole based on stable *Sevayat Jajman* relationship, conscious cultivation of *Tantric* cults and involvement of the total human hinterland of Kalikshetra in the temple rituals and associated activities. It is not unlikely, that an intensive survey will indicate a decline in the depth of devotion and wholesome dependence on the cult of Kalighat over the years for a large section of the population. Kalighat today plays the role of a vivid cultural monument for them.

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## CHANGING ELITE OF BENGAL

Benoy Ghose

THE word 'elite' was used in the 17th century to describe commodities of excellence, and now it is used to describe men of particular excellence, instead of commodities. The extension of the usage strangely coincides with the levelling of men with commodities in the machine age. It was first used in the English language in 1823, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, when it was applied to 'social groups'. It is interesting to note that it was the time of Cobbett's England when "the vulgarian makers of the new world" raised their heads high and "the aristocratic ruling class enjoyed its own pleasant life apart". This aristocratic ruling class, with the makers and menders of machines, made up the 'elite' of the Industrial Revolution, and this was the time when the word 'elite' crept into the English language. But the elite-concept was not widely used in socio-political writings till late in the 19th century Europe, when it was diffused through the sociological theories proffered by Pareto, Mosca and others. This elitism of Pareto-Mosca-kind emerged, it may be noted, with the vast expansion of the middle-classes, and it was mainly directed against Marxism which, with its pronounced bias against the middle-class, was gaining ground as a social science and social philosophy at that time. It rose to refute Marxism on two vital points: first, to point out that the Marxist conception of 'ruling class' is fallacious, by projecting the theory of the 'continual circulation of elites'; and secondly, to demonstrate that a classless society is a fiction, since in every society, from primitive slavery to capitalism and also socialism, there has been, there is, and there must be a 'minority' consisting of intellectuals and political leaders, which actually rules. The tremendous socio-political changes of the 20th century have lent a new dimension to elitism, against dogmatic and closed Marxism, and this has again given, as we know, a new direction to Marxist thought. This outline of historical and social background of elitism is offered



here in view of its relevance to the theme of the paper—'Changing Elite of Bengal'. Here we shall confine ourselves mainly to a discussion of the changing 'intellectual elite' of Bengal.

#### PRE-MODERN TRADITIONAL ELITE OF BENGAL

Although modern English education did not receive official patronage until 1835 and traditional learning was encouraged by Warren Hastings and others, the decline and fall of the traditional elite of Bengal went on steadily since the second half of the 18th century. The decline of Nabadwip, the greatest centre of traditional learning in Bengal in pre-British days, may be traced from the following reports of scholars from 1818 to 1883 :

William Ward 1818—31 *tols*—747 scholars

H. H. Wilson 1830—25 *tols*—550 scholars

William Adam 1835-36—accepts Wilson's account as correct.

E. B. Cowell 1864—12 *tols*—150 scholars

Mahesh Chandra Nayaratna 1883—13 *tols*—118 scholars (including Bhatpara).

This decline in the number of *tols* and scholars indicates a decreasing disposition to traditional Sanskrit learning in the class of Brahmins from which scholars were almost exclusively drawn and also a diminishing economic ability and inclination as well, in the class of patrons—the Rajahs and the Zamindars, by whose grants and gifts the *tols* and the pandits were maintained. With the fall of the old feudal aristocracy of Bengal under the impact of land-revenue legislations of the British rulers, the old centres of traditional learning, as well as the traditional elite, were ruined. The celebrated pandits of Bengal could make a fortune out of the liberal land-grants and gifts of feudal chiefs, the value of which varied with the celebrity of the pandit. The impressive ruins of the old family-houses of some of these traditional pandits bear testimony to this fortune, and these can still be seen in Tribeni, Nabadwip, Santipur, Guptipara, Bhatpara, Halishahar, Rajpur-Harinabhi and other centres of old traditional learning in West Bengal.

The essential characteristic of this traditional elite of Bengal has been summed up in this statement of William Adam's Report on the 'State of Education in Bengal' in 1830's : "There is no class of persons that exercises a greater degree of influence in giving native society the tone, the form, and the character which it actually possesses than the body of the learned, not merely as the professors of learning, but as the priests of religion. . . ." I wish to add emphasis to the words 'the priests of religion'. The traditional elite of Bengal was both intellectual and religious elite, and as such the tone and the form of the Bengali society was given by them. The modern intellectual elite of Bengal does not fulfil the same 'priestly' functions, nor do they possess the same 'priestly' qualities. As we shall see later, the priestly functions and qualities of the traditional intellectual elite have been largely usurped by the modern 'political elite', with the consequence that the modern intellectual elite must either float anchorless in this society, or they must seek an anchorage with any existing group of the political elite.

#### MODERN ELITE OF BENGAL

The traditional elites of Bengal, it should be noted, were not concentrated in one centre, as the modern elites are in Calcutta. They were dispersed over many centres, which often rivalled in learning. One reason of this distribution of traditional elites over more than one centre was the patronage of local rajahs and zamindars in different regions. As the city of Calcutta grew into a modern capital-city under British rule, with its irresistible economic, social, political and cultural 'pull', and with all kinds of modern institutions, including educational, located in the city, it became the chief centre of the origin and growth of the modern Bengali elite. One of the most important historical traits of the modern elite, including that of Bengal, is that it is urban in origin and urban in mental orientation. Since its origin in 1820s, after the foundation of the Hindu College in 1817, and its growth during the last 150 years, this predominantly urban character of the modern Bengali elite has remained almost unchanged.

If one is asked to choose at least two prototypes of modern Bengali elite in the 19th century, this choice should fall upon Raja Rammohan

Roy and Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. There was difference in the make-up of the two personalities, in their class-origins and upbringing, but there was close resemblance between them in the new orientation of thought, which is predominantly homo-centric (not theo-centric), rationalistic and materialistic; in the new outlook of life which is methodical, calculative and practical; and above all in their uncompromising individualism. Their attitude to traditional learning is worth noting in this context. In a letter to Amherst in 1823, criticizing the proposal for establishing a Sanskrit institution of learning, Rammohan wrote that such an institution "can only be expected to load the minds of young with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practical use to the professors or to society". And Vidyasagar, himself a great Sanskrit scholar, expressed boldly his attitude to traditional Sanskrit learning as the Principal of the Sanskrit College of Calcutta, in a letter to the Council of Education in 1853. Criticizing trenchantly the views of the English Orientalist Ballantyne, who was then Principal of Benaras Sanskrit College, on the absurd synthesis of traditional classical and modern Western learning, Vidyasagar wrote: "For certain reasons, which it is needless to state here, we are obliged to continue the teaching of the Vedanta and the Sankhya in the Sanskrit College. That the Vedanta and Sankhya are false systems of philosophy is no more a matter of dispute. These systems, false as they are, command unbounded reverence from the Hindus. Whilst teaching these in the Sanskrit College, we should oppose them by sound philosophy in the English course to counteract their influence".

These two opinions of Rammohan and Vidyasagar are quoted here to bring into sharp focus the attitude of modern intellectual elites of Bengal towards traditional elites and their learning. Along with it, if we consider the case of the ideological iconoclast Rev. Krishnamohan Banerjea, a leading Derozian of 1830s, we would face a strange fact that all the three typical representatives of modern Bengali elite of 1820s, 1830s, and 1850s, stemmed from uppercaste Hindu Brahman (Banerjea) families. In fact, the Hindu Uppercaste middleclass composition of modern Bengali elite remained

almost unchanged till about 1860s, when it began to break with the spread of modern University education.

Another fact, of far-reaching social importance for Bengal, should be noticed here. The traditional Bengali Muslim elite, like the traditional Hindu elite, were also ruined for the same historical and socio-economic reasons, but a new Muslim elite did not emerge beside the Hindus because Muslims in general, dethroned from their ruling position, were much less favourably inclined to receive Western ideas and English education than the Hindus, till the end of the 19th century. In 1881-82, of 2733 college students in Bengal, only 106 were muslims, 3.8 per cent; of 43,747 students in High English Schools, only 3831 were muslims, 8.7 per cent. In 1871 the total number of officers in the Provincial Government Service (Bengal) was 2111, of whom 1333 (about 60 per cent) were Europeans, 681 (about 30 per cent) were Hindus, and 92 (about 4.5 per cent) were Muslims. This Hindu-Muslim hiatus in the composition of modern middleclass Bengali elite could not be filled till 1930s, although the new English-educated Bengali Muslim elite started growing a little faster since 1905, the memorable year of Bengal Partition. The socio-political, and also cultural, consequence of this gap was disastrous for Bengal as we know from our history of 1940s. We shall discuss later why this happened to be so

It is true tht the uppercaste-middleclass composition of modern Bengali Hindu elite, to which we have already referred, was slackened to some extent after the spread of University education and liberal democratic ideas from 1860s. But both the horizontal spread of education beyond the city of Calcutta, and the caste-and-classwise vortical spread were severly limited till the end of the 19th century. The material gains of education were monopolized by uppercaste educated Hindu middleclass, which also meant monopolization of 'Srvices' under the British rulers. As the cities of under-developed colonial countries like ours are chiefly commercial and administrative rather than industrial centres, the 'Services' are the only broad category of employment showing any general increase with urbanization. To this category of 'Services' the modern educated Bengali elites were driven and huddled together.

The lure of 'Services', especially Government services associated with new social power and prestige, was much greater to upper-caste educated Hindus who had hardly any independent economic pursuit, than to those who had independent source of living like the peasants, artisans and traditional traders. Refer to the University Calendars from 1860 to 1900, or to any report of the Bengali colleges, you will hardly find the children of those in independent professions in the lists of passed candidates for degrees for any similar marks of educational distinction. This service-oriented English education, in the peculiar socio-economic situation of a colonial country, shaped a large majority of our modern elite into a band of job-hunters and money-makers, having much less concern for knowledge or scholarship.

In formulating the policy of English education Macaulay wanted to create "a class of persons Indian in colour and blood, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect", and he boasted in a letter to his father in 1836, that "there would not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence" None of his prophecies has come true. A section of modern Indian elite, including the Bengalis, of course became English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect, but they constituted a minority, though they took a leading part in naturalizing European institutions in our country. Macaulay's boast about complete liquidation of idolatry has proved totally false. The reason is that the educated Bengali elite has been a hybrid class since its origin, a curious amalgam of old medieval and modern Western ideas. That means, the ideological superstructure of modern Bengali elite was weak and full of contradictory elements, because it lacked the proper material basis in a colonial economy. That is why the progressive socio-religious movements led by the modern elite, including some streams of Brahmoism, got stuck up in the vortex of Hindu revivalism in the last quarter of the 19th century. And it happened at a time when the social base of the modern elite, and the educated middleclass in general, was expanding in Bengal.

The modern elite of Bengal has played a prominent role in the struggle against colonial rule. This has been an important characteristic of modern intellectual elites in almost all the Asian and African

countries. A study of the new Indonesian elites shows the strong influence of politically-minded intellectuals in the early phases of independence movement. Educated middleclass Indonesians formed a majority of the active participants in the anti-Colonial movements. In Nigeria, a new elite of Western education and frequently self-made men, supplanted the old elite of the traditional ruling families as the independence movement developed. Hodgkin in his *African Political Parties* points out that nationalistic political elites are recruited very largely from the new middleclasses and especially from the educated middleclass. This has also been the role of modern Bengali elite. Regarding the nationalist movement in our country, an eminent European scholar wrote in 1881: "Bengalcees occupy the van in this movement. To their honour, be it said, they have long been the leaders of public opinion in India. It is they who first formed it; it is they who chiefly sustain it. In them we perceive an amount of active patriotism and genuine earnestness not met with in any other Indian nationality". But the modern elite of Bengal being Hindu-dominated, as we have already said, the nationalist movement had been predominantly Hindu, both in tone and form, from the very beginning. This resulted in the gradual alienation of the rising modern Bengali Muslim elite from the Hindus, which ultimately led to the political division of Bengal since Independence.

#### CONTEMPORARY BENGALI ELITE

Although modern elitism in Bengal was conceptually based on the 19th century liberal democratic theory of *Circulation of elites*—which means all types of elites, economic, political and cultural, will be continually recruited afresh from different social strata on the basis of individual achievement and merit—it did not grow like that in the socio-economic conditions prevailing at that time. It is a kind of social *laissez-faire*, with its emphasis on competition and 'getting on', and it was never fulfilled either in the economic or intellectual field, in the colonial set-up of our country. The growth of the intellectual elite of Bengal was therefore mainly centred in the city of Calcutta, and its basic structure was kept within limits of upper-caste-upper middleclass Hindus. Before independence, hardly there

was any breach in this structure, and the line between political and intellectual elites was not clearly demarcated. The function of the political elite was largely shared by the intellectual elite, especially in Bengal, because the educated Bengali middleclass played a leading role in the nationalist movements. But there was a significant split in the rank of the Bengali intellectual elite since 1930s, with the influx of Marxist thought and its tremendous impact on the thought-process, among the younger generation. From medieval theism and modern humanism, it was a historic leap forward of the thought-process on the road to scientific materialism and socialism, which revolutionized our age-old mechanical and linear concepts of historical and social progress. Again as in the 19th century humanist-rationalist thought, in the 20th century Marxist-socialist thought, the Marxist group of Bengali intellectual elite played a dominant role in the all-India movement. Though not yet powerful, rather weak as a social group, this group of Marxist intellectual elite is going to play in near future perhaps the most important and significant role in the intellectual and cultural life of Bengal. In support of this statement it may be said that the political elite—which is the most powerful of all groups of elites in contemporary advanced capitalist and socialist industrial societies, as well as in developing societies—is now predominantly Marxist-oriented in Bengal. And there is no sign at the moment, or in the present circumstances, that this trend would be reversed.

There have been significant changes in the social composition of political and intellectual elites of Bengal since Independence, and other than these two groups of elites, the two most important groups which have risen to prominence in the tremendous socio-economic changes of post-independence period, are the *managerial elite* and the *bureaucratic elite* consisting of Government officials. These two together make up the Maginotline of today's *Organization men*. If we add to this the 'Organization men' of contemporary political elite-groups, including the Marxists, we should possibly come very close to the core of the strongest 'power elite' group, behind and beyond the 'economic elite' or the monopoly capitalists, which exercises supreme control over social and individual life today, and from

which Bengal is not exempted. This predominance of 'Organization men' among the managerial-bureaucratic-political elites of Bengal has been enhanced significantly since Independence, that is since 1950s, with the planning of economic growth mainly under the guidance of those who represent the interest of 'economic power-elite', and with the widening of activities of different political parties.

There are variations in the social class affiliations of different groups of elites. It may be multiple as in the case of the intellectual elite of Bengal, or it may be single as is mainly the case with the managers and bureaucrats, and certainly with politicians. After Independence there has been a considerable expansion of educated middleclass in Bengal. This has enlarged the stratum of the Bengali intellectual elite. Beyond the single urban centre of Calcutta, it has spread to other urban and University areas of Bengal, and what is more significant, it has vertically crossed the uppercaste and upper-middleclass limits. The effect of this vertical spread of education on the stereotyped attitudes and values of Bengali intellectual elite will be far-reaching in future. A significant trend of this effect is discernible in the students' and teachers' movements, in their fight against the 'Organization men' of Universities and educational institutions, and against the ruling upperclass-oriented attitude of the intellectual aristocracy. Besides this, there has been a division in the rank of the Bengali intellectual elite with the spread and growing importance of scientific and technical education. Scientists, engineers and technicians are fast growing into a distinct elite-group, and this group is obviously more power-and-status conscious than the general educated group, because of their key role, like the managerial elite, in a developing economy based on advanced technology. The days of Max Weber's 'Socially unattached free intelligentsia', or of Karl Mannheim's 'unanchored, relatively classless stratum' of intellectuals, are possibly gone for ever. Different groups of intellectual elites are tied to different political elite-groups, and through them to different social classes, and in Bengal, as I have already said, the contemporary trend is towards the emergence of the Marxist-elite group as the most effective social force, in spite of this group's internal conflicts and tensions.



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## *Session II*

**A CITY OF GRINDING POVERTY, ECONOMIC  
DISPARITY AND SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION**

# 2.

## **A CITY OF GRINDING POVERTY, ECONOMIC DISPARITY AND SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION**

*In the city of Calcutta people are polarized into millions living in squalor in slums and in pavements and a small minority living in prosperity. In between these poles there is the vast population belonging to the various levels of middle class. Although the slum dwellers provide the essential domestic and productive services to the affluent section there is no social relationship between them and the non-slum dwellers. While poverty of the slum dwellers makes the kinship network thin, the affluent executives also fell helplessly drifted from their kin-based matrix of middle class society. From a sample study of 150 professional 'goondas' it appears that goondalism in Calcutta thrives on a base of congestion and poverty of the masses and corruption of the upper strata. Although, in the context of rising population, poverty, unemployment and violence one would expect an increasing rate of mental illness in this city, the records of a mental hospital do not indicate that. It has been observed that the deprived citizen of Calcutta seem to be sustaining the unbearable pressures of urban life under a millenarist hope of a desirable kingdom to come, but the "upper" strata are more "disoriented" in the present situation.*

# **LIFE IN A CALCUTTA SLUM**

**Dikshit Sinha**

SLUMS are, perhaps, a persistent feature of any developing city where the basic urban amenities are characteristically lacking or are in short supply. Calcutta, as a city, has been associated with slums since the eighteenth century when these 'sore' spots grew not quite as a result of rapid industrialization and fast expansion of the city but as a form of urban zamindari system which housed labourers and servants to cater to the city's growing needs (Ghose, 1968). The C.M.P.O. report (1966) on Calcutta's slums gives the total population that lives in various bustees as 6,85,115 occupying 92,991 huts in an area of 1,701 acres of land. Except in five central wards slums are found in all areas constituting 5% to as much as 30.5% of the total population of a ward.

In this paper, based on intensive study of a slum in south Calcutta, an attempt has been made to delineate the social interaction and cultural norms of the slum dwellers within their local setting with a view to finding out whether economic deprivation generated a pattern which could be labelled as "sub-culture of poverty" (Lewis, 1961).

The problem was originally approached with three general hypotheses :

- a) The extremely poor living condition of the slum people will lead to attenuation of the social interrelationships and cultural norms which operate in the larger society.
- b) Besides attenuation, adaptation to poverty situation may also generate unique reorganization of the norms of the larger society.
- c) Socialization in the slum situation may lead to the self-perpetuation of sub-culture of poverty.

For the present, however, I will focus only some of the social relationships and underlying norms that are found within the bustee. I concentrated my observations on the Bengali residents of the bustee.

The bustee studied was selected in the first place not because it represents all the varieties that are found in the city-slums but because it is typical in having a sufficient number of fairly old population who suffer from chronic poverty.

#### THE BUSTEE

This bustee is located in ward no. 91 on Garcha 2nd lane in south Calcutta. Any visitor from outside will be struck by the contrast that the bustee presents to the adjacent *Kothabari*. The squalid looking hutments, open drains, accumulated filth and darkness amidst the glare of neon lights, swallow and haggard looks of men and women, bespeak of the utter deprivation and helpless condition of the slum and its people

There are altogether 61 mostly one storied hutments of mud or brick wall with tin or tile roofs. Once a notorious resort of the underworlds at present the bustee occupies a 7 bighas plot (approx. 2.1 acres). The occupants of the bustee can be categorized into two groups based on their relation to the landlord and mode of occupation : (a) the *thika tenants* or hutowners who build temporary huts on the land leased to him by the zamindar and rents out rooms; (b) the *bharatiyas* or the tenants who pay rent to thika tenants. Each of the hutments house a minimum of 8 to maximum of 40 families. For each such hutments there is only one service latrine and one roofless bathing place locally known as '*chatal*'. And there are only 7 tubewells and 2 running water taps to serve all the people.

The rooms are let to day-labourers, maid-servants, and low class functionaries such as masons, machine-men, lathe-man, tram-conductors, office-peons etc., at a monthly rent amounting from rupees 9 to 35.

The population of the bustee is composed of a medley of people coming from such wide areas as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Nepal and from the neighbouring districts of West Bengal. Of the total population of 2451, the Bengalees predominate with 1966 (80.2%) people. The bulk of them came from 24-Parganas and the rest from her districts of West Bengal and East Pakistan. The Hindi speaking

people form the second largest groups with a total population of 440 (18%). The Nepali, Oriya, Bengali, Christian and Buddhist together comprise 1.8% of the total.

The slum people again could be classified according to their mode of origin. The Table 1 below gives the number of families that are slum and non-slum in origin.

TABLE 1  
*Number of Slum and Non-Slum families*

Sl.No	Place of origin	No of families
1	Rural	312
2.	Slum	56
3	Urban	13
4	Refugees	60
Total		441

There are 27 different castes among the Bengalis starting from Brahmin and 12 castes among the non-Bengalis. The two Tables (2 and 3) below give different names of the castes among various linguistic groups

TABLE 2  
*Different Castes among the Bengalis*  
(Not given in hierarchic order)

Sl No	Castes	No. of families	Sl No.	Castes	No. of families
1	Bramhan	21	15.	Moirs	4
2	Khatriya	4	16.	Malakar	1
3	Kayastha	64	17	Karmakar	2
4.	Mahisya	138	18	Kumbhakar	2
5.	Sadgop	1	19	Barujibi	3
6.	Karan	1	20	Khundait	1
7.	Vaisnab	8	21	Barga Khatriya	2
8.	Sarnakar	5	22	Tanti	1
9.	Kaibarta	14	23.	Paundrya Khatriya	16
10.	Sunri	2	24.	Teli	4
11.	Goala	5	25	Mahato	1
12.	Jugi	5	26.	Tentule Bagdi	1
13.	Paramanik	6	27.	Namasudra	1
14.	Sutradhar	6			
		Total families	322		

TABLE 3

*Castes among the Non-Bengalis*  
(Not arranged in hierarchic order)

Sl.No.	Name o castes	Hindusthanis	Nepali	Oriya
1.	Bramhan	5	1	1
2.	Khatriya	11	4	3
3.	Baisnab	1	×	×
4.	Benia	4	×	×
5.	Kohri	1	×	×
6.	Goala	4	×	×
7.	Biswakarma	4	×	×
8.	Tanti	30	×	×
9.	Halui	1	×	×
10.	Kurmi	1	×	×
11.	Keuti	4	×	×
12.	Kanhar	5	×	×
Total families		72	5	4

#### THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE BUSTEE

The social world of the bustee people is primarily made up of their family and kin and secondarily by the local community. The family is not only a place where sustenance and shelter is provided but is also a repository of affection. However, it falls short of middle class concept of home where one not only gets all these but also finds in it a place for comfort and passing leisure time. The bustee people however, cannot do these because of paucity of space, with the result that, if he gets leisure time at all, he is forced to spend it outside his little room at the cost of developing intimate familial relationship.

Before describing the role-relationships in the family some preliminary facts about it may be stated. Of the 441 households in the bustee 374 (84.8%) are nuclear families. There are 16 joint and 3 polygynous families. There are altogether 48 non-family units comprising unattached males, mostly Hindusthanis, who form a sort of messing groups. There are also a few consanguinal families consisting of widow or widower and their unmarried children.

The initial survey of the bustee showed that the families could be categorized into two groups based on stability and instability of income\*. The first group, comprising 76.4% of the total have a monthly income ranging from below 100 to 150 rupees. The income of a family in this group varies quite often owing to unstable job opportunity for the husbands as well as the wives. Incidentally, in this group most of the wives work outside to supplement their husbands' income and very often they are the sole earners. The second group have relatively high monthly income (Rs. 150 to above Rs. 500) where the husband is the sole earning member with a more or less stable occupation or job. With this fact in mind a stratified random sampling was made and altogether 38 families were selected for detailed observation and interview.

#### JOINT-ROLE-RELATIONSHIP

I studied altogether 32 families where both husband and wife work. Of these in 28 families wives are the principal earners while in 4 families wives work to supplement husband's income. The case of a family has been described below to illustrate the joint role relationship (Bott, 1968).

The husband S.H. (35) is a *biri* binder (country cigar) in a tea shop within the bustee. His wife R.H. (26) works as a maid-servant in the neighbouring '*Kothabari*'. She earns about 75 rupees a month by working in four families while S.H. earns, at the most, 50 rupees monthly and this amount too is not fixed. They have three children, 2 daughters and 1 son 7, 1, and 3 years old respectively. S.H. told me that before the birth of their eldest daughter he used to work in a cigarette shop at Sealdah and earned about 100 rupees monthly. But the attack of tuberculosis two years back has considerably incapacitated him. During his illness and after that it was his wife who supported him.

Mrs. H. leaves home early in the morning for work. So, Mr. H. has to feed the children and only then can he go to his work. The

\* Income was computed from the figures given by the people at the time of census survey during August-September 1968.



children are left at home to play with other such boys of the nearby hutment. Sometimes he takes along with him the youngest daughter to the shop. Mrs. H. comes back from work at about eleven O'clock and cooks food. Sometimes when the husband has no work to do the meal is also prepared by him. Mrs. H. goes back to her work late in the afternoon and returns in the evening at about 7 O'clock. Marketing is generally done by Mr. H. Otherwise children are sent to the local shops whenever the necessity arise.

The money earned by the husband and wife is not pooled together. Mrs. H. spends her money for the children and for food purchased outside the four rations in a month. The husband spends his extra money for smoking hemp or for other similar pursuits. Though the children stay with him for a considerable part of the day he scarcely gives them corporal punishment. But their mother is not that restrained. She frequently beats them and sometimes even keep them unfed when they become too naughty.

In these families husband's inability to earn enough to provide for the family places wives in the instrumental role of bread-earners. As the wife's occupation keeps her away from home, especially in the morning and evening, husbands have to do such work as cooking, cleaning and looking after kids which is considered as woman's job. However, the joint role-relationship happen only in the internal domestic activities. Man and woman have their own pursuits and interest. Resigned to the fate of eating from wife's earning men were found to loiter in the tea-shops or playing cards with stakes with friends. The boisterousness of the husbands are in sharp contrast with wives' spine-breaking job of earning money for food just to keep body and soul together and looking after the children because men are considered traditionally inept in this field. As one mother complained, "men do not understand children".

While men have friends women have only acquaintances. Though the wives of the same hutment often co-operate in family matters the underlying motives is 'if I help now I can ask for help at other time'. The result is that insults and remarks are quickly

returned which culminates in frequent quarrels and fight between housewives.

Joint recreation, if any, between husbands and wife are few and far between. Newly married couples said that sometimes they used to go to cinema together. One informant commented that these types of joint recreation would happen only for two or three months after marriage, after which this altogether stops. The incomes of the husband and the wife are not pooled together for domestic use. Wives spend their income for domestic purpose or on children while husbands, if they earn at all, keep part of their income for their personal enjoyment. In fact many quarrels between husbands and wives are due to this fact. Continuous quarrels or fight between husband and wife may lead to desertion by one of the spouses. It even leads to periodic estrangement when the spouse may live under the same roof but would maintain separate hearth.

Rearing children is regarded as the domain of the woman. However, husband has to take care of the children when wife is away. He also helps his wife by holding the child when she is cooking, cleaning or is busy with some of her usual domestic duties. This holds particularly good for the new fathers. But in the families where there are older siblings the husband is relieved from this duty and the children are pressed into service. Older siblings not only do the duty of looking after their kid brothers or sisters but perform such function of rearing as feeding, cleaning etc. Moreover, because both husband and wife remain outside home large part of the day children learn to look after themselves from the very childhood.

The question of authority in the family is rather hard to determine, for it requires close observation of behaviour within the domicile. I have tried to study this aspect of husband-wife relationship by observation as far it was possible and also by interviewing. Husbands whose wives work outside admit that this fact tends to diminish their sway over the wives. Wives then no longer oblige them by obeying whatever their husbands say regarding domestic matters. The very fact that their income is important in rearing children seem to have a psychological effect over the men. The submissive role played by

husbands were found to be discussed by some husbands (belonging to the second group discussed above) who claimed that they had absolute authority in their home. They jocularly called these men as *dokno* alluding thereby to their southern origin and "she-man" character. Women too are aware of their independence. They realize that they are no longer bound to their husbands' whims. While discussing the difference between a husband in a 'bustee-bari' and 'babu-bari' one housewife commented, "I am not afraid of him (her husband). I do not depend on him". Another husband said, "I have not allowed my wife to work in spite of the hardship I have to endure because then she no longer will obey me"

#### SEGREGATED ROLE RELATIONSHIP

In the relatively stable income groups, where husband is the sole earner, family roles are highly segregated. In these families wives do not work outside. Husbands are the sole earners. Wives play a subservient role. Husbands control the family budget. Wives are given a fixed amount twice or thrice in a week. Here too like in the above group husbands and wives have their separate friends and acquaintances with whom leisure time is spent.

To illustrate this type of role-relationship let us examine the family of H.D..

H.D. (40) came to Calcutta when he was only 12 years old. He earned his living by working in such jobs as boy servant, shop-assistant etc. He now works as a peon in the West Bengal Chief Minister's office. His only room proudly proclaims this fact through a photograph which shows him standing behind the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr. P. C. Sen. H.D. and his wife have three sons aged 10, 7 and 5 years respectively. Though he married seventeen years ago, the span of his effective conjugal life is only 12 years, for H.D. deserted his wife a few months after their marriage because some of his kins accused her of adultery. They remained separated for five years. During these years J.D. kept herself alive by working as a maid-servant in a school mistress' house at Chetla.

H.D. believes in complete division of labour between husband and wife. "A wife's place is her home and her chief function is to look after her husband and children because God has made them that way. One should never allow them to go outside to work. If you do the result will be like the fellow opposite my room (L. Das and her husband who live opposite his room are maid-servant and day-labourer respectively. L. Das who deserted her former husband to live with B. Das, several years junior to her, beats him frequently)". It is H.D. who regulates family budget. J.D. is given a family keeping allowance weekly. This leads to occasional quarrel between them. H.D. wants that she would trim her requirements according to his income. H.D. confided that he had to beat her sometimes because she 'would not see reason'

Looking after the children is mostly done by J.D. because H.D. remains out of the home for most of the time. During their leisure time too they remain separated. H.D. spends his leisure time with G. Pal or other friends or in arbitrating bustee disputes

In all the six families that I studied there is a greater division of labour compared to the families with working mothers. Husbands are here bread-earners while wives are house managers. The authority of the husband too is accepted and obeyed.

#### ATTITUDE TOWARDS HUSBAND AND WIFE

In the bustee a wife is not a companion whose comradeship should be cherished but whose utility lies in sexual partnership and house management. "Women are born to manage home and rear children"—this is the usual notion regarding wife. The ideal wife is she who is faithful to her husband and work for his happiness. 'They should not be quarrelsome and be obedient to their husband. But our wives are different because they are illiterate' commented S. H.

The ideal husbands are those who provide their wives with four square meals and look after their happiness. Discussing this aspect with me Mrs. H. commented, "In our bustee husbands not only fail to provide food to their wives and children but they on the other hand enjoy at their wives' expense".

One of the important aspect of family life in the bustee is the awareness that conjugal ties are not indissoluble. Though the percentage of desertion is only 4.5%, this figure would be higher if account is taken of the 50 free union cases where either of the spouse had deserted their previous partners.

It seems that extra-marital sex relation take place to some extent. But quantification of this is difficult to make. Most of the information was gathered indirectly. A few men admitted that they have or had sex liaison with women other than wife.

#### PARENTS VIS-A-VIS SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Children be it son or daughter stay with their mothers and help her with household chores till they reach a certain age. Daughters and sons are taught to cook and to do other household jobs from an early age. Little distinction is made regarding the nature of works entrusted based on sex. The local primary school teacher who keeps an ever changing attendance book frequently receives requests from parents to relieve their sons early so that they can cook rice. It is a common sight to see little boys and girls cooking or fetching water while their parents are away. As has already been said above another important job is to look after their little brothers and sisters. From eight years or so sons begin to stay away from home and mother, increasingly. When they reach twelve or fourteen years they start their occupational career as day-labourers or servants or in some other jobs that are locally available. The wage earned thus is not given wholly to family but a substantial part is spent on themselves.

Daughters stay with their mothers till they are fourteen or fifteen years old. At that age or even earlier they begin their independent jobs as maid-servants or go on helping their mothers till they are married.

Parents admit that their children are not 'respectful' towards them. While parents generally tend to equate this behaviour with lack of education, further probing showed that these parents themselves had not behaved with their own parents 'respectfully'. Actually they equate obedience with respect. Extracting obedience from a

growing child is a tough job in this situation. Children tend to be submissive when they are young. But with increasing age they become more and more recalcitrant. Parents, while talking to me, attributed this to bad association. But little effort is made to curb this sort of behaviour. Punishments are mostly given when they become too much bothersome but not for their deviant behaviour. Children frequently abuse their parents in a language couched in sexual terms. Norms such as not to argue or talk back to parents are not practised. Beating of father and mother start from an early age and very often continue till late age.

Sons frequently complain that their parents are behaving badly with them because they are unable to give what the parents want. S. S. alleged that he had to live separately from other brothers though the hut is owned jointly because they were treating his wife and children badly at his mother's provocation. It is worth noting here that these facts mostly come from families who have some movable or immovable properties. But in the other families where there is no such ground sons complain about their parents' discriminations too. In the bustee sons normally separate from their family of origin as soon as they are married. Parents too work as long they can move about.

#### BROTHERS AND SISTERS

I have already showed that one of the important roles of brothers and sisters is to look after their younger brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters play together till they are 7 or 8 years old. From then on boys show more active interest in 'boyish sports' while girls become more inclined to 'feminine games'. Age difference between the siblings are not maintained. Abusing each other or beating is common among the siblings. If the age difference between the brothers is small then there is a tendency to move about together. But if the gap is long then the ties between brothers become loose. The relationship between brothers have become, in general, rational and impersonal rather than based on moral obligations. In one instance one brother borrowed money from his elder brother at 5% interest.

I have so far shown the intra-family role relationships in the bustee. Below I will discuss the relationship between different kins beyond the nuclear family

#### HOW MUCH CONNECTED THE NETWORK IS

Every one recognizes that beyond the family a person's relations extend to the kins because man's birth and marriage create an indissoluble ties with a group of individuals. This way one has a set of '*Antiya-Swajan*' or consanguinal and affinal kins. But at the same time, it is stressed, that barring a few exceptions relations between kins are not what, people said, "it should be". Family has become discrete and kin ties are considered more often than not as bothersome. In response to my questions that what one should do if one's condition became better people said that they would try to live in peace and amity with one's family and kins.

To cite an example

D.D. is a 32 years old day-labourer who lives in this bustee with his grand mother (70), wife J D (26) and one 7 years old son. His wife works as a maid-servant. His married sister resides in the same bustee a block away. He visits his sister's house quite often. As he is the only son of his father he has no other near relatives. He heard from his grandmother that his father's brothers or sisters are now living at Nadia, but he has never seen them. Similar is the case regarding his mother's kins. He has no contact with his affines either. Asked who among his kins be considered as having good relation with him, he quipped, "*poor people have no friends or kins*". He complained that his own grandmother is pestering daily for the fifty rupees that he borrowed a month back. Failure to comply with his desire led her to abuse his son and wife. (The grandmother, though is living with him in the same room, maintains separate hearth.)

In all the cases studied, except in one, the kinship network is *loose knit*, that is, all the kins known to a family are not in contact with one another. In one case a person who was brought up in maternal grandmother's house reported that since all his maternal kins were living in the same village or villages nearby the contact with different

kins were effective. He, however, has little knowledge of his father's kins, except the name of grandfather's because his mother was deserted by his father when he was young. The looseness of kin network I think, is to a great extent responsible for lessening of social pressure. Because kins keep little information regarding their kins' whereabouts or doings, individuals are left to choose their own life's course.

Related with the question of connectedness of kin-network is the *knowledge of kin* (Firth, 1956). One of the striking features of bustee kinship is the remarkably shallow knowledge of kins. (Of all the cases studied in one case only the knowledge extends upto fifth generations (the informant in this case being a Brahman priest) but otherwise the usual knowledge is upto second ascending generation. The usual rationalization of such limited knowledge is either illiteracy or the fact that they have never seen or heard of kins beyond what they know. So the kin group is limited to one's own generation and to the immediate descending and ascending generations. Some people have difficulty in remembering even their grandfather or grandmother's name. Of affinal relations the knowledge is limited to spouse's parents and siblings.

The *amplitude* of this narrow range kin system is rather thin, with maximum number of kins recognized being 75. Knowledge of kin among family members vary according to age. On the whole the knowledge of kins of the husband and of the wife is almost equal. Nature of marriage have some important effect. In those cases where marriage is not ritually consummated the spouses have little knowledge of one another's kins save the immediate ones, that is, parents and siblings. In those cases where marriage was solemnized ritually the knowledge of the kins of the spouses tend to be a little more extended. Another point worth noting is that it is the husbands who keep contact with their kins. The reason is that it is the husband who is relatively free to visit his kins and is and also, because that money is not available to bear both the husbands and wife's or family's travelling expenses.

The table below lists the range of recognized and nominated kins, that is, kins known by name, in fifteen representative families :



TABLE 4

*Knowledge of kins*

Households No.	Recognized kin	Nominated kin	Depth of generation
1	75	50	3
2	24	20	3
3	32	21	3
4	32	25	3
5	36	19	3
6	65	50	5
7	24	20	3
8	36	28	3
9	56	43	3
10	58	48	3
11	57	41	3
12	54	31	3
13	34	28	3
14	39	25	3
15	45	29	3

The genealogical data shows that in all cases the knowledge tapers off after first ascending generation. In the second ascending generation knowledge consists of only one's grand-parents with all his siblings fading out. The Table 5 below shows the knowledge of ascending generation's names in fifteen families.

TABLE 5

*Knowledge of Ascending generation's name*

Father's father	14	Mother's father	8
Father's mother	6	Mother's mother	6

In other words there is a tendency to remember FF than FM. The same pattern is evident in the mother's generation.

## SOCIAL RELATION BETWEEN THE KINS

Social relations between kins not only depend on physical accessibility but also on such factors as economic difference, genealogical connections, and personal choice. I have already shown that the bustee families could be differentiated on income and occupational

stability. Families with unstable occupation and income have less contact with their kins and the number of effective and intimate kins in such case was also small. On the other hand families with stable occupations show better knowledge of kins and more effective or intimate contact with kins. The Table 6 lists six families showing difference in occupational stability and income and their extent of contact with kins.

TABLE 6  
*Extent of Contact with Kins*

Knowledge of Kins	Families with unstable income			Families with stable income		
	Mandal	Bose	Adak	Giri	Das	Tikkadar
Depth of generation	3	3	3	3	3	3
Recognized	24	32	36	54	59	58
Nominated	18	23	28	23	41	50
Dead kins	5	7	9	6	18	8
<i>Extent of contact</i>						
Effective	5	8	9	10	10	8
Intimate			6	6	13	20

Of the families shown in the table above Bose and Adaks have most of their kins within Calcutta or at its suburbs. Most of their effective kins are affinals. In the Mandals' case except one mother's sister, all his relatives are in the villages. The five kins with whom his family are in effective contacts are all consanguinals. In the families with stable income cited above Giri and Das have most of their relatives in the city. Tikkadar has all his relatives, except two families, in the villages. And all the effective and intimate kins are either maternals or affinals.

Social relations with kins can be gauged from the different ceremonies attended by the kins. In the bustee such occasions are few and far between. Important life crisis ceremony such as *Anna-prasan* has become obsolete. Marriage and *Sradha* ceremonies have undergone some adaptations in the bustee. In both the cases the essential rituals are observed only. Kin's participation has become rare. In the case of marriage it has become rather a close

family affair with few intimate kins being present only. In the Tables 7 and 8 kin's participations in few marriages and *Sradha* ceremonies are given

TABLE 7  
*Participation of kin in Marriages*

Sl. No	Name of the family	Relation with the Head of the family	Kins present	Number of Non-kins
1.	K G	Daughter	B(2) S(1)*	30
2	K.D	Son	F B (1)	40
3	N.N	Son	None	20
4	M N	Self	M B (1)	5
5.	B D	Self	B , F.B , M B	50
6	G G	Son	F.B , M B , W S , W B	250
7	G P	Son	B , D , W.B	70
8	B.L.	Daughter	D Z (4) B Z	50

\* Figures in the bracket shows the number of families

TABLE 8  
*Participation of kin in Sradha ceremony*

Sl No	Name of the family	Relation with the deceased	Kins present	Non-kin
1	G P	Father	F.B (2)S(2)Br.in-1	200
2	B G	Father	None	20
3.	P.D	Sister	None	22
4.	D K D	Wife	W.B , M-in-1, B	50
5.	K.D	Husband	D	8
6	S D.	Father	None	10

In analysing kin relation in the bustee it was found that families have more contact with affinal and maternal kins than with the paternal or consanguinal ones. The obvious reason seems to be the importance of the mother. Since wife plays a prominent and pivotal role in the family the tendency to have closer relation with affinal and maternal kins might seem natural. Another factor, I think, that might have had some effect is the nuclearization of family. With the nuclearization of family the help and support that was available in a joint family is no longer feasible. A newly married girl might

find in her mother a better counsellor than in her mother-in-law. Moreover the mothers have interest in seeing that the marriage of their daughters comes off successfully. But it might be asked how far in the bustee situation relation with affinal or maternal kins remains effective or intimate. In all the families studied it was observed that just after marriage families have close relation with affines. With the progress of time the relations gradually cool off. Relations with affines also is dependent to a great extent on their economic condition (Table 6)

#### FACTORS AFFECTING THE INTENSITY OF KIN RELATIONS

In discussing why kin-visits in the bustee is so infrequent informants pointed out that the paucity of space and economic condition would not make it possible to entertain guests in their house for a long time. Due to low economic capacity it becomes imperative that when some kins have to stay in their house the expense will have to be borne by the guests. R. Halder said that when he visited his native village he used to put up with elder brother but he paid for his meals. Similarly T. Bhandari had to pay for his maintenance when he had to live with his mother-in-law just after marriage. The moral obligations of mutual hospitality among the kins is accepted as an ideal norm but it was pointed out that in their impoverished situation this has to be kept in abeyance. Disparity in wealth and corresponding difference in residence also places obstacles in normal kinly interactions. A. Halder said that though his *Mushi* (mother's sister) resides in a nearby *Kothabari* they never visit their house because, he feels, that they are above his station. Only two cases were found where the family concerned have their close kins who live in *Kothabari*. In both cases respondents said that they have never been paid visit by their more prosperous kins. M. Roy, a small scale businessman who resided in the bustee for more than three years recently shifted to Jadavpur because he found that among other things, living in the bustee was hampering his relation with kins. For they would not come to the bustee and had begun to look down upon him.

While remoteness of genealogical ties cancels out any possibility of kin interaction, physical accessibility plays no minor part in affecting contact between kins. Out of 38 families studied 28 families reported that most of their kins were in the villages. The families coming originally from the slums have their kins in the city but they too have contact with very small group of kins.

To a great extent kins relations or contact have become selective based on likes or dislikes and not on structural principles alone. Many families were found to have no contact with their brothers or sisters sometimes living in the same bustee while contact with relatively distant kins were effective.

#### THE CONTENT OF KIN RELATIONS

In describing family I have already delineated the pattern of interaction and norms between the members. Scope for observing extra familial relationship was very little. Nonetheless, I had opportunity to observe the behavioural pattern between *Bhasur* (husband's elder brother) and younger brother's mother and father-in-law, between maternal uncle and nephew etc. In all the cases the element of respect seems to be lacking and the social distance has shortened considerably. Smoking *biri* or cutting jokes with elderly persons has become common. Normally a brother's wife when talking with *Bhasur* must veil herself and use a gentle tone and should show no petulance. The *Bhasur* on the other hand, should be reserved in his behaviour. Though this is the ideal norm none of these conventions are observed in the bustee. I have at least one case to show that sexual relation exists between *Bhasur* and his younger brother's wife.

Two cases of incest happened in the bustee five years ago. But both the families have left the bustee now. It was reported that in one case daughter and father were involved while in another step-daughter and father were implicated. Though it can not be inferred from these two cases that this is the order but it certainly points to the extent that the content of relations have changed or deviations from accepted norms have taken place.

The pattern of relationship between sons-in-law and parents-in-laws and between daughters-in-law and parents-in-law too have changed. Mother-in-laws have little hold over her daughter-in-law because the latter runs the home and not the son.

#### BUSTEE AS A COMMUNITY

The people of the bustee regard it as separate entity from the adjacent regions. To them a 'bustee-bari' and 'kothabari' are separate not only in physical aspects—the former being mainly a conglomeration of huts and hutlike tenements constructed out of mud, bricks and tiles while the later is mainly a structure of concrete and bricks—but also in other socio-economic criteria. The inmates of 'kothabari' are regarded as '*babu*' or belonging to the 'Bhadralok' (Sinha and Bhattacharya, 1969) class separate from bustee people not only in respect of money but also in education and general behaviour. Interaction with the neighbouring 'kothabari' people happen only in their respective capacities as employer and servant but not on social and cultural level. Recently some 'Bhadralok/Babu' workers of leftist political parties have been trying to convert the people of this bustee to their line of thinking. But so far this has met with only limited success.

The initial impression of the bustee would present many points of resemblances with the village (Siddiqui, 1969). As in the village the bustee people have a consciousness of kind and the frequency of face to face relation too is considerable. But a bustee differs from the village in having a large number of people who occasionally drift from place to place. In the village people consider their village as a permanent abode and have great sense of pride and attachment expressed in the term "*Bhitye-bari*". The people of the bustee are conscious that the "bustee lacks samaj (society)", in comparison to the village. An old resident of the locality not only knows the members of his hutment but most of the people of his street. But the acquaintance is often limited to the level of "cognitive recognition" (Goffman, 1963) that is, "linking a man by the sight of him with a framework of information", in the sense that the knowledge in most cases is confined to the names, residence and occupation and not on

the basis of intimate knowledge of personal biography. The frequent shifting of residence from one bustee to the other hardly enables the people to mature their acquaintanceship fully. Another aspect of the social profile of the slum which attracted my attention is the apparent spontaneity with which the squabble and quarrels were solved. The daily quarrels between mothers over one another's children, occasional family feuds between brothers or the dissolution issues are solved by the public on the spot. The loud voice of the two warring groups would draw instantly a large crowd. Some interested people among them would then come forward and after ascertaining the reasons behind the quarrel try to pacify both the groups. Such frequent quarrels, as between mothers, frequently draw a large number of supporters behind each group but generally remain restricted in hurling invectives, and recounting the past misdeeds of each other but never take the form of physical clash.

In the case of disputes of graver nature the help of leaders of the bustee is taken. Sometimes the arbitration takes the form of court proceeding where the witness and deposition of the two contending parties would be taken before arriving at a judgement. But the effort is always made towards arriving at a consensus rather than rigidly evaluating rights and wrongs. For example, the case between K.N. and K.D. may be cited. In this case the latter was accused of molesting the former's daughters. K.D. pleaded that this case was trumped up to coerce him to submission by the friends of K.N. The case was arbitrated collectively by G.P., H.D. and P.M. After four days full sitting of the court it was decided that the case should be dropped and both groups should settle their dispute "because such matters would disgrace the name of the bustee to the outside world". It may be mentioned here that both the contending groups were backed by their respective friends. Fearing that any judgement might displease the people and ultimately lead to violence, recourse was taken of this middle path.

Ordinarily the people would conveniently overlook the moral laxity that occur not infrequently in the bustee. Such incidence as birth of a child to a widow or prostitution would hardly agitate

the peoples' mind but sometime this will be raked up in connection with some other incidence with which the issue at stake is remotely connected. This again underline the personal interests of the group concerned. Sometimes this may lead to drastic action as driving out the offending person from the bustee which is surprising for a people who normally take a "live and let live" attitude. For instance R D and her daughter were driven out of the bustee because it was alleged that they were permitting illegal visitors to their room at night. But in fact this aspect was raked buy by her hutowners in league with some other local people because they refused to pay a higher rent.

Outside help is very rarely sought in settling the bustee disputes particularly of police because of their strong dislike of it. Police are regarded as always conspiring against the people. But when situation takes a shape which is beyond the control of the people police help is taken. For example, when fight occurred between two adjacent bustees police was called.

From the above discussion it is apparent that apart from minor squabbles which are solved on the spot, the graver issues are temporarily settled rather than solved. This may be due to two reasons. Firstly, in the absence of clear cut mandate and authority the leadership finds it extremely difficult to enforce their verdict. And secondly, the lack of social sanction (which people visualize as lack of Samaj) leaves people free to act according to their own discretion.

It has been shown above that the only structural unit in the social life is the nuclear family and a very weak form of kin relation. In the group life people often complained of selfishness and individual interests. This notion is behind the withdrawal from intense and unnecessary relationships. "People will be good to you as long as you please them"—is the common saying. People will help one another on specific social purpose but it does not extend beyond that to draw people in a permanent network of group action. People living in a hutment though address each other by kinship terms the interaction takes place on family-to-family basis rather than as a



joint group. Death or marriage do draw together the inmates in a temporary alliance but it never takes a corporate form.

Locally there is an attempt to solve the integrative problems by group action. Three years back a Development Committee was formed under the aegis of Calcutta Rotary Club. The club undertook a development programme of the bustee, aiming at cleaning of the bustee and redress of the local grievances. It also tried to arbitrate the local disputes and bring about peaceful settlement. But this group action broke down in the face of individual apathy. The organizers found to their dismay that people are not disciplined to put forth the unselfish effort that organizational life demands. People were even found reluctant to contribute a meagre four annas monthly that were needed to keep the roads and drains clean. I found people more inclined in placing faith in individuals that they know best, particularly the hutowners, to settle mutual disputes rather than on a common leadership. This results in the formation of small groups. This is particularly manifested in the local pujas. Every such occasion will bring to the surface more than two groups competing against each other to raise contribution for pujas. Group alliances too are not fixed. It shifts and forges fluidly as individuals sever connection from one group and transfer to another or autonomously changes his loyalty. To what extent the breakdown of group life is due to ineffectual leadership needs, however, detail examining.

#### SUMMING UP

In summing up we find that in the bustee the social life is characterized only by the elementary structural unit of the nuclear family. The family as an unit has become quite discrete with great degree of personal choice exercised in relation with the kins. There is a tendency to drift away from kins with marriage and increase of family size.

As far as the effect of poverty is concerned it was found that due to the inability of husbands to provide basic sustenance and consequent employment of the wives, the latter become the central figure with considerable freedom and authority in the family. The family

as an institution for procreation, sustenance and shelter remains intact. But the other elements of relationship such as affection, love and obedience can not find full expression in the existing situation. While love and affection is mainly bio-psychological, the pattern of obedience is normative and relative to the cultural pattern. The classical Hindu literature gave a model regarding husband and wife relationship which places emphasis on respect and obedience on the part of the wife. The people of the bustee too are conscious of this, but in the contingent situation of poverty, we find that in the day to day interaction between husband and wife the latter do not act in terms of the norms of respect and obedience. Husband's failure to provide food for his family has corroded his authority to a great extent. This failure often leads to escapism which finds expression in hemp smoking and a subdued and defeatist attitude among the unemployed husband.

In parent-child relationship also the ideal norms of respect and obedience are lacking. Due to the absence of parents from home for most of the time of the day, leaves them with little time to watch and regularize the behaviour of their children. And because the element of expectation on the part of the children *vis-a-vis* their parents is lacking they realize from an early age that parents can not gratify what they demand. Consequently, when they reach adolescence the children behave as if they are independent of their parents.

In the kinship system the range and depth of kinship network has become narrow; the range being limited to second ascending generation and to first cousin laterally. The social relations between kins have become attenuated to a considerable degree with the emphasis on personal aspect than on conventions. And from the structural point of view the families show a desicive inclination to have more contact with affinal and maternal kins than with consanguinal

The group life is very weakly developed, punctuated by individualism. There is a tendency to retreat from unnecessary contact with neighbours. With the result that interpersonal relations are marked by strain and individuation. Reciprocal relations beyond households may play some important part but happen only so far as it sustains mutual interests.

Finally, the question may be asked as to the future prospect of the bustee popple. Though some attempts are being made on the part of individual organizations to bring succour to the people and the Government has taken certain measures to modify the existing land tenure system, these measures will hardly deliver the goods. For it bye-passes the major issue, namely, poverty. Our observations indicate that the lot of the people will hardly improve if we do not try to give them at least a stable income so that they can organize their future life to some extent and fight from an objective position of strength.

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## THE WORLD OF GOONDAS IN CALCUTTA

**Sabyasachi Mukherjee**

MAN instinctively worships power. In ancient times the strongest man was the best and this fact determined supreme leadership in society. With the growth of civilization, physical strength alone ceased to be the criterion of leadership in society. Physical strength, utilized for the well-being of society, was given the pride of place. The knights of the middle ages were honoured because they lived to make society better. Gradually, social appreciation, political approval and legal sanction formed the bastion of the use of force or strength. This is the rule of law with sanction behind it. The rule of force of the primitive society is a historical fact. The rule of law is only a by-product of civilization. It must however be added that the use of force is an inalienable right of the state for its existence and it subserves the ordered growth of the community. Goondaism is the use of force for the furtherance of individual interest. A goonda seeks to serve himself or his associates and not society at large.

The foundation of the British rule in India augured ill for its inhabitants. "The servants of the Company", writes Macaulay, "obtained, not for their employers but for themselves, a monopoly of almost the whole internal trade. They forced the natives to buy dear and sell cheap. . . . Every servant of a British factor was armed with all the power of his master, and his master was armed with all the power of the Company. Enormous fortunes were thus rapidly accumulated at Calcutta, while thirty millions of human beings were reduced to the last extremity of wretchedness. They had been accustomed to live under tyranny, but never tyranny like this." India became the El Dorado of persons from beyond the seas. Calcutta along with the rest of India occupied by the English groaned under the foreigners. To crown the misery of the common man great landowners and other wealthy men who had settled in the city employed 'paiks' and 'lathials' for defence and offence as the case might be. But after the Sepoy Mutiny, the Government to forestall future

calamities, cut down the number of retainers of the men of substance to a minimum. The dismissed 'paiks' and 'lathials' hanged about the city. They adapted themselves to the changed circumstances, most of them were now better off and their ill-gotten gains from bullying, blackmail and robbery far exceeded their former income while in the employ of rich masters. The goonda of the day is, to some extent, the spiritual descendant of these swash-bucklers.

The ordinary dictionary meaning of the term 'goonda' is a ruffian. But in common parlance, he is an outlaw, known and understood more for his bravado than for other felonious enterprises. The term certainly has a bad odour about it and, conveys social condemnation and lack of social sanction behind his use of physical force. The legal definition of such a person bears out the popular conception of a goonda. Section 1(4) of the Goondas Act, 1923, says, "Goonda includes a hooligan or other rough" Section 3(1) of the Act, further explains the term, "Such person or gang or body is committing or has committed or is about to commit or is assisting or abetting the commission of—

(i) a non-bailable offence against person or property, or

(ii) the offence of criminal intimidation, or

(iii) an offence involving a breach of the peace, so as to be a danger to, or cause, or to be likely to cause, the inhabitants or to any section of the inhabitants....". The definition and elaboration do not explicitly explain who really is a goonda. The Calcutta High Court took up the definition of the term 'goonda' in the unreported case of Said Shahib Jan Mian and three others Vs. the King. In this case it was held, "Goonda is a habitual breaker of law." In a number of later decisions this definition was further clarified. Lastly, it has been maintained that 'a goonda is a habitual breaker of law' and 'there must be some element of violence in his activities'. Such a type of persons is a menace to the community and to the public order. Constant watch and control only can keep them in check.

But Goonda Act becomes inoperative due to constitutional grounds. So an attempt was made to deal with goondas under Preventive

Detention Act, 1950. Cases of 150 persons who were detained between 1954 and 1964 under Preventive Detention Act for indulging in goonda activities in Calcutta have been studied and the result is given below :—

<i>Age Group</i>			<i>Physical Standard</i>	
18 —	21 years	28	Strong build	— 33
21 —	25 „	68	Medium build	— 83
25 —	30 „	36	Thin build	— 24
30 —	40 „	15	Deformed	— 10
Above 40	„	3		
<i>Weapons used</i>			<i>Income Group</i>	
Knife	—	10	Rs. 1 —	Rs. 100-79
Bomb	—	22	Rs. 101 —	Rs. 250-55
Bomb & knife	—	98	Rs. 251 —	Rs. 400-11
Soda water bottle	—	15	Over Rs. 400	— 5
Lathi	—	2		
Revolver	—	3		
<i>Residential accommodation</i>			<i>Residence in Calcutta</i>	
Building	—	56	South	— 21
Bustee	—	72	Central	— 70
Homeless	—	22	North	— 59
<i>Territorial Distribution</i>			<i>Intoxikants</i>	
Calcutta born	Bengalee —	48	Wine	— 102
	Non-Bengalee —	30	Ganja	— 16
Permanent	Bengalee —	13	All type	— 30
Home outside			Not addicted	— 2
Calcutta	Non-Bengalee —	47		
Refugee	—	12		
<i>Women</i>			<i>Education</i>	
Kept	—	13	No or little	— 127
Brothel-goer	—	96	School Final	— 18
Married	—	38	Above	— 5
Not attached	—	3		
<i>Employment</i>			<i>Politics</i>	
No work	—	123	No connection	— 127
Casual	—	22	Connected Left	— 10
Regular	—	5	Right	— 13

*Age-group* : This survey does not cover the juvenile delinquents as they have not yet attained the full maturity of criminality. Delinquency has a formative stage. Juvenile delinquents, though technically left out of this survey, are but goondas in the making

and give us a glimpse into the green-room of their elders. The age-group between 21 and 25 is on the peak of criminality. The criminal biography indicates that they started their criminal career generally between the age of 16 to 18 years. During this period, the criminal activities are coloured by a grand display of power. In the period of gestation, the show of force is more than the force itself. Target of force is the person. Personal violence causes spilling of blood and blood often creates a ghastly spectacle. At this stage the delinquent is more concerned with the display of his powers than with acquisition of property. Display of force adds to his importance in the community and people out of fear satisfy his demand. He retains his unholy hold on society as long as he is in fine fettle. For this reason, goondas well stricken in years and a prey to senile decay are rare. But it does not mean that persons who are advanced in age do not at all indulge in goonda activities. The survey reveals that three persons who are on the wrong side of forty were detained for their goonda activities. Physical fitness and not age is the determinant of goondaism.

*Physical standard:* Physical fitness is generally synonymous with strength. But a goonda is not always a man of strong build. On the contrary, persons of medium build, are most efficient and 83 persons of that category are found in the list. Even persons with deformed and disabled limbs are not found wanting in the illegal activities. Blindness of one eye, deafness of one ear or both, absence of wrist from one hand and the like are common enough in these criminals; but there is, for very good reasons, no deformity in respect of any leg. They must have a pair of healthy legs to carry them nimbly.

Deformity militates against physical fitness but deformed and disabled persons sometimes develop a strong flair for competition with a normal person. Backed both by physiological and psychological reasons, they sometimes are a little more desperate than their able-bodied counterparts. Desperate attempts are sometimes the overt acts of the defectives.

*Type of weapon:* Health and strength wield a great influence on the mind and character of a goonda. The choice of weapon depends

on the state of health.' A comparatively weak man prefers explosives and soda water bottles. He can just throw them and make good his escape without facing the victim. But a confirmed goonda does not like to take any chance. 90 persons, out of the total number of 150 persons, used both knife and bomb. They use the knife when the victim is comparatively a feeble man and is within the reach of their hands. But the confirmed goondas take recourse to bombs when the victim is strong and is beyond the reach of their hands. Use of soda water bottles requires some practice and in the hand of an expert, they become a formidable missile. A well-trained goonda, possessing only one hand, is capable of throwing 10 soda water bottles in a minute and thereby can keep a huge crowd at bay.

A dagger or a knife in the hands of a goonda is generally used for offensive purposes. But bombs are used both for offence and defence. Possession of a revolver or a pistol heightens the stature of the goonda in the eyes of the public and his compatriots. Only with a show of it he can secure a high position in the hierarchy of goondas.

*Income-group* : Deprivation and frustration are conducive to the growth and development of the goonda spirit in a man. Most of the goondas are born of poor parents and 79 persons of them belong to the income group of persons earning about Rs. 100/- per month. The living conditions is also very poor. 72 persons are residents of the bustee area. 22 persons have no permanent residence in Calcutta. They are homeless vagrants. An unattached person has no respect for the soil and generally he becomes a desperado. When the income exceeds Rs. 400/- per month, the number of persons infected with the goonda spirit decreases and it come to 5 persons only.

Parental control is a great factor in life. From statistics it is not possible to state anything about parental control, although attendant circumstances throw a flood of light on it. Goondas, who have their fathers alive and who have their fathers dead, are almost equal in number i.e., 74 and 76 persons respectively. A goonda generally comes from the low income group. The members of this group are always engaged in earning their living by the sweat of their



brow. The exclusive preoccupation with their living leaves them little time to look after their wards and hence a father alive or dead makes no difference in the life of young ones prone to delinquency. These unhappy children grow up without the fostering care of their fathers. They are without roots in the family. Deprived of joy at home, they seek it outside according to their lights. Consequently they develop into runaways and find allies among the street urchins.

*Living condition* : Congestion has much to do with the formation of a criminal mind. In a crowd a single man is a nonentity and can merge his identity in the vast ocean of the multitude. It is difficult to sift out a culprit from among a mob. Central Calcutta is by far the most densely populated and as such it is the worst affected area. Out of the total number of 150 detained persons, 70 persons are from this area. In this locality the servants of the well-to-do when out of employ, sometimes swell the number of goondas. Bereft of patronage, the retainers of the rich scrape together a living by goondaism.

Over population has made architecture vertical. When the houses are on the same plain, watch and surveillance are comparatively easy. But vertical houses demand constant up and down movement over and above patrolling areas on the same level. In such a condition unobtrusive watch from outside becomes almost impossible.

*Territorial distribution* : Calcutta is the microcosm of Indian criminals. Employment and different avenues for earning attract many people from other states of India. In the jail, goondas coming from the Punjab shared bed with those from Tamilnadu. Even Chinese and Burmese nationals come to its fold. But Calcutta-born gentlemen tower above them all. Their number comes to 78 persons. But all of them are not sons of the soil. Compared with them, refugees from East Pakistan form an insignificant minority. They are only 12 in number and they are only novices. The last generation of the refugees is lost in the futile search of an anchorage. The present generation tries to find it through anti-social acts.

*Moral standard* : A goonda's nerves are always on the strain and hence he has frequent feats of depression. But signs of depres-

sion are a death-knell to a goonda. He has to keep up his spirits. So he takes to wine. 102 persons are addicted to wine. Only 16 persons of them smoke 'ganja'.

Wine does not always tone them up. Goondas try to find some 'kick' in the company of women as well. Women of easy virtue like to have goondas as their protectors. It is found that 96 persons visit the brothel, 13 persons live in open sin with fallen women. 38 persons are married but 6 of them married girls whom they had kidnapped. Only three persons have nothing to do with woman.

*Education :* Education is a great civilizing force. Most of the goondas are without the benefit of education. They are not licked into shape. Hence they are the sport of chance desires. Of the total 150 persons, 127 have no or little education, 18 of them have passed the Matriculation or School Final Examination and 5 of them have gone beyond Matriculation standard, but none of them is a graduate. Artistic qualities are inborn and may be found even among the uneducated. 2 persons are good painters, 1 is in the habit of writing poems, 12 are good singers and 3 can play on the 'tabla'. 14 of them are good sportsman and one among them was football player of international repute.

*Employment :* Most of the goondas have not their time well filled with honest and creative work. Only 5 persons of them have regular employment. But 123 persons have no employment at all and have no ostensible means of livelihood. 22 are under-employed for they cannot stick to any work for more than a few days. Regularity grinds the goondas. They either give up the regular job on the flimsiest pretext or are dismissed for their misconduct.

The unscrupulous traders indulging in shady deals at times escape the arms of law. But goondas generally know of their activities. Both of them are brethren of the underworld. These traders require protection, help and guidance of the goondas. To win the goondas over they pay the goondas tributes which are more handsome than the salary earned honestly. Thus easy money comes to them as royalties to their prowess and goondas also take pride in swallowing

the same. This easy flow of money tempts them to get rid of the drudgery of a regular service.

*Political affiliation :* Many of the goondas are without any political colour. Only 23 persons have political contacts. Some fallen angels of politics may take to goondalism to feed fat their ancient grudge. Frustration lands some to goondalism. Again with some goondas politics are a camouflage. They put on a political hue to wriggle themselves out of a difficulty. With them politics are a means and not an end.

#### CONCLUSION

The spirit of lawlessness is now abroad nearly everywhere. In many quarters of the globe under various names goondalism stalks over the stage of the world. Administrators find it difficult to combat the evil. The rise and growth of goondalism all over the world can be traced to the change in the socio-economic force of the present day world. We shall here briefly enumerate the causes that made goondalism prevail in Calcutta and why the powers that be fail to cope with the problem. During the Second World War, Calcutta became the Head Quarters of South East Asia Command and was subject to the strain of war economy which tore asunder the fabric of society. Money-making was the absorbing passion of some who adopted questionable methods to get rich quick. It is not perhaps too much to say that the ways of the new-rich were the ways of goondas. They unleashed the forces of evil. The alliance of the rich with desperadoes made the bad characters look respectable in the eyes of the people for affluence and sometimes influence. The rich can defy law and to perpetuate their power, they harbour and patronize desperate persons. Other events that followed heightened the stature of the goondas. During the communal troubles there was a further shift in the attitude of society towards goondas. At that time the services of the goondas were much in demand. The desperate courage of the goondas saved the life and property of many and made some localities safe and secure. They became local heroes and had a large following. They had an army of delinquents at their command. They ceased to be universally condemned. Again the

power-politics of the day bring the socially boycotted goondas with the pale of civilized community. During the elections they do yeoman's service. Sometimes their brawn is an asset to the brain of a party intent on capturing power. This places the administrator into a tight corner. He knows full well the soil on which goondaism thrives but cannot get to the bottom to root it out. Legal action can be taken against anti-social elements but not against socially-accepted persons. In an unstable society a goonda may be held in esteem for some reason or other and may be looked upon as a useful member. This undeserved stature gives him the extra-legal position. Political turmoil and goondaism often go together. When the body-politic is out of joint, the forces of darkness get the upperhand. It is then the goonda in the garb of a patriot hoodwinks society and gains the esteem he does not deserve. Such a sorry state of things calls for a radical change in society. The need of the hour is to strengthen the moral fibre of the people at large.

# **PROBLEMS OF THE MENTALLY DISORDERED IN CALCUTTA**

**Ajita Chakraborty**

## **MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

It is a common and popular assumption that mental illness is associated with social conditions in the same way as it is thought prostitution and crime are associated. The common factor among lunatics, prostitutes and criminals is, each constitute a distinct group in the eyes of law; law which reject and cast them' out from the society. Speaking of the mentally disordered, it is certain historical situation in western Europe, which has placed them under law and behind bars (Foucault, 1967). The movement to free them is still continuing in most countries, but mental illness is firmly established in people's mind as a social problem. Traditional Indian concept regard madness as disease process and do not associate it with demonology as it was done in medieval Europe. However, this difference in view points has not made the problem greatly different in our present day complex urban societies.

It is also common to assume social change and social disorganization increase the rate of mental disorders. Whether it is a correct assumption or not, we have no clear answer, because the co-relation is not simple and the conceptual and methodological difficulties present in the subjects dealing with these questions have not yet been overcome.

I should say, if the participants are expecting to hear how the present troubles of Calcutta are making us mad, they will be disappointed, or, to put it in other words, Calcutta is indeed sending us mad, but perhaps, not crazy! I hope my attempt at levity brings home to you, at least, the semantical difficulty from which we suffer! What is mental illness? What is this particular phenomena that we should associate with social change? Well, there is no

agreed definition of mental illness. The old term *lunatic* which deprives the person of his full human status has been discarded by all concerned and the term *mentally ill* is generally preferred now-a-days. However, this term begs the question. Is it an illness like typhoid or arthritis? Then what concern is it of non-medical persons? Still, the majority in the medical circles accept mental disorder as illness, but this attitude has its critics (Szazes, 1961). There is, however, a general agreement that certain aberrant behaviour, recognized as such, is and had been present in all societies at all times including prehistory of mankind as evidenced from myths and attitudes towards the afflicted person in most archaic of societies (Fortes, 1965). We do not know what causes mental illness, or rather, we know, that a great number of causes are at the root of mental illness, but it is the result, the outcome that concerns us more as it invariably involves the society. The mentally ill persons either reject and withdraw from the society and other human beings or make insistent demands of help. There is often a refusal to accept and behave according to norms, not only of his given culture, but also of basic human life (like talking or eating).

The view-points, even the manner in which I have presented the problem so far, may not be agreed to by other psychiatrists, let alone to any conclusion I may present, which highlights the difficulties I have mentioned earlier. In spite of such difficulties one is always free to form opinions and I quote the following opinions of well-known experts with which I am in agreement. In a review of epidemiological studies of mental disorders, Dr. H. B. M. Murphy says, "Nature of the relationship between sociological events and rates of mental illness still remain uncertain. Studies indicating increase in mental diseases following social change and those suggesting decrease are about equal." To quote from another authority, "Only where under-developed areas are in contact with West and undergoing westernization there seems to be increase in rate when compared with members of the same group not undergoing change (Kiev, 1964)". As far as I can make out, the above conclusion is based on studies of tribal groups. Social change and disorganization in so far it means westernization has yielded some positive co-relation with mental

disorder. You will agree it is not possible to test the above hypothesis in Calcutta, where 'westernization' has gone on since the founding of the city some 200 years ago. You will perhaps also agree, in spite of a high level of industrialization the Bengali society in Calcutta has many features of 'underdevelopment' within it. Hence, it is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate what is 'westernization.' Methods of investigation designed for this type of studies are somehow inapplicable to Calcutta. Of course, we the Calcutta psychiatrists or psychologists have not been able to produce any original kind of studies suited to local conditions.

At this point, I must emphasize, notwithstanding whatever has been said before, as psychiatrists we are seeing a lot more mental cases these days. An upward curve of increasing rate is found everywhere. Some of the reasons for this trend may be, people are more aware of the illness and that help can be obtained; there are more facilities for treatment available; there is also a diagnostic bias among doctors, tending to diagnose conditions which would pass as normal variations some years ago.

Even and in spite of the above considerations which are applicable to all countries, most experts agree there is an absolute increase in mental illness all the world over. I shall return to this topic later. In other countries sophisticated data has been kept for at least, last 30 years, on which one can base some assumptions. But in our country even if any data is collected, it is unreliable and unobtainable. The Union Government has taken some steps regarding this vital aspect of psychiatric research, i.e., data collection but, unfortunately, West Bengal is totally indifferent to it.

#### THE PROBLEM IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CALCUTTA, THE CITY OF COMPLEXITIES

Is there a problem in the city with the mentally disordered ?

(A) If any member of to-day's learned gathering had occasions—Heaven forbid ! to grace the chamber of one of my colleagues and have forked out multiples of thirty rupees, he must have felt the

problem as one of his pocket. If he has taken one of his relatives with mild symptoms of being slightly off balance, say after childbirth, the problem would appear much the same—of expenses. Otherwise, he will get best attention and adequate treatment; perhaps, he will find the nursing homes are not of very high standard, perhaps, his friends know very little about them and they are somehow suspicious; on the whole, help will be available and the problem solved.

Now suppose your clerk who lives somewhere in Garia or near Dum Dum—his rather promising and only son goes off his head one day and starts throwing brickbats at passerby—what happens? His friends catch hold of him and carry him to a hospital emergency, there to be told to come next day for the regular out-door. Perhaps, a local doctor gives him an injection and the night passes quietly. The next morning, the boy, though accompanied by a dozen of friends and the distraught family, does not present an alarming picture to the psychiatrist-in-charge, who cannot spare more than 5-6 minutes for interview and examination in a heavily crowded out-door, the family would like to spend an hour. They return home dissatisfied, bewildered and excited. They start asking for advice from all and sundry. One thing they realize but are unable to accept is that immediate admission in a free or low cost bed is not possible anywhere in the city. They might pool their resources and get the boy treated privately, but it is more likely they will go from hospital to hospital and doctor to doctor. Instead of making the best of the treatment that is available they make themselves thorough nuisance in the eyes of the hospital doctors and lose their sympathy. Eventually, whatever the treatment, the boy gets better, he might even pass his examination and get a job. When he relapses after a few years, the father is wiser, an admission is arranged. If he has been married off in the meanwhile, his wife looks after him which is a great help. He goes back to his job. If he relapses frequently and is unable to keep his job, more difficult problems appear. He is now a chronic case and his admission in mental hospital becomes almost impossible unless he has relatives who can pull strings to get him a free bed in the large long-stay hospitals in Ranchi. Otherwise, he remains at home as a burden on his family.



As there are no social welfare agencies, treatment of the mentally ill in Calcutta depends solely on the efficiency, resources and interest of his family.

In matters of employment and marriage, single attacks of schizophrenia (the major mental illness) does not spell absolute doom here as it does in the West. Social stigma of having mental disease seems to be confined to higher strata of the society, not among the hospital cases, I encounter. The types of cases that we see, or the diagnostic pattern, is not greatly different from that in other cities in India.

Our hospital is situated in the more affluent south western part of the city, but 80% of the patients are drawn from a strata we have termed—non-manual middle, i.e., clerk, small shop-owners etc. We get a fair proportion of students, but both the highest and the lowest strata are scantily represented. Hospitals situated near industrial and slum areas may present a different picture of pattern of help sought. For example, the psychiatric O.P.D. of the hospital situated near the Sealdah Station is well attended by people coming from the rural area surrounding Calcutta, people who can afford no expenses for treatment. That particular O.P.D. has no facilities for any treatment, so it refers many cases to other hospitals, which only a fraction of these referred cases ever attend. This means the poorer section of people do seek help but do not pursue treatment within hospital organization.

It is the experience of all doctors in Calcutta, that hospitals, general or otherwise, are mainly utilized by middle to lower middle class of people. The situation in Howrah hospital situated in wholly industrial area is well worth a study. I shall return to this topic later. Social conditions as reflected in our own patient population reveal some interesting features. There is a preponderance of refugees from East Pakistan among our patients. We are conducting a study to see if this group is in any way specially vulnerable. So far, I can say, if anything they are more hospital minded or more aware of organized social benefit facilities.

Soon after the gold control order we had a spate of goldsmiths, thrown out of their livelihood, coming with symptoms of depression and other mixed psychosis. This group seemed specially vulnerable, being elderly people with life long habits of meticulous orderly work. It is for record, that I did see one or two cases of *chhana-wallas* after the *chhana* control order ! For sometime we are getting a sprinkling of students coming with a variety of symptoms resulting directly from frustration over long closure of schools and colleges and postponement of examinations. I have not as yet seen any case which can be related directly to the present state of unrest going on in West Bengal, at least for the last two years. Workers have brought in their sick relatives, more because they now have time, rather than because tension has increased at home. What I find most baffling is their answer to questions—"How are you managing ?" which is always—"Somehow !" Perhaps the anthropologists and sociologists present here are conducting studies which will one day reveal, how our factory workers, with closure or strikes in their factories for 4-5 months at a time, had maintained their morals and have not felt the pinch.

(B) Let us now ask one more question. What happens, if suppose, a country brother of your driver, goes off his head ?

The same story is repeated, his country folk, residing in the same bustee, with perhaps a brother of the patient working in the jute mills, come to the hospital with the patient. An ECT may be given straightaway, but there is a difference this time, whatever the doctor's advise regarding treatment, the friends are more likely to send the patient back to the village as soon as they can. The patient may get better there and come back to Calcutta only to relapse. The story may take a different line—a slum dweller may wander off at the very onset of the disease. If the patient is an elderly widow, a "*Ghutewali*" for example, or even a young housewife, who will do no work but sit somewhere and shout and abuse, she is very likely to be turned out of the house and may wander off. Such cases, specially, when they have no friends, or have relatives who do not want to be bothered, soon become a very familiar sight in Calcutta—a man or woman, dressed in rags, carrying bundles under his arms

or above her head roaming around aimlessly in the streets. If she starts abusing passers-by or he starts directing traffic, or commit any such acts of public disturbance, then luckily or unluckily, as you take it, he will be arrested. The police will produce him before a magistrate to get an observation order. If after the end of a month which he spends in the lunatic ward of a city jail, the psychiatrist-in-charge finds the person a 'lunatic', the magistrate will commit 'the said lunatic' to the custody of the jail, pending a vacancy of a free bed in Ranchi where he can be subsequently removed for treatment.

If these patients do not create any disturbance, but take to the streets, living quietly off dustbins, they may remain free for a long time. Often such cases get adopted by the neighbourhood, who clothe and feed them. But they soon fall prey to diseases and die, quite often, at one of mother Teresa's homes. Such persons become the most irritating and difficult problem of the civic authorities. Such degradation of a human being produce feelings of revulsion in all civilized people. Metaphorically speaking, stray dogs and wandering lunatics are the best indicators of a country's state of civilization. In Calcutta, a number of docile lunatics are placed under the Vagrancy Act and put in Vagrants Homes. In India, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras are the only cities having this Vagrancy Act, which is designed to check begging. The study of vagrancy in Calcutta when it is undertaken will be an interesting one. I had occasions to visit these homes and was told that one third of the cases apprehended give up begging, often do well in schools run by the Directorate, and learn a trade, facilities for which are also provided. Of course, the scheme falls through, as jobs can seldom be provided for them. The accommodation provided in 4 such homes run by the Vagrancy Directorate can take in perhaps, not even 1% of the city's beggars, but of this meagre quota, more than 60% are now occupied by mentally ill persons, who being sick people and not vagrants block up, on one the hand places which are not meant for them, and on the other, get no treatment for their condition. Though the benefit of food and shelter provided are not to be minimized, specially when one thinks of abandoned mentally defective children and adults, still, the problem of the mentally disordered, if one takes into account

modern advances in treatment and the world wide movement of mental health, rightly and properly belong to the authorities responsible for health. However, in our city these self exiled and cast-outs are nobody's problem, a fraction of them are just somehow shoved out of sight, but a great many of them are always to be found out there, perhaps, enjoying the freedom of the streets.

The conditions in the vagrants homes are bad, but not as bad as in the jails. Through the intervention of some public spirited persons some female cases were removed from the Presidency jail and were placed in a special jail in north Bengal. The vacant places in Presidency jail have been filled up in no time and the conditions are as bad as ever. It is to be said there are psychiatrists in charge of the lunatic wards but proper treatment is well nigh impossible due to legal difficulties, though some drugs are occasionally available.

The majority of cases in vagrants homes and half the cases in the jails are non-Bengalis, though for many names even addresses are unknown. They are mostly from Bihar, a situation which reflects the plurality of Calcutta and makes rehabilitation extremely difficult. If a Bihari women recovers she can neither be sent to her village nor can she be discharged here with nobody to look after her. It is only Calcutta of all Indian cities that has this particular problem in this magnitude, that is treatment, welfare and if necessary, rehabilitation of a large number of migrant labour from other States.

#### SOME ASSOCIATED PROBLEMS

No discussion on mental illness in its social perspective can be complete without mentioning the following topics, which by the way, are the more important social psychiatric problems in the west.

First, the psychopaths or the sociopaths (the misfits)—groups of people who, though not manifestly abnormal, cause other people or the community to suffer through their acts. They are the drug addicts, alcoholics, perverts, vagabonds, habitual criminals, gamblers, people given to unprovoked violence, and, where opportunities exist, people who are unable to hold on to steady jobs. In U.K.

law has been changed so that, many people who come under above categories are forced to accept some treatment. The very list is enough for us to realize, it will be a long time before we can consider say, drifting or vagabondism as mental abnormality. Yet, these are typically city problems and Calcutta is teeming with the misfits. It is, perhaps, only the 'blacksheep' of an affluent home, who may, though rarely, be brought to the psychiatrist, thereby proving that we do have true psychopaths.

Second, to certify a person as lunatic means he is deprived of all his rights and can be locked up indefinitely. Many countries have formulated safeguards to prevent misuse of certification. As the Indian Lunacy Act is very much antiquated, the Indian psychiatrists are trying to introduce a new Mental Health Act. My own efforts in this respect has brought me surprising realization. I find the concept of civil liberties is almost absent in this highly political city of ours. Some three years ago, the State Government opened a mental hospital in the city and placed it outside the jurisdiction of any law relating to mentally ill persons. In spite of my vociferous (though lone) protest, they did not even realize it is an anachronism. The newspaper which 6-7 years ago made an issue of certain changes proposed for the Lunacy Act, did not take any interest in the matter. Now the hospital situation in Calcutta is such that no patients can be kept, in occupying a bed, for any length of time. This factor, i.e., quick discharge may be one of the reasons why the city has not had a court case of false certification and unlawful detention in the past 20 years. But I feel it is not an isolated phenomenon relating to psychiatry. People's attitude and understanding of laws are radically changing since the British left and the Zamindari system was abolished (most cases of false certification in the old days used to be associated with disputes involving inheritance of landed property). The whole topic may seem rather irrelevant and unimportant to you, but it is being mentioned to underline the futility of borrowing and propagating ideas and concepts from other countries, with the logic what is good for them is good for us. All the reforms instituted for the mentally ill in advanced countries may be extremely good in themselves but they may be utterly meaningless in our context.

Third—the question of rehabilitation which is closely linked with the problem discussed just now. Mental illness is a chronic disabling process, some treated and all untreated patients gradually cease to be functioning members of the community. In this respect it is somewhat similar to tuberculosis and leprosy. You are perhaps aware of the problems in our sanatoriums for these diseases. Recovered patients refuse to leave the hospitals. In a tuberculosis sanatorium there is a patient's union demanding among other things, jobs when they are discharged. If resources were available, unemployment benefit or disability pensions would have solved this problem. But mental illness pose some other fundamental problems of relationship between the individual and the society. On the one hand mental patients need care and protection by the society, on the other they challenge the society's right to force it on them. Our patients neither want to come into the hospital on their own nor do they want to stay. Whether you force them through law, or coax and cajole them through social welfare agencies, to accept treatment, problems remain. Even while making good all the defects Calcutta has, no advanced country has as yet found the ideal solution how to deal with their mentally ill. Some problems will always remain as long as they are problems of human will, choice and freedom.

#### CONCLUSION

Without minimizing the problem and registering a strong protest at the neglect by the authorities of the rudimentary organizations that we did have, I must say, in my experience, the increase in the rate of mental illness in Calcutta is not what one would expect. I am offering two arguments to support my assumption. First, the types of cases that we see are not the types more obviously related to stress, i.e., depressions and anxieties. Our cases are mostly schizophrenias; the percentage distribution of different diagnostic categories coming to the hospital outdoors has not undergone any change in recent years. Second—allow me to bring back some facts already mentioned. I have stated, the unclaimed cases on the jails and in the vagrants homes come from the lowest strata of the city's population. My guess is there are about 3000 cases of this type in

Calcutta and Howrah, including those who are at large. This is not a high figure. Of course, it is very approximate, because so many cases are sent back to villages, so many did and so many cases recover spontaneously. Yet, I think this is a group of cases which must reflect the true indication of psychiatric breakdown rates. As I have stated, patients from this strata do not come to the hospitals, nor can they afford private treatment. It is also not possible for them to 'hide' mental patients in anyway. Loss of accounting can only occur the way I have mentioned. Hence, these cases should represent the hard core psychotics, who, it is not unreasonable to expect, as a sort of residue in psychiatric mixture, hold a proportional relationship to the whole quantity.

If this section of population is taken as less vulnerable to social stress, then we have to explain what is social stress and find an answer for the actual increase that has also been mentioned before. I think the increase in number of cases that we see are due to the same reasons that are causing higher breakdown rate elsewhere and not due to the social factors operative here. West Bengal is undergoing deep and major social changes, but these changes are not of such nature that cause true mental strain, that is, they do not enhance the deep seated alienation inherent in man. In western countries, more correctly, societies whose technology has reflected in their social structure, perhaps, processes are operating that increases man's alienation from man and society. I feel the true psychological effect of the present changes in Calcutta are being felt more in the upper strata than in the lower ones. It is the 'upper' who are more disoriented. The others are now more buoyant, more hopeful than ever before, it is perhaps millenarist hope of the kingdom to come, perhaps there is just a touch of cargo cult in all these endless processions. In the midst of these momentous changes I do not find any conflict of values, conflict always presupposes two opposing and fairly rigid codes. What I find is an absence of values, which strangely enough, seem to suit everybody.

There is something else which is also absent in this city of grinding poverty, economic disparity and social disorganization—unsmiling

faces. I do not mean filth and malnutrition is filling us with any 'joie de vivre', but I challenge you to go on watching faces in the streets and find out how many hard, sullen faces you see. No—we do not feel the misery of our miserable existence, we Bengalis are incapable of feeling despair. I think this is what lies behind the inexplicability of Calcutta.

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# **THE EXECUTIVE OF CALCUTTA**

**Gouranga P. Chattopadhyay**

## **INTRODUCTORY**

THIS paper, I must say at the beginning, should have never been written because its basis is going to be personal impressions only.

With this short introduction, let me plunge into the subject matter. I do not feel that there is a completely homogeneous executive culture prevailing in Calcutta. I have come to this conclusion on the basis of some personal observations and some facts.

## **FOUR EXECUTIVE SUBCULTURES**

It is usual to classify executives into two broad categories—general and functional. The latter are such people as the works manager, who is an engineer of some kind, the finance or accounts executive, who is usually a chartered or cost and works accountant and so on. Such functional executives almost inevitably have specialized academic qualifications—they are engineering graduates, chartered accountants, diploma holders in labour welfare (labour welfare officers), doctorates in economics or statistics (the marketing executives) and so on. But the general executives, on the other hand, can be matriculates, ordinary graduates etc. In other words, they need not necessarily have any specialization. These people are the branch managers, general managers, directors and so on. Some of the older top executives of some of our traditional industries like jute are only Senior Cambridge passed or less. I had once tried to collect data on the social and academic background of the executives in the jute industry in West Bengal, but due to lack of cooperation from their official association in West Bengal I could not proceed with my work.

There is also a third type of executives, who manages the family business and is a near kin of the entrepreneur. He belongs to a special category, for reasons I shall go into later on,

Of late a fourth kind of executives are making their way into the industry. They are the graduates of the two Institutes of Management at Calcutta and Ahmedabad, a few university departments of business management and a sprinkling of foreign M.B.As. These young men and women are highly educated and are trained in using sophisticated management techniques in various functional fields like organizational behaviour, financial and economic planning, information and data processing systems and the like. They come very near, in their approach, to the older generation of functional managers. It may be worthwhile mentioning here that during the late fifties the Government of India had set up a commission to enquire into the state of management education in the country. After collecting data this commission argued that while the government had spent money in buying machines and training men to run these machines, next to nothing had been done to get trained personnel for various areas of management. As a result, not only the two Indian Institutes of Management were set up at Calcutta and Ahmedabad (the money coming from the Government of India and at those of the States of West Bengal and Gujarat respectively), more money were pumped into some universities to expand existing departments of Business Administration or to set up new departments where they did not exist

One of the exercises that could be undertaken by anthropologists is to study the interactions of these four types of, as it were, subcultures, within the broad executives culture. I shall first try to give a general idea of the common elements of culture among all these four subcultures, and then highlight some of the points of difference.

#### **THE COMMON ELEMENTS SHARED BY THE FOUR SUBCULTURES**

At a superficial level, in Calcutta, the members of this culture can be identified by some traits of their material culture. Their homes almost inevitably are drawing room centred rather than the bedroom centred homes of the middle class Bengalis. The radiogram and the refrigerator are conspicuously displayed, with an occasional tape-

recorder. A collection of standard cottage industry products like dolls and masks adorn the shelf over the pelmet, or the mantelpiece, if the house is old. A small liquor cabinet and a collection of beef-mugs and wine-glasses add to the status. A stock of whisky is must. A hidden bottle of rum for sharfng with close friends, (this is to keep the costs down) may also be discovered behind some books. A fascination for imported clothes is yet another common element. Children's education is usually given through English medium public schools or semi-public schools and they are encouraged to address their parents as "Daddy" and "Mummy". The kind of luxury articles and dress that these people buy are reflected in the saving pattern of the executives. Beyond a safety level, they do not save money for investing in business by buying shares.

Almost all major companies encourage club and restaurant habit in their executives by giving them expense accounts and club memberships at company cost. Usually an executive has two accounts in his club—one personal and the other financed by his company though both the accounts are sponsored by the latter. The company account is supposed to be used only for entertaining business acquaintances. But it is not unknown for an executive to lament over the fact that he is bored with drinking in the company of fellow executives in order to spend an amount per month that his employers consider necessary to project a proper image of his company. As a result, he seldom runs a bill at his club in his personal account. Apart from drinking and having lunch at times, playing golf is very important even today. I wish to recall two anecdotes in this context. The first one is that once a senior executive of a British company seriously advised me to start a miniature golf course to give our Institute's boys practise before they got their diploma. The second one is slightly more elaborate. We had once organized a seminar in Calcutta to discuss the relationship between practising managers and our Institute's faculty. An executive suggested that we should allocate funds to let some experienced managers take a sabbatical, stay with us and write books, immortalizing their profound experiences. Before any of us could find our wits to reply, a down to earth executive got up and said that unless one of the Chambers of Commerce introduced

a Merchant's Cup\* for writing a book, he was sure that no amount of sabbatical would be sufficient incentive for an executive to write a book. As for other kinds of leisure activities, going to pictures in balcony seats and ball-room dancing at every party, which results in dinner being served after midnight, is a must. Unlike the British, for Indians dinner is at once a cue to eat and then go home. The executives feel the pressure of this tradition too. So dinner has to be served at the dead of night to a tired crowd after a lot of dancing, and perhaps this is a contributory factor to the widespread gastric trouble that haunts executives in India.

Surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, reading is an unknown exercise for a large majority of executives. During short courses that we hold for executives, I have even been told, by way of remonstrating against the amount of home work that we give, that the executive has even given up reading short stories, and not to speak of novels and that at best he reads the daily newspaper and at times the *Times Magazine*.

I have an impression that, as far as family life is concerned, there is an element of parent-children alienation. Children are to be certainly left with grandparents whenever the executive gets a chance of wrangling a foreign trip with his wife. Even during annual holidays at Kashmere or Gopalpur-on-sea, children are preferably left behind. In day to day life, since evenings are spent largely in parties or at the club, and that is the time when one can spend with one's children, there is little communication between parents and children.

#### THE CULTURALLY ROOTLESS CULTURE

The Calcutta executives, to a great extent, thus appear to be culturally rootless. I have seen Bengali executives at quandary during "Bhratri dwitiya". They were embarrassed when a sister, who has married into a traditional Indian home, went through the ritual and gave gifts; the brothers realized too late that they were expected to reciprocate it. During the Pujas, I have heard executives

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\* The Merchants cup is one of the most coveted golf trophies.

greeting their subordinates by saying "Happy Pujas"—which is, I suppose, some kind of Indianization of "Merry X'mas" or "Happy New Year". But they go in for the Christian festivals with gusto, after distorting these to some extent. Obviously there is no question of church-going or praying. The element of family reunion is also absent. But all night parties and heavy drinking are musts during X'mas and New Year's eve. At Easter, well, I had once asked an executive's children on a Good Friday morning if they had had Easter Eggs. Their indignant mother answered, "Eggs! That will come a little later. They have just breakfasted on hot-cross buns!"

But while all these executives live in a world of imported goods, cars, public schools and hot-cross buns, they willy nilly pay their allegiance to the traditional culture. As a matter of fact, this conflict of cultures seriously hamper industrial growth and peace. It is well known to any anthropologist that every organization demands a particular kind of repetitive behaviour, which in its turn is derived from a system of norms and that these norms are dependent on a value system. Industrial organization was evolved in the West and considerable adjustment of values was needed there before the men who ran the industries at various levels found their moorings in a new situation. As a matter of fact, even today this process is going on in the West. In India, at a very short notice the machines were brought and the organizations to run the machines were created. The men who are parts of these organizations find that the traditional values that they believe in are at variance in many areas with the values that these organizations demand. The executives, who have to uphold this new value system, have no option but to pay lip service to the new value system. But in their behaviour, they still adhere to older values. As a result, the more they upbraid their subordinates for not adhering to the new values, the more angry, frustrated and confused the latter become.

This is, it may be noted, not to suggest that a particular kind of Western value system and the consequent behaviour pattern are the only possible choices for the industrial and commercial organizations in India. There are many ways of resolving this organizational

dilemma of value conflicts. But the unfortunate fact is that barring one or two organizations in India, which are highly innovative, most of them appear to merely copy the Western pattern and try to make the best of the resultant organization, without caring to examine at least the key variable existing in the environment and within the socio-technical system of the organization.

To elaborate this point regarding value conflict, let me quickly give a few cases. Recently one of my students, interviewed some senior Bengali executives. One of them denied that he puts any emphasis on kinship while recruiting or promoting. But in course of the interview it came out that he was furious with his kins because they had refused to help his wife and children while he was in England. He considered it as their duty as kins and since they had not done their duty, he was out to see it to that none of his kins ever got help from him in industrial career. Thus, in truth, he was showing his strong attachment to the traditional value on kinship system.

A second executive, who also likewise denied having any traditional values said that *all things remaining same*, he preferred to give jobs to a kin or to an ex-student of the school where he had been educated. He never realized that all things cannot remain the same if one gave emphasis on kinship and such other ascriptive characteristics.

Apart from the type of instances given above, one could also cite the cases of kinship being a criteria of getting important club membership, to be brides being first approved of by senior directors, instead of by the parents of the groom, strong cliques that cut across the formal organization being formed on the basis of caste and region and appointment of near kins to important posts through an apparently impersonal selection system.

But the effect of traditional values is really felt in the area of superior subordinate relationship when the gap in the hierarchy is large. A senior executive's attitude towards the workers is largely that of a Zamindar towards his field hands. Here both age and hierarchical positions are felt as justifiable ascriptive statuses for demanding unquestioned loyalty—which is not forthcoming, giving

rise to industrial unrest. (I am not suggesting that this is the only cause or even that this is the most important cause of industrial unrest).

Thus we see that the executive culture is really a thin polish over the hard grains of the traditional Indian culture. Everyone knows that the grains are present, but they behave as if these do not exist, as a result of which continuously one rubs against the grains and gets hurt.

Now to give a little time to the subcultures.

#### THE DIFFERENCES AMONG THE FOUR SUBCULTURES

Till now the dominating sub-culture is the one that have men who are hardly educated compared to their responsibilities. Those who take decisions concerning hundreds of human beings and crores of rupees are usually Senior Cambridge passed or graduates. They have little or no specialization, though they have authority over others like engineers who have put in several years of intensive specialized training and education. They are suspicious of any kind of intellectual activity or systematic (in the sense of its being scientific) approach to problem solving in their organization. They put a high premium on experience and even if experience shows that for every ten right decisions, three major blunders are committed, those blunders are quickly forgotten and the problems of lower productivity or unhealthy organization are never thought of by them as the result of their lack of necessary knowledge in the various fields of human behaviour, technology, finance etc. This sub-culture is the most isolated one. In some companies they differentiate between two kinds of executives—the Brahmins and the Scheduled Castes. Obviously, reference here is not made to their caste. Those people who get jobs by virtue of having kinship, public school and club connections and little specialized knowledge, are the Brahmins. They patronize similar clubs, drop into one another's house without being formally invited, and marry into one another's family. There is a strong feeling of antagonism between them and the functional managers. This is not only reflected in the use of such terms as Brahmins and

Scheduled Castes, but also in the classical antagonism between factory staff (who are mostly higher educated) and head office staff. I have also heard the terms "the assess" and "the bosses" to differentiate between them ! These generalists not only fight the older specialists, but they also find it hard to accept the young highly educated managers of the type our Institute produces. As a matter of fact, we are not sure how long our graduates will be able to resist this dominating sub-culture and finally give up trying to utilize their newly acquired knowledge. This antagonism, we may find out, is not blind resistance to change, but it really stems from a fear that these youngsters may, in the near future, prove the old generalists to be redundant, or at least, comparatively inefficient.

The specialists or the functional managers, on the other hand, are by and large more traditionally oriented. One of the likely reasons for this is that they have to spend longer periods in their colleges, universities, I.I.T.s and so on in the company of solid middle class boys. Because they start their working life comparatively late, they also marry late and have to cope with the value system of middle class women who are more traditionally oriented. Also, they cannot afford to spend too much on luxury goods or for sending their children to too costly schools. All this is because they start their life comparatively late and have to save money at a greater rate in order to provide for a decent retired life.

In our third category comes the entrepreneur, who is also an executive, or the executive who is the brother or nephew of the entrepreneur. These people are mostly found in large and small family business. By and large they are highly traditional people who make little concessions to the Western values. At best they will wear suits while going to office. But even this is dispensed with if the office is not air-conditioned. They behave as traditional patriarchs, both at home and at office, and make no bones about it. Because they have money, and it pays to patronize clubs and restaurants, they frequent these places. The functional executive is seldom there, but the generalists, who are very much there, resent these people, though very little can be done by them to get over the resentment. As a result cliques abound in these clubs and in the organization of



official balls and charity balls. Our own experience is that because these entrepreneur executives really mean business, once they are convinced of the utility of new kinds of education or organizational change, they accept the change faster than the die-hard public school type of generalist.

I have so far tried to briefly highlight the four divisions found in the executive culture of Calcutta, and the inherent value conflict that runs between the Indian tradition and the executive culture on the one hand, and between these four divisions as well. Very useful research can be undertaken to study in depth these value conflicts. Such researches, apart from their academic value, would be very useful to bring in much needed improvements in the strife-ridden Indian industries.

#### THE EXECUTIVES AND THE BUREAUCRATS

I have altogether skirted two aspects of the executive culture. The first area that I have left out is the sub-culture of the public sector enterprise managers. This is yet to be studied, as also their interaction with the other sub-culture executives at places of business and recreation.

The second area is the relationship of the executives with the bureaucrats in the government. The vintage car rallies, where the executives, ex-feudal overlords and high police and military officials come together, the Navy Balls or the 'Made for each other contest', where the army chiefs, the governor of a State, the government Secretaries and the executives come together, and many similar other institutions need also to be studied to find how these cultures interact and the consequences thereof on our economy and political life.

It is now accepted by almost everyone that in order to survive India must not only industrialize herself more quickly, but that these new industries must be capable of producing world standard goods. From this angle, the industrialists and the senior executives have to perform leadership role in the country, and as a consequence form at least a major section of the country's elite. But till now, without giving either any leadership, or performing their own task

of improving organization and the quality of goods, they are trying to become accepted as part of the elite through a very traditional institution—namely, conspicuous consumption. The bureaucrats who lack the economic resources of the industrial executives, sometimes, combine with them and sometimes fight them to gain similar recognition by using their traditional weapon—namely, power. This interaction need to be studied thoroughly, and quickly, for healthy Indian life.

#### KNOW THYSELF

We, who claim to be an important part of the Indian elite—the intellectuals—well, I wonder who would study our interactions with the executives and the bureaucrats.

## ***Session III***

### **A CITY OF CREATIVITY AND FRUSTRATION**

# 3

## A CITY OF CREATIVITY AND FRUSTRATION

*To the Bengali Bhadrakalok citizen of Calcutta, this city is considered to be a pace setter for the intelligentsia of the nation. They are aware of a galaxy of intellectuals in the nineteenth century who creatively responded to the stimulus and challenge of the west. Although the early spirit of 'nationalism' has not at all been replenished by a new spirit of nation building in present day Calcutta, the local Bhadrakalok citizen continue to hold on to the tradition that they are expected to be deeply involved in the world of intellection and the creative arts. In this collection of six essays practising scientists, painters, movie-makers, drama-critics, writers, dancers and music-critics discuss the problems of their various creative fields in the social and cultural milieu of Calcutta. Several writers discuss about the apathetic upper strata and the creative resilience of a section of the middle class. In the field of drama the creative genius of the Bengali middle class intelligentsia has been particularly effective in bringing into relief the social and personal problems faced by the people of Calcutta.*

# **GROWING COMMUNITY OF SCIENTISTS IN CALCUTTA**

**Purnima Sinha**

## **1. THE DOMAIN OF DISCUSSION**

THE number of people engaged in the field of scientific creativity or research in Calcutta is perhaps much larger than that in the various arts. The term 'scientist' covers an unmanageably wide range. In this paper I shall limit my discussion to the community of research workers in physics and chemistry distributed in the three categories of institutions in Calcutta namely, universities, autonomous institutes and directly government controlled laboratories. An attempt will be made to locate the sources of incentives and constraints in the sociocultural and organizational atmosphere of Calcutta within which the scientists have to operate. Many of the problems encountered by scientists of Calcutta are common to India in general. Some specific situations may be characteristic only of Calcutta.

## **2. METHOD OF STUDY**

It should be mentioned at the outset that this paper is not based on a systematic investigation of the different aspects of all the major scientific institutions in Calcutta. I have mainly depended on informations gathered as a participant observer working in several institutions in Calcutta belonging to the three categories mentioned above. My personal observations have been supplemented by data gathered on the basis of interviewing a few scientists in depth. A historical perspective on the implantation of western science and its growth in Calcutta will be brought in only very briefly.

## **3. DISTINCTION BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY**

It is necessary that we spell out the specific nature and requirements of the creative endeavour of science as distinguished from the creative arts to be discussed in this session. In the creative arts,

the very nature of expression follows distinctly individual courses and it is possible for an artist to carry on his work almost all by himself or on the basis of interactions with a small localized group. Of course, the artists too, require a critical audience for inspiration, and communication with the international community of artists provide a source of new ideas.

In the case of science, however, co-operation and mutual exchange of data between people working in the same or related fields, is an absolute necessity, at every step. Because, the pursuit of science aims at unravelling the invariant absolute properties of nature, where there is no scope for individual taste or convenience to influence the results. The unique gaps in knowledge have to be filled in with experimental data and logical interpretation, which has to be uncontroversially acceptable by the total international community of scientists working in the field. Any gap in communication causes wasteful duplication and also hinders the growth of a complete theory covering all the required informations.

The knowledge about natural phenomena obtained by science, leads to attainment of power to manipulate nature for material benefit, and thus the applied aspect of scientific research is inherently connected with material prosperity. Unlike the artists, the scientific community in an industrially underdeveloped country like India, have to operate under the pressure of expectation from the society that their research should lead to elimination of poverty and material distress by increasing production. The scientists have to face the situation of being labelled as belonging to an "underdeveloped" nation much more directly than the artists because of the prevailing convention of measuring the progress of a country on the basis of the state of development of science and technology. The excellence of a scientific research is easier to assess in objective terms than that of artistic work. Unlike many of the arts which have vigorous indigenous base, in the field of scientific research the Indian scientists are aware that they are dealing with an entirely borrowed system of learning whose centre of excellence lies in the West.

In order to understand the state of scientific research in Calcutta, we have to find out whether the scientists work in an atmosphere

where they can and do effectively co-operate among themselves in the pursuit of advancement of knowledge and manipulation of natural resources for the well being of the country. Apart from objective assessment of their work, it is also useful to find out how the scientists in Calcutta feel about their own performance and about their institutional environment.

#### 5. A BRIEF HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE BEGINNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENCE IN CALCUTTA

Before describing the contemporary situation of scientific endeavour in Calcutta, it may be useful to review some relevant aspects of the nature of diffusion and development of scientific research in India during pre- and post-independence periods.

##### 5.1 *Early beginning*

Calcutta being the headquarter of British administration, the people of this city were exposed to modern scientific learning earlier than any other place of India. Founding of Asiatic Society in 1784 in Calcutta marked the beginning of a centre of occidental learning. This was followed by foundation of Trigonometrical Survey in 1802 and Geological Survey in 1856, where British scientists in Governmental Service worked to serve the interest of Imperial administration and from which Indians were almost excluded as a matter of policy.

But even under such limiting condition, gradually an awareness about the utility of scientific and technological education was generated among some distinguished citizens of Calcutta. Some individual British scholars were also interested in spreading western education, including science, to the Indian people. The Hindu College was established in 1817 by the efforts of a few leading, influential and liberal Hindus of Calcutta. In 1855 it was taken over by the Government and renamed Presidency College where, in course of time, some arrangements were made for the teaching of science at the 'under-graduate' level under 'B' course. J. C. Bose and P. C. Ray both had their initial exposure to modern science in Presidency College. Later on these two pioneer Indian scientists received advanced training in scientific research in U.K. after which they joined Presidency

College as professors in physics and chemistry. Both of them carried on research in their respective fields in Presidency College laboratory and received international recognition for their contribution to science. Later on P. C. Ray joined Calcutta University and built up a nucleus of devoted research scholars in chemistry and J. C. Bose set up the Bose Institute.

### *5.2 Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sciences*

While only a limited scope for scientific research was available under Government sponsorship in Presidency College, a Bengali doctor Mahendra Lal Sircar took the initiative in 1876 to set up an organization named Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sciences (IACS) completely independent of Government control. In 1907 C. V. Raman started working on various branches of physics in the modest laboratory of the I.A.C.S. during his spare time as an officer in the Finance Department of the Government of India. Later on, a number of devoted young scholars gathered around Raman, who was later on persuaded by Asutosh Mukherjee to join the newly founded Science College of Calcutta University as the first Palit Professor of Physics. The discovery of Raman Effect and the award of Nobel prize in 1930 created a level of confidence and enthusiasm among the researchers in Calcutta

### *5.3 University College of Science*

Post graduate teaching in science with facilities for research in laboratories became possible mainly with the efforts of Asutosh Mukherjee with liberal contributions from Tarak Nath Palit, Rashbehari Ghosh and Maharani of Khaira. One of the conditions of Palit's endowment was that all the teachers appointed with the above fund should be of Indian origin. Asutosh Mukherjee persuaded the veteran chemist P. C. Ray to head the Chemistry Department and offered Palit Professorship of physics to C. V. Raman. It is on record that Asutosh, the chief architect of scientific education and research in Calcutta, searched out talents from all over India in order to build up a first rate tradition of teaching and research in all the science subjects. Teaching in physics was started in 1916 with a



few young scholars who had just obtained their M.Sc. degree in physics and applied mathematics from Presidency College. S. N. Bose and M. N. Saha were among these young teachers. In 1918 C. V. Raman joined as Palit Professor and later on D. M. Bose as Ghosh Professor of physics.

P. C. Ray and Raman set the pace for scientific research in Calcutta. The research scholars were expected to lead a life of austere devotion in the laboratories. P. C. Ray laid the additional emphasis that science should be utilized in building up national industries as he himself had done by founding the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works.

In 1914 Sir Asutosh took the initiative to organize the Indian Science Congress Association whose office and decisive control remained with the Calcutta scientists for several decades. The scientists of Calcutta also took the main initiative in establishing the National Institute of Sciences of India. The decisive eminence of Calcutta in the Indian scene of science continued upto 1940 although, between 1920 and 1930 a number of eminent Physicists and chemists of Calcutta like S. N. Bose, M. N. Saha and Gnan Ghosh moved into other Indian universities obtaining better positions. In 1934 Raman went to Bangalore as Director of the Indian Institute of Science, leaving the scientific scene in Calcutta to be dominated almost exclusively by Bengali speaking scientists. It appears that the dispersal of a number of eminent scientists from Calcutta took place at a time before the Calcutta base could gain sufficient momentum.

#### *5.4 The recent phase of development*

During the second world war the British Government felt that it was no longer safe to limit British industrial enterprises to U.K. and that scientific researches in the colonies, particularly in India, should be directed towards strategic industrial development. In 1943, at the request of the then Viceroy, Professor A. V. Hill from Royal Society came and advised on building up a number of research institutions in science and technology. Among the few laboratories estab-

blished according to this scheme, Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute of Calcutta may be mentioned.

When India became independent in 1947, Government of India under the leadership of Jawharlal Nehru, planned to concentrate on developing the tempo of scientific education and research and industrialization, with the hope of quickly raising the standard of living of the people.

In 1948, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research was set up in Delhi with S. S. Bhatnagar as the first Director, according to the general plan outlined by Dr. Hill. Many national laboratories were established in quick succession, but none of the major laboratories dealing with physics and chemistry were located in Calcutta.

However, science in Calcutta, received its share of support from the public sector, resulting in rapid expansion of Government laboratories and Government sponsored autonomous laboratories. Universities also received support for scientific education and research through the U.G.C. As a result, the professional manpower and quantity of research in the various science subjects have increased exponentially during the first two decades after independence. If we look into the record of award of doctorate degrees in physics and chemistry in Calcutta University the pattern of expansion of trained scientific manpower and research becomes apparent. Between 1916 and 1947 Calcutta University produced 91 doctorates in all science subjects (2.8 doctorates a year), between 1948 and 1956, the same university produced 278 doctorates in these subjects (*i.e.*, 27.8 doctorates a year). In between 1944 and 1948 only 3 physicists and 6 chemists received their doctorates (*i.e.*, 1.8 doctorates in these subjects a year); during 1949 to 1965 the same university produced 119 doctorates in various branches of physics and 334 doctorates in pure and applied chemistry (*i.e.*, on the average 30.2 doctorates a year).

### *5.5 A review of the historical background*

It is apparent from the above account that the intelligentsia of Calcutta became aware of the importance of modern science, through

contact with the British rule. But the main thrust of enthusiastic involvement in the organization of higher education and research in sciences came from the Indians themselves, who were moved by a spirit of nationalism. This 'spirit' produced a few brilliant scientists but the available resources were inadequate to provide suitable positions and facilities for research for these scientists in the laboratories of this city for a sufficiently long period to generate a vigorous tradition of research.

In the background of this picture of relative stagnation during 1930-1947, the sudden expansion of resources since independence seems to have caught the Calcutta scientists somewhat unprepared and one of the major reasons for the general state of malaise in the field of science in Calcutta to day may be due to the abruptness of expansion

## 6. THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

From our historical review it will be apparent that the combined factors of early exposure to western science in the strategically located city of Calcutta and the effective initiative of a section of Calcutta intelligentsia charged with the spirit of nationalism, led to the decisive eminence of this city as a centre of cultivation of sciences in the country. We have now to review how far the initial enthusiasm has been retained and expanded in the contemporary scene of vastly enlarged support from the Government.

### 6.1 *A general state of malaise*

One of our leading scientists, P. C. Mahalanobis states :

"Expenditure on scientific research in India perhaps has increased ten times since independence. A large number of laboratories and institutes have been established; and the number of scientific workers have increased considerably. And yet the output of scientific research of high quality does not seem to have been commensurate with the physical volume of expansion of facilities. There are complaints of lack of enthusiasm and frustration among young workers. It is generally agreed upon that before indepen-

dence, resources were meagre and the number of workers were also much smaller but there was enthusiasm for research; the quality of research also was reasonably high" (Mahalanobis 1960 : 18-19).

The eminent chemist P. Ray makes similar observations on the quality of scientific research in India (Ray 1958 : 249-254).

It is difficult to assess the quality of performance of a research institute unless a detailed study of all the aspects of research are made. But according to Sir Edward Bullard a general impression about the atmosphere in a research institute can be made even by walking around the different departments and talking with the people. A right climate of opinion is an indication of a good research organization:

"The work of a factory can be planned and measured and reasonable performance enforced without a very delicate consideration of the wishes of the staff.

In a laboratory, if the staff are actively dissatisfied or even if they do not identify their own wishes and ambitions with the work, the establishment will quickly and imperceptibly lapse into mediocrity. There will be no very conspicuous signs that anything is wrong, the cost per worker will not change, the bulk of published work and unpublished reports may stay about the same; all that would happen will be the departure of a few bright young men, some difficulty in recruiting and an uneasy feeling among visitors that something is wrong with the establishment, and perhaps the staff complain more about the management than they should" (Bullard 1965 : 264).

If we follow Bullard's prescription in forming overall impressions on the three categories of institutions in Calcutta mentioned before we cannot escape the feeling that with the exception of a few individuals, or a few teams of workers or perhaps some sections of a laboratory, it will be apparent to even a casual visitor that there is a general lack of confidence and purpose and also resentment and frustration among the vast majority of research workers in these

laboratories. In contrast, one learns from some old workers in Calcutta University laboratories and in the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sciences that small groups of researchers worked in an atmosphere of dedicated enthusiasm around a few outstanding Indian scholars of international reputation. Although it is not possible to fully ascertain the truth of these nostalgic memories, yet they are important as relevant myths which guide the researchers even today.

## 7. STRUCTURE AND ATMOSPHERE IN DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS IN CALCUTTA

### 7.1 *Calcutta University and attached autonomous institutes*

In University College of Science the students are often found to complain about bad teaching, academic corruption and lack of guidance.

Many of the teachers on the other hand complain about lack of idealism and devotion among the students. Some of the old timers pass their time talking about the past glory of Calcutta University. A distinct change from the initial pattern of recruitment of teachers during the enthusiastic days of Asutosh is apparent in post-independence period. Instead of brilliant, active and young scholars, old and 'experienced' teachers, many of whom have discontinued research, are selected for most of the higher positions. Also, the tradition of recruitment of talented scientists from an all India base has completely broken down in favour of recruiting only Bengalis.

Two autonomous institutions, the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics and Institute of Radio Physics, were established within the university campus just after independence. Many young scientists got opportunity to work in these two new institutes during their initial period of growth. Although these institutes have been more open to receiving young talents in the faculty than in the original university departments, here again, some of the outstanding young scholars have left the Institutes to accept teaching and research assignments abroad. One gets the impression that even these

new institutions having better laboratory facilities and staffing pattern, are facing difficulties in sustaining the initial enthusiasm.

I have already mentioned that Calcutta University which has remained the main source of supply of new scholars is not being effectively replenished by brilliant young researchers. One, however, notices some flickering of enthusiasm and purpose among students working for doctorate degree even in the midst of the otherwise dull atmosphere in the old university.

The students, although generally complaining about lack of proper guidance and co-operation from other workers and non-availability of necessary facilities, somehow are able to work energetically with the limited purpose of getting a doctorate degree. In this general atmosphere of gloom one occasionally (though very rarely) comes across a few exceptionally brilliant teachers who maintain their optimism on the basis of their experience to enthuse the new generation of students who, they claim, are more alert than the average run of students in their own student days.

### *7.2 An Autonomous Institute : Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sciences—Recent Phase*

We have already described the early beginnings of the IACS with its glorious culmination in the discovery of the Raman Effect. To-day from the humble establishment of Bowbazar street the IACS has a substantial set up with large financial support from the Union and the State Governments. The scientific as well as the administrative staff have increased many times since independence. The volume of research in physics and chemistry has steadily increased during the post independence decades, yet, we observe to-day a lack of enthusiasm and a sense of frustration and purposelessness among many of the research scholars. There is a general complain that while the number of research scholars have increased considerably, capable research guides have not increased proportionately.

### *7.3 Government Laboratories*

The Government controlled laboratories in Calcutta have the usual rigid hierarchic structure with a heavy proportion of adminis-

tration staff. The emphasis is on applied research. One of the oldest research institutions, Geological Survey of India, was started in 1856 by the British Government with British scientists holding all the higher jobs and the Indians occupying only the subordinate positions. The formal structure of the G.S.I. has remained the same after nearly two and half decades since independence; only the positions are now all manned by Indians. The higher positions are recruited on an all India basis, while the lower staff in Calcutta are predominantly Bengali. In the culture of the laboratories in this massive survey department the emphasis is on being officially correct in procedure and in being formally obedient to the boss and being supercilious before the subordinate research staff.

The new institutions—the national laboratories have also adopted more or less the same model of rigid hierarchy as the G.S.I. with some minor modifications in structure. The equipments, library etc. of these institutions are kept in order and the routine functioning of these institutions are quite smooth. But signs of lack of enthusiasm and purpose in research becomes evident when one listens to the common topics of conversation and observes the behaviour of the research workers. Informal discussions among the scientific staff usually centres around speculations about the motives of the high officers, the salary scales, probability of a promotion, implications of various rules and regulations and plain gossips on topics other than scientific. Rarely one would find enthusiastic involvement in a scientific problem.

The prospect of attaining higher position, however, does provide some stimulus for initiative for a limited period. But the possibility of national development through contribution to science does not seem to act as a source of inspiration for a majority of the workers.

Although these institutes are primarily meant for promoting industrial research, the scientists often feel that their research ideas are not utilized by the industry. While many scientists complain that the industries are not science conscious, very many people in the industries feel that the scientists are not aware of the requirements of the industries. It seems that the two way channel of complementary nourishment is not adequately smooth.

#### *7.4 Characteristic features in the general atmosphere*

Although the scientists in different fields belonging to various institutions occasionally meet socially, there is very little effective professional collaboration and communication among them. As a result, scientific equipments as well as experiences available in the city are not effectively shared and utilized by the local scientific community.

#### **8. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS : THE SPECIAL FEATURES OF SCIENCE AND SCIENTISTS IN CALCUTTA TO-DAY**

The special features of science and scientists of Calcutta may be summed up as follows :

1. The Calcutta scientists are aware that this city played a pioneering role in developing a tradition and organizational base for scientific education and research in the country. They are also aware of the decisive eminence of this city in the sciences till the coming of independence. After independence, the claim of Calcutta as the most important centre for the pursuit of science gradually receded in favour of many other important centres developed in other parts of the country. This situation seems to have caused a sense of a damping of spirit among the Calcutta scientists in recent years. The young scientists of this city do not feel that great things in science are happening in their city.

2. It is not to be assumed, however, that scientific research has actually been declining in Calcutta in post-independence period. On the contrary, the number of professionally trained scientists and the quantity of research have increased many times compared to the pre-independence base line. Science in Calcutta is passing through a new phase. It is no longer a community dominated by a handful of individual towering stalwarts but it certainly sustains a much larger number of productive scholars than before, among whom quite a few are outstanding in their particular field of specialization.

3. The early enthusiasm of Calcutta scientists was charged with the spirit of renaissance and nationalism. Unfortunately, resources



were inadequate to keep together the brilliant products of Calcutta University in the pre-independence period. Thus, when Calcutta was in the threshold of developing a self sustaining tradition of modern science, particularly in fundamental research, the critical number of eminent scientists who could have trained a team of second generation of scholars could not be retained in this city with the meagre financial resources available at that time. As a result, when independence brought new funds and opportunities for science in Calcutta, by and large, the scientists were caught unprepared. New institutions were set up without adequately equipped persons in sufficient number to perform the required jobs.

4. In spite of P. C. Ray's pioneering effort to involve Calcutta scientists in industrial enterprise resources were inadequate to push forward the programme and the British firms were not at all interested in developing modern industries around this city utilizing local scientific talents. The indigenous Bengali trading groups were deflected from industrial enterprise to investment in zamindari and real estate. The dominant Rajasthani commercial houses in Calcutta were also not interested in sponsoring indigenous applied research. The initial enthusiasm for science in Calcutta remained basically in the form of abstract intellectual pursuit of the Bhadrak middle class.

5. After independence, support for applied research could gain momentum endogenously only in regions like Gujarat and Bombay, where indigenous industrial entrepreneurs were there to utilize scientific research. It is difficult to find the counterparts of industry and management oriented scientists of western India in this city.

6. One of the main limitation of the organizational milieu of science in Calcutta is that institutionalized tradition has not developed to effectively bring together the scientists working in related fields from different institutions—universities, national laboratories and autonomous organizations.

7. In post-independence Calcutta one finds a decline of the endogenous informal structure of the earlier generation. The new Government sponsored institutions have in general failed to introduce

any major organizational innovation beyond the colonial bureaucratic model, where the heads and the higher officers are expected to behave as "Sahibs". This structure is sustained by the massive hangover of a servile "clerical" mentality generated in Calcutta during the British rule.

8. Science in Calcutta, even today, is virtually isolated from the lower strata of primary producers, the farmers and artisans, belonging to the lower castes (Sinha 1970). Greater participation of the above groups would perhaps have generated vigorous interest in applied research connected with national welfare.

9. Some eminent scientists of Calcutta like S. N. Bose, have emphasised the need for propagating and teaching science in Bengali so that a massive enthusiasm for science is generated among all classes of the population. But, so far, these efforts have not gained much momentum.

10. On the whole, one would not be too far wrong in asserting that in spite of expansion of resources and opportunities and substantial rate of growth in scientific research and publication, the scientists in Calcutta suffer from a feeling of stagnation. They are aware that under the existing situation of poor coordination between relevant institutions, inadequate laboratory facilities, and lack of sufficient number of capable guides, they are often forced to work on obsolete and peripheral areas of modern science. Also, in many of the institutions meant for applied research, the scientists feel that their efforts are not substantially leading to national welfare.

There is a tendency among some social scientists to ascribe the root of the malaise in science in Calcutta to the national character of the Bengalis. It appears to me that a more rational approach would be to review the phasing of scientific endeavour in this city in the historical perspective outlined above. Whereas, for many of the centres of scientific research in different regions of India, new institutions are growing up with fresh enthusiasm, in Calcutta the problem is that of revitalization of a relatively fatigued tradition.

But generation of a purposeful optimistic atmosphere of in the field of scientific research is too complex and involved a problem to

be solved only by the efforts of the scientific research workers of this city.

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# THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL WORLD OF THE MEN OF LITERATURE IN CALCUTTA

**Alokeranjan Dasgupta**

It was in 1894 that Rabindranath wrote in a letter to Indira Devi Chaudhurani :

When in the village, I become an Indian. The moment I go to Calcutta I become a European. Who knows which is my truer self ?

Looking further back one finds one Stravonius describing Calcutta as a nascent 'metropolis' in the year 1770 without this revelatory shock of split-psyche so amazingly scanned by Tagore. Things happened rather hurriedly during the period in between to mar the time-honoured complacency of a creative Bengali writer of the day. But Tagore was more disturbed with what occurred at that moment or in the immediate past. For there was a tendency among quite a number of literary potentialities towards thwarting the advent of the urban individual assuming a typically occidental air. Sahitya (1890), the most popular literary journal of the time was edited by Sureshchandra Samajpati whose conservative attitude found expression in forming a literary group that would adequately resist all individualistic and urbanistic leanings. Tagore did a lot in his psychological novels to counterblast the move towards any such pseudo-normative groupism. But he failed utterly to form a group of his own while re-editing Bankim's Bangadarshan. No sooner than he relinquished its editorship, subservient medium of anti-moderns like Ramaprasad Chanda, Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay and Induprakash Bandyopadhyay branded Tagore an outright egoist revelling in the immoral. We had to wait until Pramatha Chaudhuri, the precursor of French modernism in Bengali literature, held the Arnoldian position that urbanity in literature was first visible in Bengali Literature. On the eve of the First World War\*Chaudhuri

founded *Sabuj Patra* (1914) which succeeded in bringing about a modernistic milieu. But the intellectual accent of the Sabuj Patra coterie was not popular enough. The third decade of this century witnessed the publication of *Kallol* (1923) and *Kalikalam* (1926). The 'Kalloleans' in the history of modern Indian literature, were the first group of writers who believed in collectively fighting for the egotistical sublime, or call it the egotistical sinister, with a terrible gusto. Achintyakumar Sengupta, one of the leading members of the Kallol, has later rationalized the tension lurking beneath this movement. This is the summing-up of his attitude :

The malady of the age left its lasting imprint on the Kolloleans. The Kallol meant a paradoxical Juxtaposition. It was sometimes over-energetic and sometimes languid. Now it waged a war and again it lost its interest in survival. It resembled some of Turgenev's characters. To be more precise, they were Shelleyan in spirit and Hamletish in action. For they were in love with Death. It was then romantic to espouse death caused by a revolt—be it political or literary. Both literature and politics at that time aimed at rebellion and annihilation alike<sup>1</sup>.

Despite this nihilistic anguish, it must be said that all that the Kalloleans succeeded in was to set a programme (tendenz) for their art. They fell for a purpose and stood by it and thereby ultimately only achieved, somewhat irritatingly, an institutional image rather than a solipsistic one. The common reader could easily identify himself with their creations. *Bede* by Achintyakumar was nothing but a frustrated vagabond of the middle-class society whose soliloquies had nothing private about them. *Pathik* by Gokul Nag, leader of the Kallol clan, was the sage of another, though dignified, tramp whose homelessness had a price-tag attached to it. For one thing, de-rooted humanity was a popular theme then and to fuse one's individuality with the people was an irresistible urge even with the egocentric writers.

The 40-s intensified this drive, re-inforced this chaotic confusion of the 'I' and the 'we'. Independence came along with massive immigration as its major feature. Estimated annual outflow of the displaced people into Calcutta Industrial region in the 1947-48 session was 2,58,946, the male-female ratio being 1,42,602 and 1,16,344<sup>1</sup>. W. H. Auden took his theme of involuntary exodus and charged the helpless situation with a magical tenderness of love in a poem where the male said to its other-half :

Say this city hath ten thousand souls,  
some live in mansion, some live in holes,  
But this is no place for us, my dear,  
this is no place for us.

But our poets of the late thirties and early forties harped on hatred and not on love. They chose Samar Sen as their mentor who pointed out the useless fertility and death to be the only real things and exclaimed even in his pre-independence prose poems :

Cholera, factories, gonorrhea, chickenpox,  
floods and famines,  
God's own children made in this image<sup>2</sup>.

The very next moment the poet would like to escape this horrible cityscape without any notice :

Far, far away from here is the land of the  
Mahuas. There all the time the stately  
Devadarus shed their mysteries on the roads.  
The breath of the distant seas stirs the quiet  
loneliness of the night. Let the Mohua flowers  
fall on my tired limbs, let their smell cover me<sup>3</sup>.

This somehow baffled a plain reader who definitely wanted to spell this riddle out. How could a self-conscious poet sacrifice his alienation to anonymity ? This was the riddle which remained unsolved in the fifth decade of the present century Bengal. On a deeper probe it is discernible. Poets like Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Arun Mitra and

\* 1. R. R. Das : Studies in Immigration in West Bengal, 1966.

\* 2. Tr. Manish Nandi,

3. Tr. Samar Sen,

Birendra Chattopadhyay fused the personal with their social egos because they could not free themselves from the collective norm presaged by their immediate predecessors. It was, of course, comfortable to wear a socio-political mask at a juncture when the city of Calcutta intrigued the writer with its unprecedented problems of growing population. The masses comprising immigrants and local inhabitants represented a puzzle to the poet who had to address a mixed audience. They tried to explore new possibilities, and thematically speaking, ushered in a new note of urban identity. While doing so, they mumbled a choral burden of boredom and social injustice.

The 50-s, on the other hand, witnessed the introduction of a social, experimental conscience without any ulterior end in view. The representative poets and novelists of this period did not stand under any banner whatsoever. Their one goal was to differ from each other not only in literary ethos but also in the mode of living. Sandipan Chattopadhyay, a very reliable storyteller of this period, has recently made an observation on this with a lot of fun :

I invited some of my relatives and a friend of mine at the first birthday party of my daughter. In puja I went to Mihijam with the family. That very year Pranabendu went to Mussoree with his wife. He travelled in a first class compartment. Utpal Kumar Basu has bought a car. The first Absurd Playwright Dipakkumar Mazumdar met with an accident in California, received several injuries, was heavily compensated by the insurance concern. The insurance had been arranged before. Jyotirmay Datta brought with him an air-conditioning machine from America, only to relinquish his covetable job in the Statesman. Socialism did not come through democracy, he admits, and yet he does not have the guts to suggest an alternative means. This is us<sup>1</sup>.

Here we find a confessional, though amusing, account of the movement launched by the men of literature of the 50-s. Actually

speaking there was no movement at all. These people did not believe in any collective credo—social or political theme. Their artistic intention emerged from their autobiographical identities which did not simply have any connexion with group therapy. No wonder that the extrovert Samar Sen was perplexed to find these poets to be 'not that Catholic', meaning that they only addressed themselves and created inhibitive areas of their own. They might be accused of flinching away from all sort of reformer's zeal that was residue of the last century. On the other hand, their credit lies in shaping the contemporary chaos of the city-lives into a sort of personal pattern.

Thus, the varying shift from the literature of commitment of the 30-s to the non-committal leanings of the 50-s may be shown by way of highlighting the purposes of their respective literary organizations. In the 30-s P.W.A., that is the *Progressive Writers' Association* provided, the urban writers of the city with a forum, or to put it more awkwardly, a debate rostrum, to speak with a pro-marxist and anti-fascist bias. This assembly was adorned by the eminent literary personalities like Sajjad Zahir, Hirankumar Sanyal and Hiren Mukherji. It must be observed that even the pro-Gandhian Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay and the anti Marxist Buddhadeva Bose were drawn to its vortex. *Congress Sahitya Sansad*, in reply, was founded and came to be known as a timid, self-defensive concern with a kind of enlightened motivation. Then in the later 40-s Abu Sayeed Ayub, the noted aesthetician, who once prepared the first valid collection of Modern Bengali Poetry in collaboration with P.W.A.-branded Hiren Mukherji, established *Samakalin Sahitya Kendra* to advocate the intergirty of new writers, challenging the propriety of 'regimentation' in the Marxian camp. There was no such canopy for the typical writer of the 50-s. True, with the advent of the sixties, a group of young castaway writers formed a much-abused organization called the *Hungry Generation*. But their accent was definitely apolitical. They spoke of their own anxieties and cravings. They shunned the code of decency to disturb the establishment. They did not produce a single line worthwhile. But the fervent faith in the lonely person that they intoned in their writings deserved one's attention. **1 Sakti**



Chattopadhyaya one of the top-ranking poets of the 50-s, has pleaded their case with a certain amount of bravado :

Well, these conceited citizens are poets, painters, prosewriters, their age ranging from twenty to thirty. Most of them are social in an anti-social way. Those who have discarded them have done so because they are devoid of any rigidly political or spiritual conviction. They want to draw their attention to the fact that each of them is rushing onwards to a faith of his own.

Thus the mode of faith is no longer politically oriented. This is amply substantiated by the role of the little magazines of Calcutta and its neighbourhood. It is a fact that some daily papers, including a couple of party journals, have been artificially trying to set literary groups on the basis of preordained creeds. Since there is no real urban community press to espouse the cause of the private individuals of the metropolitan area, it has been easier, indeed, for these papers with vested interests to purchase talented writers and form meaningless coteries which have attempted to retard the free urban outlook. Little magazines poured on in protest of the bossing of these 'big' magazines to safeguard the rights and prerogatives of each creative writer. What they have done for the cause of secularization and urbanization is immensely creditable. *Krittibas* (1954) deserves special mention in this connexion. This little magazine, mainly devoted to poetry, has always focussed contrary views side by side with equal justice. It has represented varied types of attitudes—progressive, reactionary, esoteric, exoteric and so on. Here I will cite from two poems in the same number of *Krittibas* to illustrate this ambivalence. The first one is by Arabindo Guha on Ganga in Haridwar :

Refreshing, pellucid waters flow in Haridwar,  
Calcutta loses all its contours.

I feel these waters flow everywhere,  
even in Calcutta.

But you have never heard or seen such white  
symphony of waters in Calcutta.

The next one is by Samsher Anwar bearing a queer title 'This Calcutta and my lonely bed' :

Under the frost-bitten, rain-marred lamp-post  
 I have stood here, deserted, for the last  
     twenty years of my life,  
 Looking slantingly I have been watching the  
     criss-cross game of sorrow.  
 I fear, having stood thus for such a long time  
     one day I will be murdered while asleep.  
 If one calls this fated picture history,  
     then I accept history,  
 The creation and civilization that has grown  
     beyond my existence has no  
     meaning for me at all.  
 If I ever attach any meaning to a truth then it is  
 This Calcutta and my lonely bed.

Despite the fact that both the poets are 'refugees' from East Pakistan, two distinctive poses have been struck in these two poems. One attempts to ease the tension of life in Calcutta by taking a pilgrim's plunge in the refreshing recesses of waters that revitalize a sensible, city-bred person. Another reflects a complete identification of the poet with the city-life with all its insecurities and unrest, pity and horror. This completes the cycle of urbanization in Bengali literature. In fact both the poets meet in that Calcutta which perpetually stands as the point of reference, the gravitational centre of our being and decaying.

The earlier writers were either idealizing this city or visualizing a brighter Calcutta. Buddhadeva Bose exalted the city as 'a drop of honey in the lotus of limitlessness'. Jibanananda Das predicted that if we were sane enough Calcutta would one day be a living image of perfection. That was the romantic or at best the mystic way of eluding the problems of this city of ours. Jyotirindranath Tagore, an alien in his times, projected a mother-image of Calcutta in one of his Bengali versions of French verse. But Calcutta at the penultimate phase of the 20th century is, however, like a step-mother whose hatred has been turned into love by the undernourished members of its family. Or, does this metropolitan city now appear to be a necropolis only to challenge the real integrity of an urban creative writer ?

## DRAMA MOVEMENT IN CALCUTTA, 1944-69

Samik Bandopadhyaya

A PROCESS of deliberate commercialization was the persistent trend in the Bengali theatre from the mid-nineties of the last century till the emergence of Sisirkumar Bhaduri in the twenties of this century. The means that Amarendranath Dutt (1876-1916)<sup>1</sup> adopted to attract larger sections of the community to the theatre included an emphasis on musicals and spectacular shows, the distribution of lucky gifts and sensational publicity. Amarendranath offered higher salaries to actors and actresses tempting them to leave their theatres and join his; he circulated lampoons and cartoons satirising the leading artists in the other companies. Apareshchandra Mukherjee, a contemporary actor, writing his memoirs in 1934, noted a revival of the half-*akhrai* and *tarja* tradition in Amarendranath's publicity campaign<sup>2</sup>. There was a deliberate vulgarization of the attitudes sustaining the theatre. While the Star Theatre audience was expected to remain sober and quiet in the theatre, the Classic theatre audience could be more relaxed; indecent jokes shouted out at the top of one's voice, whistlings, and loud comments were permitted by Amarendranath, even encouraged by him. Apareshchandra commented : "Amarendranath turned the theatre into a place where people came for sheer entertainment. The theatre had so long been bureaucratic; Amarbabu made it democratic". Publicity handouts circulated earlier had been badly printed on coarse paper; Amarendranath circulated leaflets printed on quality paper, with portraits of the star artists. The language used in these leaflets, which incidentally were then the primary means for theatre publicity, abandoned with a vengeance the more staid style cultivated by Girish Chandra Ghosh and Amritlal Bose, the earlier producers. There is reason to believe that Amarendranath's family background had attracted a considerable section of the influential Kayastha community of the city. But his concessions to the vulgar taste for sensationalism, cheap humour,

sentimentalism, facile patriotism and showmanship had alienated the more enlightened and educated sections of the community. While the traditional *Jatra* retained its hold on the more conservative sections of the community, and the educated intelligentsia turned away from the theatre in sheer disgust, the commercial theatre catered to a mixed audience of the fashionable "babus and those who came to the city on short visits.

Sisirkumar's emergence led to a revival of enlightened interest in the theatre. In his earlier productions in the early twenties he utilized the services of some of the finest creative minds of his time; there were others who stood close to him, encouraging him and contributing to introduce him to a larger public; younger writers were drawn towards him<sup>3</sup>. But Sisirkumar's creative career was too shortlived to create an impact on the commercial theatre as a whole. It is difficult to explain his failure either entirely in terms of personal idiosyncrasy or in terms of institutional resistance. Anyway, the new clientele that had discovered something really valuable in the theatre as a form in the creative contributions of Sisirkumar, now moved away to support and sustain the new theatre movement of amateur companies. The educated urban middle class has been the mainstay of this new movement. The audience is still mainly drawn from college and university students, and those in the 20-40 age group with some collegiate education, and some interest in contemporary cultural or literary trends.

The new theatre movement in Calcutta traces its origins from the Indian People's Theatre Association and its theatrical activities in the mid-forties—the first organized socialized initiative in the theatre as opposed to all earlier business initiative or private patronage. The immediate urge behind the IPTA was more social and political than theatrical. The IPTA was originally an affiliate of the Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists Association, organized in 1942. Group signing at public gatherings had been the first creative act of the IPTA. The organized theatrical activity grew out of the humanistic reaction to the man-made famine of 1943 and the sufferings that it caused. The first performances of the play *Navanna*, directed by

Shri Bijan Bhattacharya and Shambhu Mitra, were planned to raise funds for the famine-stricken; the initial production expenses were forwarded by the People's Relief Committee; the loan was repaid from sale proceeds. The IPTA did not have a theatre of its own, but managed to put up about 35 performances at a number of public theatres, and at public gatherings, often to audiences of seven thousand or more. The first liberation of the theatre from the theatre houses was accomplished by the IPTA, for performing outside the theatre house had been undertaken but never relished in the past. The original cast of *Navanna* included at least three journalists, six whole time organizers of a political party, a medical practitioner, and only one with a professional theatre background. The IPTA had direct political affiliations. But the attitude of the creative artists in the IPTA was best expressed by Shri Bijan Bhattacharya in a recent exclusive interview: "We did not propagate the Party viewpoint. The country and its common people were our subjects. Our job was to prepare the soil; it was the job of the political people to sow the seeds. We were preparing and enlightening the people from a broad humanistic point of view". The IPTA had a self-sufficient organization of its own, and did not have to depend on any political party for assistance in its day to day functioning. At a later phase the political involvement of the IPTA created organizational and functional complications. From the fifties there has been a recession on the part of the amateur theatre groups from direct political involvement and a conscious effort to find a more autonomous organizational identity. It does not mean, however, that the groups have given up their political interest. The political interest in choice of themes still remain a dominant interest, and political sympathies still determine the character of quite a number of theatre groups.

The organizational and economic pattern for the amateur companies in the fifties and the sixties was set by the IPTA in the forties. In fact, a large number of these groups had been started by artists who had their first theatrical training and experience in the IPTA. The members of a theatre group contribute towards the expenses in the form of regular subscriptions, and the projects till now remain non-profitable, with a persistent unfavourable economy. The very

few companies which find a professional standing and recognition and can put up performances regularly, do not normally afford to put up more than two shows a month. These companies have to pay an establishment cost in the form of rental for a rehearsal-cum-office, rental for a store room to keep the stage properties, costumes, etc., expenses for light refreshment (normally a few cups of tea) during rehearsals, and the production costs that go into every production<sup>4</sup>. The situation at the moment is that there are only two companies performing twice a month, about ten performing once a month and others more irregularly. The performances are primarily limited to the New Empire Theatre and the Mukta Angan Theatre, which accommodate 600 and 395 respectively. For experiences have showed that the Rabindra Sadan with an accommodation of 1101 and Kala Mandir with an accommodation of 1103 rarely draw full houses; these two theatres are yet to become part of the theatre going schedule of the audience.

A commercial theatre in Calcutta pays a monthly rental varying from Rs. 3,000/- to Rs. 4,000/-, puts up a minimum of sixteen shows a month, can take advantage of the resultant economies in publicity and can advertise its shows more frequently and more regularly; it saves on the rental that the amateur groups have to pay for their rehearsal space or storage facilities, can employ its actors on a whole-time basis and can make them work harder and more; it can rent out space in the theatre building to stalls, and the auditorium on days on which it does not perform, to other organizations, normally at least ten days a month, fetching at least Rs. 6,000/-, often rising to Rs. 10,000/-. The commercial theatre companies and the *Jatra* companies enjoy railway concessions that are denied to the amateur groups. The amateur groups are at an obvious economic and organizational disadvantage when placed beside the commercial theatre companies. The growing prestige and popularity of the amateur theatre movement—often called “the other theatre”—in spite of these obvious handicaps is evidence of the great creative energy generated by the movement.

The impact of the new theatre movement has been felt in recent years upon the commercial theatre and the *Jatra*. Themes and styles

have been indiscriminately lifted from the new theatre. But more important still has been the importation of artists and technicians from the new theatre at professional rates. The *Jatra* and the commercial theatre have consciously tried to exploit the popularity earned so laboriously by these artists of the new theatre movement. There is not a single commercial theatre in the city at the moment which does not have its share of the new theatre artists. A more recent trend has been the importation of the theatre artists into the cinema. The cinema, still an infinitely more popular medium than the theatre, had added its glamour to the prestige of some of these new theatre artists, and the star glamour has in its turn drawn a new audience to the new theatre—an audience primarily interested in the live appearance of the celluloid star. How far the responses and demands of this new audience can influence the quality or organizational shape of the movement can appear clearly only later, provided this new audience stays on with the theatre.

A more interesting feature is the dissemination of the new theatre outside Calcutta<sup>5</sup>. The performances by Calcutta troupes sponsored in mofussil towns by local organizations have become quite common in the last two or three years. A sample survey of the leading companies reveals that out of the 132 shows put up by Nandikar in 1968, 72 were sponsored shows in places like Durgapur, Asansol, Oaria, Kharagpur, Bankura, Chakbazaar, Barasat, Agarpara, Dum Dum, Triveni, Behala, Bansdroni, Kulti, Adra, Konnagar, Singur, Kandi, Howrah, Batanagar, Bonhooghly, Dhanbad, Baidyabati, Uttarpara, Barrackpore. The sponsors included nine College Students' Unions; the rest were local clubs and recreation clubs in the industrial centres. In 1967 Nandikar put up 27 shows on their own, and 43 sponsored shows; the figures for 1964, '65, '66 are 36 and 21, 46 and 81, 38 and 44 respectively. Another troupe, Nakshatra, in 1968 has performed in Chandnnagar, Bali, Chittaranjan, Asansol, Baruipur and Malda. Bohurupee has performed at Barasat, Kanchrapara, Dum Dum and Santragachi in 1968, and at Uttarpara, Durgapur, Baidyabati and Dhanbad in 1969. Sponsors for the Bohurupee shows included clubs, libraries, and at least one Kalipuja committee. The plays staged by these companies have often been adaptations of foreign classics

or stylized and symbolic treatments exploiting the more complex modes of theatrical expression. The same productions have appealed to the more select audience in Calcutta and the more assorted audience at any of these centres. The question of the growth of a common urban consciousness may be explored as well as the possibility of different levels of responses.

The heterogeneous composition of the amateur companies is a peculiarity not so noticeable in amateur theatricals abroad. Of the 33 members of Bohurupee, 7 are accountants, 11 are clerks or stenographers or typists, 1 a jute mill foreman, 2 publicity executives, 2 students, 1 medical representative, 1 Calcutta Corporation assessment inspector, 1 Customs Inspector, 1 executive officer, 1 university lecturer and research worker. Of the 20 members of Nakshatra, 5 are clerks, 2 school teachers, 1 college lecturer, 1 medical representative, 2 engineers, 1 freelance radio mechanic, 1 medical student, 1 radio announcer, 1 cold storage worker, 1 bank executive, 1 small businessman, 1 technical assistant, and 1 press and publications expert. Of the 26 members of Nandikar in 1968, 3 were college lecturers, 1 journalist, 1 government gazetted officer, 3 clerks, 1 postal peon, 2 school teachers, 1 shopkeeper, 1 stores assistant, 2 technicians, 1 tailor, 1 sales representative, and 4 unemployed. With the newly realized importance of the director in the new theatre, some of the directors have found it difficult to serve their form as part time workers in the field, and have chosen to give up their jobs and become freelancers, making a precarious living out of film and radio assignment and journalism; a few out of commercial art.

A new category of semiprofessional actresses are associated with the amateur theatre movement. They had been originally drawn towards the movement from economic necessities. With little education and considerable acting talent a semi-professional actress associated herself with a particular amateur company, which pays her a small allowance per show. She is free to supplement this rather uncertain income from participation in office club theatricals. Her association with a successful amateur company serves as an introduction. But some of these actresses are gradually coming to make a



more enlightened identification with the new movement, training themselves up emotionally and intellectually.

In the last few years amateur troupes from Calcutta have performed outside the State. The trend has started in 1954 with Bohurupee performances in New Delhi. In 1968-69, Bohurupee has performed at New Delhi, Allahabad, and Hyderabad; Nandikar at New Delhi, Bombay, Allahabad and Patna; Nakshatra at New Delhi. The audiences have included a considerable section of theatre workers working in the amateur Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Telugu theatres. Common stylistic and thematic elements are now shared by the new theatre movement in New Delhi and Bombay, where the impact is still confined to a much smaller sphere in spite of far better and more substantial support from the establishment and especially the Press. The Hindi theatre in Calcutta has come to have in the last two years very definite stylistic and thematic affiliations with the Bengali new theatre movement, while it still faces the larger problem of finding a big enough audience prepared to go along with its experiments. Anamika, the major Hindi theatre group, facing this problem, has extended its membership beyond its active group of artists. With a membership of 950, it has been able to involve at least emotionally a considerable section of the audience in its activities. The Anamika Kala Sangam, a sister organization, acting as an impresario unit, has organized performances in Calcutta by other experimental theatre groups in different parts of the country, helping to mould taste in Calcutta. A striking feature of Anamika is the number of linguistic groups it accommodates. Two of the three major roles in an important Anamika production are acted by a Bengali and a Bengali actress; a Gujarati businessman settled in Calcutta is one of their major dramatists and directors; an Uttarpradeshi from Benaras translates important Bengali plays for the troupe, has dramatized Hindi novels for the troupe, and has directed productions; a Marwari solicitor is their major director and actor; some of the major female roles have been handled by a Bihari student. Anamika has maintained on its own initiative a regular and close contact with Bengali theatre workers; it has produced important Bengali plays in Hindi translation even before they have been produced in the original<sup>6</sup>.

In spite of the considerable creative effort that has gone into the drama movement in Calcutta, it still caters to a minority audience, while the majority is interested in films or the commercial theatre or even in the urban *Jatra*, which has, thanks to support from the popular press and certain stylistic and thematic modifications, regained a position in the city. One can trace a vicious circle in the limited scope for regular performances and inadequate publicity, a reliance on the minority, a choice of minority or elite themes, and the resultant alienation of the general playgoing public. State, municipal or public support has not been as forthcoming as elsewhere. Calcutta, in spite of its long theatrical traditions, is still denied a subsidized theatre, a phenomenon which is all too common in any enlightened city anywhere in the world. Subsidized theatres elsewhere in the world have been sponsored by the State, by the local councils or industry. In Calcutta all the three sources have been indifferent to the theatre movement. A number of the amateur theatre troupes have joined together to raise funds to have a theatre of their own and have been able to put up a number of performances with the best artists of all these troupes pooled together, artists in other fields have appealed for funds for this theatre.

A theatre for the new theatre movement may affect the audience at large and change it in quantitative and qualitative terms. The new theatre may be able to discover a centre from which communication becomes wider and easier, a stylistic form or a theatrical language which would be able to touch a larger audience. Regular exposure to the new theatre would train up an audience more used to and familiar with the new idioms of this theatre.

#### Notes

1. Amarendranath belonged to the Duttas of Chorebagan and was the younger brother of Hirendranath Dutta, the renowned Vedantist.

2. Apareshechandra Mukhopadhyay, in *Rangaalaya Trish Batsar* (Thirty Years in the Theatre) 1934, quotes one of these leaflets: "A tantalizing thrilling affairs! Astounded playgoers! Humanity itself rocking to and fro with the action of the play! A galaxy of beautiful women! Songs and dances galore! For a swim in a sixteen year old's tantalizing sea of charms!" Ramapati Dutt, *Rangaalaya Amarendranath* (Amarendranath in the Theatre) 1942, quotes another leaflet: "We do not sing ourselves our own victory. The fact of our tickets even upto Four<sup>th</sup> Rupee ones

being entirely disposed of long before 8 P.M. on both the first and second nights indicates our position. All the leading Actors and Actresses are Classic's own; Hence the success ! The others—they simply beat the air—because a lame cannot jump, a blind cannot paint, a dumb cannot sing, never mind if he tries his best"—(the original English retained).

3. Younger writers who have recorded their admiration of Sisirkumar in the twenties include Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay and Achintyakumar Sengupta.

4. The exact breakup of costs and income for a single performance by an average theatre company can be gathered from estimates taken from two of the leading groups. The two groups are designated here as A and B. According to Group A, a single show at the New Empire Theatre costs roughly a minimum of Rs. 1,850 (including Rs. 800/- as house rent for a single show, Rs. 500/- for newspaper publicity and Rs. 350/- for costs for conveyance, lights, electricity, refreshments etc ), where a full house given a gross income of something round about Rs. 2,800/-, a show at the Mukta Aangan Theatre costs approximately Rs. 1,085/- (including a house rent of Rs. 235 and the other costs remaining the same), where a full house valuation amounts to Rs. 1,200/-. A show at the Rabindra Sadan or the Kala Mandir costs Rs. 1,850 (including a house rent of Rs. 1,000/- and the other costs remaining the same), where a full house given a gross income of Rs. 4,500/-. According to Group B, a show at New Empire costs Rs. 1,681/- (including Rs. 600/- as house rent, Rs. 92/- for the shifters, Rs. 300/- for publicity, Rs. 200/- for conveyance, Rs. 50/- for lights, Rs. 30/- for dresses, Rs. 32/- for stage properties, Rs. 32/- for makeup, Rs. 90/- for refreshments, Rs. 40/- for the handcars that take the accessories to the house, Rs. 50/- for the musicians, Rs. 15/- for requisitions and Rs. 150/- for the semi-professional actresses), while a full house valuation amounts to Rs. 2,400/-, a show at Kala Mandir costs Rs. 1,835/-, where the full house valuation is Rs. 3,500/-, a show at Mukta Angan costs Rs. 1,184, where a full house gives a gross income of Rs. 1,200/-.

5. A long dialogue with theatre enthusiasts in Chittaranjan, a major industrial centre, revealed that a considerable section of the white collar workers were interested in the new theatre movement in Calcutta; they produced plays that were being produced by the Calcutta troupes, very often adopting original productional approaches; they brought in troupes from Calcutta and sponsored their shows in Chittaranjan; they organized seminars and symposia with theatre workers and critics from Calcutta as participants. Chittaranjan has about seven theatre troupes that put up about six shows a year. The two railway towns, sponsor two drama competitions every year, allowing these troupes to produce plays for the competition and allow the prize winners to perform twice more free of costs at the Institute halls. Chittaranjan has an open air theatre which is available at very low rent to these troupes. The theatre movement in Chittaranjan is closely affiliated to the movement in Calcutta.

6. If I am allowed to make a personal assessment strictly on critical terms, I should like to assert that from what I have seen of the other major Hindi troupes from New Delhi, Ananika's productions are productionally superior to theirs. Badal Sarkar's play *Evam Indrajit*, which is essentially about the desires and frustrations of the Calcutta middle class, has proved to be one of the most popular plays tried out by the leading experimental troupes in Delhi and Bombay and elsewhere in the Hindi

translation. The first artistically significant production of this play came from Anamika. Three other plays by Badal Sirkar have been produced in Hindi in Calcutta, New Delhi and Bombay and elsewhere; two of these are yet to be produced in the original. It is unfortunate that not a single significant Hindi play has yet been produced in Bengali, though some of these have already been translated in to Bengali and remain an unpublished scripts; one of these has been translated by a well known Bengali director and another by an Anamika playwright-director.

# COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS AND SCULPTORS IN CALCUTTA

**Mohim Roodro**

CONSIDERING the fact that nobody cares for art in Calcutta, it is surprising the artists carry on. The artists carry on because they find that art is a thing that they have to go on with, they have no choice. They carry on against complete indifference from the society, because art is part of their systems as breathing is. But Calcutta does not care.

## APPRECIATION AND BUYERS

Two major things are expected before one can expect art to thrive : art appreciation in general, and a buying community. Neither exists in Calcutta.

Calcutta has a large educated Bengali middle class population which is perfectly capable of appreciating art. My experience is that it is eager and willing to appreciate even the most experimental and new in art. But it lies in a potential state. These people may not be in a position to be buyers or patrons of art. But their awareness and keen participation is desperately needed to give the Calcutta artists that enlivening factor that brings maturity in art.

The reasons for this potential capacity for appreciation lying fallow are to be found in our faulty education and economic systems. Our education system, even if it rams down the gullet of the young ones certain doses of poetry and literature, does not take any serious interest in art. The average man, coming out of the school or college, feels somewhat familiar with the world of literature. He may even develop a need for it in his life. But nothing of the kind happens to him regarding art.

The economic factor needs hardly any explanation. The problem of existing from one day to another is enough preoccupation to keep

him detached from the world of art. And the transport system in the city is so bad that to carry oneself from one quarter to another is as painful as punishment.

The press could have bridged the gap considerably. The press in Calcutta is apathetic towards art. The average man never gets to know of exhibitions when they are on. The press does not report on them, and in nearly all the newspapers, the review comes out after many days are gone or even after the show is over. The reader is hardly benefitted, for when he reads about a show there is no possibility of seeing it. Appreciation of art does not grow from reading the reviews in the newspapers if the reader cannot see the actual paintings.

As far as buying of art is concerned, Calcutta has practically none of it. The only buyers are more or less the foreigners, the majority of whom are consulate personnel. An art that primarily depends on foreign passers by and tourists is bound to develop sicknesses. It becomes export oriented. Art is not a product of manufacture; genuine art is that which springs from within the artist and from within the society and landscape he lives in and from within the nature and history of that society. It cannot be created according to what may or may not please the consulates and tourists. Of course there are always one or two individuals amongst them who possess authentic taste for art, but by and large these people buy art to match the curtains and to be generous.

Not denying the monstrous poverty that opens its jaws across this teeming and dense city, it is also a fact that enough people have enough money here to support many times the number of artists that live in Calcutta. But Calcutta well off people, the upper middle class and the rich people, simply do not feel the need for art. A minor party with a few friends may cost them five hundred rupees in one evening, but to spend even one hundred rupees on a water colour appears to them as money wasted.

A well-off middle class person will buy saris, cushion covers, curtains, terylene outfits more and more as and when he feels more

and more money in his hands, but to by a painting for the wall is remote from his imagination. Often the artist is told that his prices are too high. But, it is our experience that art is not bought not because the prices are high, but because nobody thinks it worth buying. We have experimented by bringing down prices to great lows.

Art cannot be priced in the usual demand-supply cost of production-profit ratio. It will always remain to a degree arbitrary. Not all artists produce at the same rate. Some are prolific, some go slow. If there was a demand that was genuine and constant, most of the prolific artists will bring down the prices, for the demand will guarantee him sustenance.

True place for art is the home of the person who realizes that an art work is an object to communicate with.

However, neither kind of buyers exist in Calcutta.

#### GOVERNMENT ROLE

The government has a big role to play in the sustenance of art. For instance, art should be not just for the homes of those who can afford to possess it. Art should be where people gather. Public buildings should have murals on the walls, paintings, reliefs and carvings on the outside,—sculpture placed rightly. The Central Government has some such interest. It thus feeds some Delhi artists. But, even our new Government (the United Front) has no care for arts at all. For instance monuments of British rulers are being replaced with statues of famous Indians. Each of those replacements cost one to one and a half lakhs of rupees. Just this situation could have given the Government an opportunity to bring enthusiasm in the lives of the artists by announcing and asking for suggestions from all artists of Bengal. From all those submitted, a panel of judges could select the right ones. An exhibition could be held of all the ones that would be submitted. Thus, deserving artists would get chances to do some major works and earn some money. But the United Front prefers to follow the footsteps of its predecessors in many ways. None of these works are being announced and no invitation to all artists,

Thus the Government shows total indifference. The private sector is equally blind. Those who are building the large multistoried buildings that are going up all around in the city could easily have considered murals or sculptural decorations as part of the projects. The additional cost would be a fraction of a fraction of their total outlays. It is not money that has stopped them but lack of ideas, vision and taste.

Alas, even the very Central Government which put two large sculptures at the entrance of the Reserve Bank of India in Delhi did not bother to spend a paise on art in its mammoth buildings in Calcutta.

#### NO COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

Art of course is treated as a commercial product practically everywhere in the world. The main feeders of artists in the West, for instance, are the commercial galleries owned by the art dealers. The art dealing game is quite a racket, but as yet, the artist really can only sell because the art galleries promote and deal with his works. The art dealers are specialists in salesmanship, and they have a role to play. It is much better than artists having to turn their own salesman. Calcutta has no art dealers. For a short while Gallery Chemould made a half hearted effort, but did not pursue. Kumar Galleries of Delhi maintained a branch inside the Grand Hotel for a time, but rolled it up some time ago. Two or three minor efforts were made by some others, to no effect. It can be said that not much real effort has been made in art dealing in Calcutta.

#### CALCUTTA ARTISTS AND OTHER INTELLECTUALS

Wherever art movement has been alive and thrusting, one notices that a close relationship existed between the artists and other intellectuals. Poets, writers, thinkers, philosophers and people in other creative fields all mingled together a lot, and in the process enriched each other a good deal. Intellectuals in Calcutta are not interested in art. It is a very uncommon event when one of them visits an exhibition.



Amongst the artists, depending on individual temperament, some read poetry, some literature, some go to see plays and some others take interest in the art of the cinema. But, there are amongst writers and poets of Calcutta individuals who consider their form of expression as the supreme height of creativity and even viewing art a relative misuse of time. Everything I have said shows that everything is against the artist. So, how do the artists exist in Calcutta ?

There are two art colleges, the Government College of Art and Craft and the Indian College of Art. Each year these two institutions belch out a certain number of art graduates.

Where do they go ?

Some teach in the two art colleges. But not many can be absorbed there after all. And it is not common that a teacher just leaves his job. He either retires or dies in harness. Vacancies thus are only far and few between. Others take up teaching posts in secondary and primary schools. Abysmally paid, most of them have to carry out many more duties than just teaching art. Another outlet is employment in the advertising agencies. There are only a few agencies in Calcutta, and vacancies there are not a matter of regular happening either. The rest find themselves in any odd job they can get hold of. A lot give up art.

#### NO PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS

Excepting veteran Jamini Roy, to our knowledge, there is not one instance of an artist in Calcutta who has actually succeeded in making a living out of painting. Jamini Roy, after his years of poverty, has to-day made good. Atul Bose, apart from the short periods of teachings, survived his free lance style, but not in the way he would have wished to, as a creative artist, but as a portrait painter. Thus, in the strictest sense of the word, there are no professional artists in Calcutta, but for Jamini Roy.

#### GROUPS

Artists in Calcutta form into groups now and then but disintegrate again. It does not seem to be in the Bengali character to function in groups. But two such groups have actually survived. The

Society of Contemporary Artists was formed in 1960 and is still going strong. This is quite an achievement. Most groups that are founded come together for financial and practical reasons, not ideological. Another group that was founded in 1963, and in spite of a period of moribund state has revived itself, is Calcutta Painters. There was a group named Young Artists Society, but nobody hears of them anymore. Another group appeared and disappeared, it was called The Art Council. I believe another group named The Canvas group is still existing, although not much is seen or heard about it.

As there are no promoters or patrons, the artists have to do all to show their works to the public. Singly, the expenses come too high for many. In a group the cost can be shared. There is another big advantage. A group draws greater attention from the public as well as the press. Also, a registered group, after 3 years of existence, can apply for a Lalit Kala Grant, which is given provided the group can satisfy the Akademi about certain stipulations. Such a grant is a great aid. The Society of Contemporary Artists is one of the beneficiaries,—and thus they can to-day hold exhibitions in Calcutta and outside without much worry about cash.

#### EXHIBITING FACILITIES

Exhibiting facilities for the artists in Calcutta are pathetic. The Academy of Fine Arts on Cathedral Road has rooms that can be rented, but the lighting and arrangements of the rooms are far from satisfactory. The Calcutta Information Centre has a room that can be hired for this purpose,—but not only that the room has no arrangements to hang pictures properly, its cost is fabulously high for the average artist, Rs. 260/- per week. The Birla Academy on Southern Avenue has built a very beautiful gallery to be hired out, but it suffers from the handicap that it is a bit out of the way, and is badly served by public transport system.

Essentially, the larger number of artists in Calcutta remain isolated from each other. There are no meeting points. There are two tea shops where some of them meet, fairly regularly, Sutripti in South Calcutta and New York Soda Fountain on Lenin Sarani.

## SCULPTORS

The odds are even greater against the sculptors. Sculpture needs greater investment. Transportation is a hard and expensive job. As a result there are indeed only a handful of sculptors in Calcutta. And excepting veteran Debiprosad Roychowdhury, who is busy with large Central Government orders, there is not one sculptor who earns enough to live on sculpture. Even the ardent and wellknown Sarbari Roychowdhury, who was independent until a few months ago, has taken up teaching. As he has not taken up for money's sake,—he may be counted as the only sculptor who survived on sculpture in Calcutta, but how ! The hardships that this sculptor had to undergo was only matched by his zeal for art.

## TRENDS

Art had died a temporary death in India after the Moghuls. Then much later, during the British days, three art schools were established, in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. And the method of teaching was as in the West. A new, foreign method was imposed upon and the students learnt to imitate the nineteenth century western school of painting.

The Bengal school, founded by Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagores, made bold attempts so shake off this very alien form. They tried to discover a new the Indian traditional methods,—and in the process, through research into Persian, Chinese and Japanese styles, a new form evolved. Abanindranath had a number of disciples who in turn spread around the country and influenced others. In this way, the Bengal school played a noticeable part in the recent history of art in India. But otherwise, it has lost its hold progressively due to its sentimental, wishywashy and dreamland qualities. In order to discover India in art form, they took resort to depicting legends and historical events,—but failed to reproduce the reality of the day. The nationalistic trends in politics emphasized this school's role. It was a patriotic act, per se, to reject the western oil tradition and establish a neo-Oriental style. Yet, in a sense, it was fighting a losing battle against the onrush of the academic western style of painting.

The art schools put their biases towards the oil painting in the western style and the so-called "Indian painting" sections remained the lesser favoured departments.

But the academic western style that had percolated down to here was decidedly of a very dead nature. It was imitative, and imitation in art is tantamount to sin. It is doomed to failure and a second rate quality. A shake up was necessary. Calcutta group, founded in 1940, did it. Calcutta group decided to formulate, through individual and separate efforts, a new approach. Its members realized that the West had come for good, but banal imitation was worse than useless. They tried to bend the Western approach to accommodate Eastern spirit. And thus, the beginning of modern movement in art in India began in Calcutta.

It was the war that brought the catalysts. Many English and American educated people came conscripted in the army to Calcutta. It was in the contact with these people that the Calcutta group artists found the yeast. They discussed with these visitors, and saw books and reproduction of paintings and sculpture by modern artists of the West. But modern art took time to catch on. It was having a tough uphill task. Both, the nationally spirited 'Indian Painting' and academic style Western Painting held their grounds strongly. And so, the Academy of Fine Arts' Annual Exhibitions showed all the three trends,—the minority still being the samples of the modern school.

Gradually, but decidedly, the scales were changing their balance, and if one had to merely study the annual shows of the Academy of Fine Arts, one noticed that modernistic works were on the increase. The resistance from the "Indian School" remained prominent, but the Academic western style took a steep plunge downwards. Going by the latest annual show, it has died its death. Excepting a small number of "Indian style" paintings, the entire show was of modern art.

Modern art originated in the West. But, it has to-day spread throughout the entire world excepting the Communist countries, where it is banned. Its waves have reached and flooded our country

too. Art has now developed a form very international. Nevertheless, local flavours, some spiritual differences between arts produced in different cultures, are expected. Albeit modern, it should contain the story, the emotions, the feelings of India. Most intelligent artists are aware of this legitimate demand and they are working towards that way. But, as such a process is slow to develop, spectacular Indianization is not noticeable in the Calcutta field.

There are some, although they are very few and have made no mark as yet, who believes in the very important role of politics in art, that art should reflect and depict the struggle of the people against their oppressors. These artists are aligned with left organizations. But because they are few and have not yet come out into open activity, one can say that there is no political polarization of any kind in the art field as yet.

#### STATISTICS

To find a table of accurate or even approximate figures of how many artists there are in Calcutta and what they are doing is absolutely beyond my capacity,—it will be the job of a thorough-going sociologist who can devote time and energy in plenty. My enquiries with artists here and there has led me to conclude that nobody has any idea as to how many artists there are in Calcutta.

The Government College of Art and Craft was found in 1864. The Indian College of Art and Draughtsmanship in 1893. Through all these years they have been manufacturing artists. Each year around 100 students pass out from these two colleges.

If a total could be worked out of the students graduating from these two institutions over all these years,—minus those who have gone away to other parts of India,—minus those who have given up art—minus those who have died, add those who are self-taught, and then an idea may be got of the possible number of artists in Calcutta.

#### CONCLUSION

The conditions in Calcutta are very against the artist. He has no buyers, no patronage, the state does not care, public bodies or

private enterprise are apathetic; his employment prospects are low, and when employed, more often than not he is badly paid; when he paints, he has not easy exhibiting facilities,—when he exhibits, he does not find an appreciative audience; the press does not care, the journals are not interested. 'A total anti-situation.

Yet artists live in Calcutta. Giant I.C.I. has not been able to eradicate cockroaches,—giant Calcutta indifference has not been able to stamp out the artists. Artists are like the cockroaches, indestructible,—excepting, I as an artist, prefer to think that we are much nicer than the cockroaches. An artist has no choice. He discovers himself an artist, and that is that. But what I think is surprising that considering the heavy odds against him, a number of good works are still being produced.

I do not wish my subjective involvement, I myself being a practicing painter, to make me so romantic and blind as to say that the general standard is very high. I am afraid it is not so. For this, I do not make the artists solely responsible,—this is inevitable. Such a negative atmosphere can only give very little scope for the artist to flex his muscles and find true expression. And, it is a matter of pride that in spite the general apathy towards the artists,—so many have retained their integrity—and are painting whatever little they can.

Nevertheless, when sometimes finger is pointed at the artists and they are told that their works are divorced from the reality of their surroundings, that their works do not reflect the sentiment and feelings and moods of the changing situation in the country, I am afraid, I have to admit that the accusation contains some truth. "Calcutta", the accusers say, "is not the place for sweet dreams,—it is here where the artist confronts harsh reality. Why does not his works reflect it?"

I place it to the sociologists again for research on this score, on the alienation of the artist from his people. I, however, would like to add that many of the really talented artists are unconsciously reflecting the tensions of the atmosphere, although they may not be identified with any specific movement,

I end my paper with the full assertion that I believe that there is tremendous talent in Calcutta. It would burst out into efflorescence under kinder conditions. I believe that the Calcutta educated middle class public, once it is given the chance to see works of art, will fully reciprocate with enthusiasm and eagerness. It has far too few opportunities to see art at all. Why blame it ?

And the rich people are beyond redemption.

## COMMUNITY OF DANCERS IN CALCUTTA .

Manjusri (Chaki) Sircar .

ONLY fifty years ago community of dancers in Calcutta meant a small group of dancers and their accompanying musicians and teachers who earned their living by entertaining so-called rich zaminders. The 'Jalsas' were all male parties comprising of well-to-do people who were not connoisseurs of dance. The quality of the patrons had an inescapable degrading effect and their dancing concentrated more on '*Shringara*' with the exclusion of other '*rasas*'. Society looked down upon these dancers, who in spite of these severe limitation in the pattern of patronage somehow managed to keep the flickering flames of this noble art still burning.

Rabindranath Tagore for the first time recognized the aesthetic value of dance for modern citizen of India and introduced it as a subject in his institution at Santiniketan. It was not an easy task for him to make dancing as a worthy pursuit among the *Bhadralok* class. He faced severe criticism and protest from puritan Bramho-Samajists as well as English educated Hindus. In spite of this resistance the poet made amazing progress during his life-time.

Around 1917, Tagore brought a Manipuri dance Guru to Santiniketan to train the students and from then onward invited teachers of Kathakali and Kathak from the South to Santiniketan. He even introduced Ceylonese Kandiyani dancing, Javanese dance styles and made mild experiments with Western ballet forms with the help of a Russian ballet dancer. In his dance compositions he also utilized several folk dance motifs as well. In course of time he was able to create an environment in Bengal in which dancing as an art became respectable although some social resistance continued. Apart from playing the pioneering role of making dance a socially respectable art Tagore's contributions will be gratefully remembered for his creative experiments with dance forms. His "dance-dramas" (*Nritya-Natyas*)



made a powerful impact on the middle class Bengali mind and a cultural movement was generated in which it became quite common for schools, colleges and clubs to organize Tagore's dance dramas.

Men and women from middle class society became alive to the importance of dance as a new field of accomplishment. The patronage gradually shifted from the rich-class to the middle-class.

In the meantime Udayshankar's international fame brought a new prestige for the professional dancers in India and for the traditional Indian dance forms. Although Shankar did not start dancing in Calcutta, he attracted several young men of Bengal to go to his centre in Almora and several of them chose Calcutta for their career in later years. A new generation of professional dancers appeared on Calcutta stages around the middle of the third decade of this century. For the first time dance was recognized as an independent performing art on the modern stage. In the thirties we found several Bengalee dancers making an impact on the dancing world. Mani Bardhan, Maharaja Bose and Pralhad Das belonged to this group. During this period Kathak dancers Jamunaprasad and Ramnarayan Misra started teaching in Calcutta. In the beginning Kathak was the dominant style in the music-cum-dance schools of Calcutta. But within a few years Guru Gopal Pillai of Kerala came to teach Kathakali and Guru Brajabasi Sing came to teach Manipuri. The group of young dancers influenced by Shankar's dynamic way of presentation experimented with more creative dancing.

During the middle of the forties the leftist inspired Indian Peoples' Theatre movement gained momentum and the emphasis of this movement was to combine folk forms with classical styles and the themes concentrated on urgent social problems. I.P.T.A.'s cultural movement brought to the forefront several gifted and creative dancers. Quite a few of them continued their creative life in Calcutta in later periods. Among them we find outstanding dancers like Shanti Bardhan who staged dance-dramas like 'Discovery of India' and 'Panchatantra'. From the beginning of the forties 'All Bengal Music Conference' gave distinct recognition of dance in the world of music. Organizers like Manmatha Babu, Bhupen Babu, Lala Babu, Kishroe

Shing Nahar, Kishenchand Baral and impresario like late Haren Ghose contributed a great deal toward establishment of a professional field for the dancers. But still Tagore's overall inspiration was the dominant mode for the middle-class Bengali society specially in non-professional middleclass homes. One would like to know the condition of dancers and dancing in Calcutta in the two post-independence decades: how Calcutta dancers are carrying forward the initial creative impulse of Tagore, Shankar and I.P.T.A. movement—what new areas of expression are they exploring—what incentives the local environment is providing them and what frustrations they are facing in this city of Calcutta.

One change which the two decades have brought about is the stratification and segmentation of dance styles, whereas in the pioneer movements *synthesis* was the guiding spirit. At present stratification into distinct styles seems to challenge the earlier elan. One group is strictly devoted to classical styles like Manipuri, Kathak, Kathakali and Bharatnatyam. But still these dancers have limited audience. Large music conferences offer some opportunities to these classical performers but still dance is a side programme in such conferences. In recent years we feel a growing tendency towards specialization in terms of distinct forms. Kathak which held the major position in the classical field is gradually yielding ground to Bharatnatyam. Nritya-Bharati dance college run by Pralhad Das since 1945 introduced classical dance teachers like Maruthappa Pillai in Bharatnatyam, Guru Krishna Nair Guru of Kathakali, Guru Atamba Shing of Manipuri and Indrakumar Pattanayaka in Orissi for the first time to the Calcutta students. Recently Rabindra-Bharati University and Uday Shankar Culture Centre have brought together several dance teachers from beyond the borders of Bengal. Many students after completing their training have started teaching in the local schools. They have made several classical styles, once rare to the Bengalee students, available to the average students.

The other group of dancers although starting from strong classical background in their training are less conservative in attitudes towards rigidity of techniques. They are willing to blend various classical

forms into a creative synthesis. Here the great divide between the Northern and the Southern styles, which is so marked in the field of music is often crossed and we experience a unique harmony embracing various schools. This speciality of the group of modern dancers of Calcutta immediately attracts attention. From the beginning several of these dancers were influenced by Tagore's conception of blending several styles and Uday Shankar's dynamic presentation. Though Tagore did not establish any high professional standard of dancing during his life time, his dance-dramas demand intellectual maturity and fine skill in dance and drama techniques. During his time the dance drama forms were still in the budding stage. But he broke the tradition of so-called 'Hindu' dance and enlarged the theme of dance beyond Shiva-Krishna mythological themes. He raised fundamental moral issues about untouchability in 'Chandalika' on the basis of the Jataka story, criticized the age-old rigidities of traditional society in Tasher Desh and gave new dimensions to several ancient festivals like 'Varshamangal', 'Vasantotsava' etc. The rigidity of stylistic approach of the traditional schools of dancing did not satisfy his creative mind. Although he himself was not a dancer, in choreographing the dances with the help of Gurus he demanded a relatively free quality in movement. His own philosophy of dance could be described in his own words : "There is no bounds to the depth or to the expression of any art which like dancing is the expression of the life's urge. We must never shut it within the bounds of a stagnant ideal, nor define it as either Indian or Oriental or occidental for such finality only robs it of life's privilege which is freedom". He not only provided a respectable atmosphere for the dancer but also opened a new panorama for the inspired creative dancer.

Uday Shankar achieved a high level of artistic excellence in blending several styles into his own. He established a high professional standard in creative dancing. This influenced the Calcutta dance-world.

From both of these persons, a great poet and a great dancer, Calcutta dancers have drawn their inspiration for working on a much wider perspective in comparison to the dancers of the other cities in India who are still mostly devoted to one traditional school or the other.

Creative dance performances specially the dances choreographed on Tagore's songs and poems have guaranteed audience in Calcutta. Due to this popularity certain problems have arisen. Big crowd of amateur performers have grown who are often misunderstood as representatives of this style. Many men and women without proper training appeared on Calcutta stages. Several institutions and organizers grabbed this opportunity of earning easy money by these unpaid or poorly paid performers. As a result the style suffered quite a bit in public estimation. To interpret Tagore's songs and poems a dancer not only needs skill in technique but also a deep literary sense to feel the depth and subtlety of the subject. The danger comes from the more conservative classical-trained dancers too. Often a kind of crudity in showing off skill, a common feature among Kathak and Bharatnatyam dancers, kills the aesthetic essence of a dance performance. In spite of these twin difficulties, continuous efforts on the part of the inspired and diligent creative dancers, has made it possible to a great extent in choreographing Tagore's songs and poems brilliantly. On many occasions Calcutta has experienced such good performances, especially those guided by the renowned exponent of Tagore's songs Debabrata Biswas.

But a creative dancer often has to face the conservative attitude of some critics who sling discouraging remarks like "not after Tagore school of dance". Unfortunately they have very little knowledge of Tagore's own conception of dancing. Is there any such thing as Tagore's school of dancing? Again, one cannot accept the experimental phase of dance of Tagore's time as a standard style in specific choreographic order. It will be better to discard the idea of naming it as a school of dance and rather call it as *a contemporary style inspired by Tagore*.

In recent years the Calcutta Youth Choir has shown considerable talent in bringing the folk dances and songs in a lively and fine artistic way on the Calcutta stages. "Drums of India" are not mere repetitions of tradition but a new approach of performance—making the folk art a performing art on modern stage. Contemporary problems like flood, famine and the world problems like white imperialism in Africa

and focusing on man's strife for beauty and a better world find expression in some of the creative dance compositions. Here one could remember the memorable dance demonstration of Sukanta Bhattacharya's poem 'Runner' by Shambhu Bhattacharya.

Even in the performances of Tagore-inspired style there has been great deal of change in the manner of presentation. Many dancers of this group do not restrict themselves only to Tagore's songs. There are blending of several classical traditional dances to express various themes such as a description of spring in Gita Govinda in Orissi or Rains of Vidyapati's lyrics in Manipuri along with Tagore's poetic music of rain and spring. Certainly, Tagore's poetry widens the field. The effort is most effective. One enjoys the utilization of classic as a form of modern expression. Such performances are usually rich and vibrant with classical boldness and fine sensitivity and subtlety of Tagore's music. Recently a group in Calcutta is working on two new dance-dramas 'Chirantan' and 'Idaning'. The former expresses the eternal truth in the conception of the Upanisads while the latter deals with the contemporary society—the transitional role of women in middle class Calcutta society.

There is a growing tendency of interest in original folk dances. Recently Purulia's Chou dance has made a great stir among Calcutta dance lovers.

Despite this growing interest and popularity the dancers suffer from frustration and economic reason is the chief cause. Since 1947, after the partition of Bengal, the number of dancers with some professional training have grown tremendously. The opportunities fail to keep pace with the growth in number. Most of the dancers come from the average middle class families. Male performers are few but almost all the teachers of dance are male. But unfortunately the teachers are poorly paid. It is a tragedy for Calcutta that even the famous Guru of Kathakali, Gopal Pillai could not be properly provided for. A male dancer has to face tremendous economic pressure whereas a woman dancer can afford to take dancing as a semi-profession and stands a better chance as a performing artist while her male counterpart has to lean on tuition as his sole prop for sustenance.

In the beginning of the new era of dance, the film industry provided a new economic field. We can recall the names of dancers like Sadhana Bose, Leela Desai, Shiela Halder who became famous through the cinema screen. During later period the producers developed an unhealthy commercial attitude and exploited the dancers as vulgar exhibitionists. Bengali film failed to provide any prospect for the fine dancers. Only recently in Satyajit Ray's "Gupi Gain Bagha Bain" one finds a fine sense of imagination in using dance movements on screen. Udayshankar is working on "Shankarscope"—a dance fantasy—using various media on the screen and on the stage. We can expect more from dance if the dancer can work through different modern media specially through one like cinema screen.

Proper communication and understanding between artists and critics is essential for the growth of an art. Such communication and understanding exists in the field of art and literature. But dance reviews in Calcutta newspapers often seem to be funny and frivolous. In contrast to music, Calcutta does not yet have an authentic cadre of dance critics. Healthy and constructive criticism demands thorough knowledge of the subject and intimate understanding of the technical problems of the performer. Such critics of dance are simply not there in Calcutta.

The dancers in Calcutta suffer from intellectual isolation from the other fields of creative excellence also. Dance as a theatre art could make greater contribution as a powerful medium if the dancers could work together with poets, playwrights, painters, sculptors, photographers etc. Here one might recall Tagore again whose creative genius worked in unison and intimate collaboration with artists like Nandalal Bose and others to fuse stagecraft, make-up, costume and poetic music to blend harmoniously with dance. This is a common factor in the Western dance world also.

More than fifty years after the revival of dancing under the inspiration of Tagore where do the dancers stand socially? Do the former prejudices still prevail? To the larger section of our society, the image of a dancer is still blurred in the age-old prejudice. The vulgar dances and the crude and obscene posters of Indian movies confuse

the average people who are not aware of the artistic world of dance. Only a few years ago a young fresh M.A. of Calcutta University was dismissed from a puritan-ridden college of South Calcutta on the ground of her being a performing dancer. This incident clearly brings out the mixed attitude of our society towards a dancer, particularly a female dancer.

It is usually unexpected for a boy or girl as a dancer to be considered as a suitable spouse in Calcutta, because very few parents in the middle and the upper classes consider dance as a desirable accomplishment in life. Most of the dancers in Calcutta have to go in for what is known locally as love-marriage, and marriages are arranged between dancers.

If we review the overall pattern of the community of dancers, we find certain characteristics which might be typical of Calcutta's complex society.

(a) The Bengali dancers are all from average middle class homes and a large proportion of them are from the relatively less conservative East Bengal families.

(b) A large number of male professional dancers have come from Kerala, Manipur, U.P. and recently from Madras and Andhra Pradesh and have settled down in Calcutta. Most of them speak fluent Bengali and communicate with their students through the Bengali medium.

(c) There is increasingly less isolation of the different stylistic groups in the different dance schools and troops. Very often a classical guru is seen to work with modern dancers.

(d) Although once I.P.T.A.'s cultural movement inspired the creativity of dancers in Calcutta, the dancers' circle unlike those in drama, music and literature remained politically unbiased. It is true that Tagore's and other contemporary dance dramas brought in social and other contemporary problems of our society into relief, but political considerations hardly has any hold on the dancing world. Dancing continues as an autonomous and independent mode of expression of the human mind.

(e) A recent tendency of getting tired of constant repetition of Tagore's dance-dramas is becoming apparent. This is a healthy sign of an urge to break new creative grounds and to deal with the vital problems of contemporary life. This half spelt demand for giving new and effective expression to the crisis of contemporary life should be a source of inspiration for the creative dancers of Calcutta. Unlike the effective modern drama movement Calcutta dancers have not yet been able to fully express the contemporary spirit. This will only be possible when creative dancers in Calcutta start operating in close collaboration and interaction with the practitioners in the other creative fields and a genuine cadre of professional critics grow. At this phase creative dancers will have to struggle hard to maintain their own steam.

In spite of several sources for frustration Calcutta's dancing community is unique in India. Although Calcutta cannot boast of any special indigenous classical style like some other cities of India but none can deny her the honour of being the birthplace of a highly sophisticated contemporary dance style.



## THE MOVIE-MAKERS OF CALCUTTA

**Mrinal Sen**

To make a film, anywhere on earth or in space or under the sea, you need a camera and a sound recorder and also the necessary gadgets and, may be, more of these depending, of course, on your understanding of the medium and on their availability and your requirement. You also need raw film to record the visuals and the aural, the words and the incidentals. And then with a heart to feel and a brain to operate and organize, you are to use all these materials to produce what the Americans term 'movie'.

I am not an archivist; that is not my business. I shall therefore make no attempt to find out who was the first to collect all the available movie materials as well as the heart and the brain to make the first movie in Calcutta. But as a Calcuttan I shall no doubt have an enormous sense of pride if some one can prove beyond doubts that Hiralal Sen of North Calcutta had made his feature-length movie before the world could come to know of Edwin Portor's *The Great Train Robbery* in 1904. As claimed by a certain quarter, this movie and another of the same length, one hour long, and by the same Hiralal Sen were full of innovations such as close-ups, panning, tilts etc. There are many other stories about Hiralal Sen of North Calcutta including the burning of the entire work of his lifetime two days before his death in 1917. All these, if credence could be given to them, would certainly make the history of movie-making in Calcutta much more richer than what it is now. But there are other historians too who hold different opinion and have more substantial matters to prove that the first movie in India was made in 1912 by Dadasaheb Phalke of Poona.

Whether or not there is a valid case for Hiralal Sen of North Calcutta as the first feature movie-maker of the world, not to speak

of India alone, is predominantly an archieval issue and not my meat. Quite in the fitness of things, therefore, I would keep apart from such intriguing, exciting, file-searching performances of the archivists and would rather dwell on the quality of stuff produced during the early period of the Calcutta movie-makers.

In the beginning, as elsewhere, there was camera with not adequate arrangement for proper lensing, there was raw film not enough sensitive, laboratory to process the film, editing table to cut and join and technical know-how to apply. The result, in the beginning, was just an assemblage of moving pictures coherent enough to record an event or, at most, a story. It was all very crude, never going beyond its physical perception, marked by total absence of characterization and atmosphere. The early stuff, because of a certain novelty never seen before, was quite saleable; the early audiences were the least demanding. Gradually, with sure success on the commercial front, the employer-appointed technician became more certain than ever about the use of tools and began to introduce "stiffer" variety in story-material. From independent scene to picturization of dance, from dance to mythology, from mythology to Alibaba, from Alibaba to farce, from farce to Bankim Chandra and even to Sarat Chandra. That was generally the march of events during the silent period of Calcutta movie-makers. With more cogent story to tell now, the need for controlled operation of the tools and the players became more evident which, eventually, led to more activities inside the studios and less in the exterior. To work inside the studios, you need additional gadgets. So there were more gadgets in Calcutta studios. The gadgets having definite properties, movie-maker making use of them invested his work with additional properties broadly on the technical plane. But, to be objective, not much of substance was achieved during the silent period. The basic reason was the absence of a reasonable awareness on social and artistic planes.

The sound came as it did elsewhere. With sound, movie became more life-like, more exciting, more saleable. And now, with having the benefit of the spoken words and the incidentals and also the music to create atmosphere, there were a few attempts here and there,

sporadic and independent, where one could find tendencies indicating some promise, technical as well as artistic, but the promise did not last long and in a total sense there was not any appreciable improvement in the standard. The movies mostly remained "talking pictures".

Small bits of near-competence in the movies of some individuals could by no means alter the general character and, as usual, the movies made in those days did collect the fattest possible revenue. With this enormous success at the box-office, the pre-war movie-makers found themselves in a state of absolute security and remained indifferent to the needs and the possibilities of this art-form. Economic success resulted in self-complacency, self-complacency to callousness, and it was perhaps due to such callousness that the movie-makers in those days could afford to stay far away from the 'contagions' of other arts, particularly the contemporary Bengali literature which made tremendous advance during the 'thirties'.

And then came the war which made the severest kind of impact on our people. Things moved fast, too fast for one to comprehend. And the mind, in the midst of this confusion, moved faster. The artist could not escape the reality around him. At the end of the war, some of the movies started becoming noticeably different, both in Calcutta and Bombay. Several movie-makers, during that period of transition, derived a lot of inspiration from other arts, drama in particular, and almost inevitably a trend in Calcutta movies was about to take shape. What followed next was not without a constant sense of uncertainty. Activities were very often uneven, and the trend in the making got very much diffused when, at last, moved by the tremendous sight of the East Bengal refugees crowding, in successive waves, the streets of Calcutta, a man called Nimai Ghose came out into the open with his camera and with almost nothing at all. Nimai Ghose, an active participant of the Indian Peoples Theatre Movement and a cameraman, collected some meagre fund and a groups of non-professional players and even refugees, most remarkable of them all being an old woman, picked up from the depth of immense suffering who had just arrived from East Bengal and had known how one felt when leaving ones own homeland. With all these explosive

materials and very little money Nimai Ghose left the glamour-world of the movie-makers of Calcutta and made his own movie and named it Chinna-mool. True, it was not artistic enough, but it was no doubt very timely for more than one reason. Watching this movie one could see a certain courage, a certain conviction and a certain faith in a newer kind of movies neither known to the movie-makers of Calcutta nor to the metropolitan audience. A popular failure though in terms of takings at the box-office, one could read on the faces of a very minority spectators the reverence of a new experience.

In 1952, the First International Film Festival was held in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. As far as Calcutta was concerned, the festival had an unusually remarkable role to play, that of stirring the imagination of the Calcuttans. To give you an idea of the impact the festival created I just take a page out of my old diary. It was a certain Friday and that was the time when I had nothing to do with the movies except nurturing an impossible hope that some time in future I would get into movies. I was at that time a medical representative, my job being detailing our products to the doctors. The writing on the page was as follows.

Friday · 10 a.m.—12 noon ..	Visiting doctors 4 will do. (My daily quota, however, was visiting 8 doctors).
3 p.m. ..	At Purna Theatre : Open City Rome by Roberto Rossellini.
6 p.m. ..	At Menoka : Jour de Fete by Jaques Tati.
9 p.m. ..	At Light House . Miracle in Milan by Vittorio de Sica.

That was the time I had. That was the time my friends had. That was the time the film-enthusiasts of Calcutta had too. They got busy, running like me from one theatre to the other religiously watching the wonder that was post-war world cinema. The Calcuttans thus became very active, they became more demanding and the "contagion" spread in the air which also partially invaded the film studios "*corrupting*", so to say, the younger technicians. And, at last, in 1955, after

years of stress and strain, the greatest event in the history of Indian Cinema took place : the making of *Pather Panchali*.

With absolutely no experience in movie-making, Satyajit Ray collected a group of youngmen to work as technicians and, like Nimai Ghose, selected a group of non-professionals and also one professional actor and then walked straight into an unknown and uncertain world defying everything that was prescribed for the movie-makers of the Calcutta studios. The result was stupendous, giving him a place among the world's living best. It was, in fact, the same old perennial landscape that Ray filmed, the same old locomotive running across the distant horizontal that he put in a sequence, the same old pond with stagnant water that came so many hundred times on our screen; and all these and many other typicals of the village visuals not unknown to our audience were recorded on the same kind of film by the same camera with no extra gadgets, but everything in the film, the visuals and aural, assumed an entirely different dimension. What, in essence, made this difference ? The movie-materials being the same, the heart and the brain at work were all that made all the difference. With the growth of science and technology making their headway in our country and with a tremendously growing sense of urbanity in Calcutta there was indeed an intense need for such a man to come and join the business of movie-making in Calcutta, a man like Satyajit Ray whom Louis Malle has rightly called "the spiritual child of Bengali Renaissance". *Pather Panchali* set the ball rolling, a case for a new trend was sharply defined and the ethics of the movie most eloquently brought in. Years to follow saw many happenings in Calcutta, things that contributed significantly to the art of the movie. Trends took definite shape, styles in order to communicate ideas came up on the screen, and with the growth of trends and styles, cropped up problems of diverse nature. The years to follow *Pather Panchali* were indeed quite eventful when the medium was handled in different manner, problems dealt with differently. A movement, so to say, became very much apparent during the post-*Pather Panchali* period with Ray and a few others giving exceedingly animated account of themselves.

The movie-scene in Calcutta since *Pather Panchali* has taken an

altogether different turn. Talking about the film society movement, the societies are almost always in festive mood today, screening world movies of outstanding merit and all those suffering from mediocrities, studying movies in their minutest details and being religiously critical of every bit of thing done on celluloid. Over-enthusiasm does sometimes become tiresome, but what one notices from the activities of the film societies is an acute sense of awareness. And that is a phenomenon so much linked up with things taking place in a certain section of movie-making in Calcutta since 1955.

With this growing consciousness mostly outside and partly inside the studios, the future, at least on the surface, appears to be not that bleak, but, to take a practical view of things, the present state of affairs is pretty uncertain. To do the minimum good to the investor who always wants maximum return at the box-office, a large audience is required, larger than what all our film societies can mobilize. And the majority of the audiences continue to patronize, as before, anything that is nearer gross stuff. So, here is one problem which, as in other countries, worries the conscientious artist. A constant sense of insecurity arising out of fear, fear of a possible financial crash, is liable to considerably cool down the enthusiasm of even an artist of ideological integrity.

And this is what we see today among our Calcutta movie-makers : more of cautiousness, more of rethinking and less of courage. The spirit of challenge is now seen to be in the process of liquidation. We see today more of conforming to the set rules rather than furthering the case of non-conformism. The trend that was built in the mid-fifties and pursued all these years in big and small proportions is now seen to be fast disintegrating. Movie-making in Calcutta is now tending to go what I would say an Establishment-way.

Whether in art, business or politics, the Establishment, to ensure its existence and growth, sets certain rules and uses its own machinery to tell others that the rules must be strictly observed. The Establishment in our trade is no exception. It has set norms for the story, prescribed rules for the application of the movie-materials, of techniques and has the last word on audience reaction. It has been trying

to convince others, if not itself, that the making of movies is its monopoly and not the "outsider's" business.

But the fact remains that in 1955 there emerged such an "outsider" who made an aggressive infiltration and set a trend of world stature. And now, with thirteen film societies functioning in Calcutta, with seminars and symposia being held frequently on various social and academic levels, with the fascinating urbanity that has grown in fairly large proportion among the Calcuttans and with remarkable cross-fertilization of different arts operating in the metropolitan cultural life, there is no reason why the spirit of the early fifties should not come back with greater vigour to the movie-making in Calcutta. What is needed today is challenging the authority of the Establishment as Ray did in 1955. Let the new forces defy the rules, let there be no compromise with the laws of the Establishment and let there be desperate efforts, as in 1955, to create new artistic conventions. What the movie-making in Calcutta needs today is aggressive infiltration which will open up new horizon even for the "insiders".

# **CO-EXISTENCE OF MANY MUSICAL TRADITIONS AND THE COMMUNITY OF MUSICIANS IN CALCUTTA**

**Rajyeswar Mitra**

## **I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It would be worthwhile to comprehend why the subject deserves scrutiny and discussion. Like other traditions, musical traditions have also evolved from the likings of different types of people inhabiting in Calcutta, who are the components of the society which has come to be known as the Calcutta Society. This means, by analysing the different musical traditions obtaining in Calcutta we are trying to appreciate the mental set up of the entire Society divided into so many groups. Or, in other words, various musical institutions reflect the different mental structure of a vast number of citizens and it is thus, an assessment of a popular society looked from a particular angle of vision.

Let us not go into the details of what is good or bad and what is wholesome or unwholesome. But, let us have an unbiased view of the entire position.

Now, what is a tradition? It means something coming down from generations, be it orally or through written texts, by specialized practice or by some customs prevailing in the family or among an ethnic group. We are interested in finding out whether certain characteristic of the entire society persists in spite of changing circumstances, due to deep emphasis in affection, beliefs and values. We are interested in finding out what are the persistent traditions in the sphere of music in Calcutta society.



## II

## EARLY MUSICAL CULTURE OF CALCUTTA WITH THE RURAL HINTERLAND CONTINUITY

Calcutta is not an ancient city, neither it has a long standing reputation of many developed traditions like other old cities passing through various turmoils of many centuries. Originally it consisted of some villages not marked by cultural activities. The British business community founded the city for their own advantage and it turned out to be the biggest city in India merely by accident of history. But the localities near Calcutta were more developed since earlier times. Places like Serampore, Chandannagar, Chuchurah, Nabadwip, Santipur, Khardah, Shyamnagar, Bhatpara, etc. were all populated by "cultured" people and the entertainments obtaining in these areas readily filled up the cultural vacuum of Calcutta.

Calcutta became the metropolitan city since the end of the eighteenth century and from that time onwards rich and influential people began to settle in Calcutta gradually from their village abodes. The required entertainments and different musical sects and groups gathered in Calcutta for finding patronage. Among them rural folk singers were not wanting. Kabiwallas, Jatrwallas, Panchali Singers, Kathaks, Dhapwallas, Tappa singers all assembled in Calcutta and formed groups. Among them, Kabiwallas were hailed with much enthusiasm and we all know what amount of patronage they obtained from the aristocrats. Kabi songs were not art songs in the proper sense of the term, but some popular lyrics rendered into music. It was a very lively pattern since it was in the form of a musical duel. Such boisterous songs and music were liked by the people of the eighteenth century. Music did not lack in varieties, but there was not so much of refinement. Calcutta Society was more or less the same old village society where different village patterns gathered in a concentrated form and from Calcutta one could guess what was the general mental set up of the whole country. It was the mentality of somewhat contented people who were rehabilitated in peaceful surroundings after an irksome period of insecurity and fear. The enlightenment of the modern age, however, did not yet cast its gleam on

these people although worn out ideas and practices of the mediaeval ages were being given up by degrees.

### III

#### THE LATER URBAN PHASE (19TH CENTURY)

Urban types began to grow with the advent of the nineteenth century. New ideas of theatre, lyric songs (including Brahma Sangeet), concerts, instrumentals etc. began to invoke new creations whereas the old patterns continued to be modified and remodelled. As for example, the old Akhdai songs were broken into Half Akhdai to make it more popular. Tappas were polished and even folk patterns like Agamani, Shyamasangeets were embellished with the touches of Tappa style. Panchalis were renovated and various activities of the society were eulogized or criticized through this medium. Dasarathi Roy's Panchali was a new creation and the old enthusiasm of the Kabi songs was reflected on this new variety. Classical Raga music found a new impetus from the patronage of the interned Nawab Wazed Ali Shah whose court attracted Ustads from various parts and a section of Calcutta musicians eagerly liked to be initiated by them. This marked the beginning of a serious culture of Raga music in the city and identification of various singers with different Gharanas.

During the later nineteenth century certain popular varieties like Panchalis, Half Akhdai, Kabi, Tarja etc. lost their charm rapidly and theatrical songs and lyric songs captivated minds of people more readily. This would indicate that at the initial period of the nineteenth century there was a small enlightened circle who wanted something more refined in the art of music. But the same old masses still liked simple enjoyment in the old pattern and this was also the trait of Babu culture. These Babus of the nineteenth century patronized Kabi, Panchali, Half Akhdai, Kathakata etc. on the one side and also classical songs, classical dances of the Baijis on the other. During the later nineteenth century there was a polished urbanized educated class who also having been influenced by the puritanic movement of Brahmoism did not like many of the old varieties, but enjoyed good lyric songs produced by eminent intellectuals. Thus at the end

of the nineteenth century we find a peculiar co-existence of various musical trends which could be broadly divided into entertaining, devotional, lyrical and classical. At this time Calcutta comprised of people of various tastes and various traditions of music easily co-existed in the city. Although urbanized, the old culture and custom still prevailed in Calcutta and there was a peculiar mixture in the urbanized musical arts.

#### IV

##### SOPHISTICATION AND SPECIALIZATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Twentieth century dawned with more sophistications. Some of the previous traditions like Kabi, Panchali etc. went into obsolescence and others were modernized. Lyrics and dramatic songs were variegated and elaborated. Several distinct forms of the city's own culture began to grow and the old unostentatious forms came to the field of theatre and other musical trades. The Gramophone Company started with utmost public support and enthusiasm. There was altogether a new awakening in musical appreciation while the catholic instinct of listening to all types of music still persisted. The first two decades of the twentieth century at least, showed that people were tolerant so far as different musical groups were concerned. Whatever might be the feeling of different classes, music was held as a common entertainment for all. Even if a statistics of the collaboration of Gramophone records with the citizens at this time could be taken, it would have been found that the tendency was to buy them according to merit regardless of the particular category to which they would belong.

Gradually, more changes occurred in our music and the cultural outlook was broadened immensely by the impetus given by a personality like Tagore and there was also repercussions of the creative movements in the field of dance initiated by Uday Sankar. Music was practised more liberally by the middle classes than before. Classical songs became more popular and conferences were organized for appreciation of higher musics. A class of lyric songs developed and was called "modern songs". Actually this class was fostered by commercial interest and popularity was its criterion. Nevertheless, it has many good characteristics also and several composers and artists of no mean merit contributed to this category. Similarly, a

type more fit to be called classico-modern (Rag Pradhan, Ramya Giti) also grew. It was primarily classical, but the lyrical value of the songs was not neglected. Folk tunes were again favoured in some of these synthetic innovations. Several artists earned immense popularity in Calcutta by singing songs in various folk tunes.

By this time, however, music became ramified into several branches and a sense of critical evaluation grew among a section of the people. A tendency developed to judge the merits of existing musical varieties and to sort out their distinct appeals. Every tradition was scanned by its inner value. It is quite natural that this should happen with the spread of general education and in keeping with this, various groups arose in the musical society who chose particular classes of music according to their liking. It is this feeling of selective choice which prompted a deep appreciation for folk tunes during the thirties of this century. Why was it that some types of Baul, Bhatiali etc. became popular while Jatra, Panchali of the older days went out of favour? It was because the universal appeal of these songs was recognized and a new value was attached to them. This sense of finding out good in artistic creation also led to the wide appreciation of the Ghazals composed in Bengali by the poet Nazrul Islam. Hindi classical songs and Tappas were already existing but why did the Bengali songs of Jnanendra Prosad Goswami or Vismadev Chatterjee composed in classical style elicit so much public admiration? Its source was again this new sense of evaluation. It was curious that people would find so much interest in the Kirtans sung by Krishna Chandra Dey while the classical Kirtans were forgotten. It was because people had found a new appeal in these Kirtans which they did not get in older forms.

## V

### THE POST-WAR PERIOD : CRYSTALLIZATION OF EXCLUSIVE GROUPS

In the post-war period the tendency towards specialization was further developed in the music of our society as in the case of other aspects of culture. As a result different groups have crystallized rather firmly in the music world of Calcutta. One of the characteristics of such groupism is that one group is not interested in the other. Every group seems to be totally devoted to foster its own particular

taste. Often no love is lost between these different groups which go under the categories of Modern, Tagorian, Folk, Classical, Instrumental etc. Perhaps the culture of music is being improved by such individualistic efforts, but such existence of different musical factions can hardly be termed as peaceful co-existence. There are many musical institutions in Calcutta where the pupils can find out the subject of their own choice and they can thus gather experience in those particular subjects only. This also reflects the same self centred tendencies which are now generally found among the citizens.

Very recently certain loud and popular Western types of music have gained popularity among a particular class. Calm and sedate types of older songs do not attract them. They depend upon cinema, cabaret and disc records for these songs. Primarily it is commerce which is creating and fulfilling the demands of the people for music as in the case of other spheres of culture. It is they who are controlling this sphere and catering musical forms according to different tastes. They are regularly scrutinizing the different mental levels of the people and producing appropriate forms of music.

After a careful survey of the whole situation we may come to the conclusion that the society itself has been very lucidly reflected in the music of the city. It is usually found that those who are rich and contented find satisfaction in calm and quiet and melodious forms which include Rabindra Sangeet, lyric songs and Raga music. But there remain a large section of people who are discontented, dejected and struggling with various hostile forces generated in their families or the society itself. They probably want to bring about a sensational change in our music, because they find an inspiration in the loud, often incongruous, sound effects produced by certain special creations which are not compatible with classical and folk forms. I do not know how their co-existence is to be explained, but as the society is passing through abnormal times so also is its music. There is everything, every possibility, resources and no dearth of genius either in this city, but not the proper co-ordination as a whole, because organization itself is perhaps lacking in this society.

**PART II**

**DISCUSSIONS**

## DISCUSSION

### SESSION I : A CITY OF CULTURAL PLURALISM AND THE BENGALI CORE

#### PAPERS DISCUSSED

*Languages and Dialects of Calcutta during the last one hundred years.*  
by D. N. BASU

*Caste among the Moslems of Calcutta.* by M. K. A. SIDDIQUI

*Intergroup Stereotypes and Attitudes in Calcutta.* by S. C. PANCHBHAI

*B. N. Saraswati*

I shall confine my discussion only to the first two papers and place before you a few general points that appear to me relevant.

In Dr. Basu's paper we find that Bengali being the native speech of Calcutta, becomes spoken language of a new comer even within six months of his stay in the city. I find that Bengali is almost the second language of the eastern Hindi pilgrim town like Benaras. I can well understand this for it has arisen obviously out of business necessity. But the reason which can be assigned to the spread of Bengali language is the Bengalee's love or attachment to their language. It is our common experience that the Bengalees go on speaking Bengali with those who do not actually know the language. This kind of persistence seems to me have helped in the spread of this language.

Mr. Siddiqui's brilliant argument that elements of Hindu *Jati* system are present among the Moslems of Calcutta is undeniable. But while certain elements of *Jati* system persist among the Moslems, one thing which is conspicuously absent is the linkage of the so-called Moslem castes with the *Varna* system. While I concede that the endogamous occupational groups existed in India much earlier than the introduction of *Varna* system, I think, the present form of the

Hindu *Jati* system came into being only when the early endogamous hereditary groups were wedged by the Brahmin theologians into an order which may be called *Jati-Varna* complex, has been fully naturalized in Hindu life through legends, myths and canons of scriptures. As Prof. Bose has shown in some of his articles that temples and soil have also been classified into *Varna* order. We gather that fruits, vegetables and birds have also been grouped under the four-fold *Varna* scheme. It is impossible to isolate *Jati* from the *varna* system which is the corner stone in Hinduism. Such a linkage of the social order of *jati* with the religious organization is practically unknown among the Moslems. In other words the *jati* system has not been fully naturalized within the Moslem society.

Sociologically it is interesting that the Moslems have retained some of the Hindu *jati* elements but have not developed the *varna*-like myth even though they are supposed to be practising the *jati* system for nearly one thousand years. It is obvious that the Islamic great tradition does not recognize *jati* system whereas in the Hindu great tradition it is a well founded and sanctioned social system. While the Moslems have accepted the Hindu mode of production, they have left the essential socio-religious elements of the Hindu *Jati* system. At certain period of history and at certain places, however, the Moslems were not hesitant in sharing Hindu knowledge system.

*Nihar Ranjan Ray*

My first question is for Dr. Basu.

The various cultural forces that have entered Calcutta in the last 250 years or so have left their impact on the standard language and the dialects in Calcutta in varying degrees. What we have been finding before our eyes for the last 20 or 25 years has been perhaps the most deciding factor so far as standard language of Calcutta, if there is one, and the Bengali dialects. This is due to the partition of the country. Even in such areas which has a typical cockney, we have seen in our student days in Calcutta say in Shyambazar, Bagbazar or Sovabazar areas, even in these regions the so-called



cockney is being transformed. Even there it is very difficult to hear the Calcutta cockney which we used to hear in early twenties. And this is the most significant change that is happening. Let us also not forget that in the beginning of mid-nineteen twenties most of the leading writers of standard Bengali came from East Bengal. The entire 'Kallol' wave is an East Bengal wave. Later on if you just scan the names of the journalists, reporters, sub-editors and news editors of the bigger Calcutta dailies, they are mostly from East Bengal and in the vocabulary that has been in Jugantar and Anandabazar much of the East Bengal dialects, typical East Bengal words, idioms and phrases have entered into standard writing. This is an important subject for study and investigation.

I was very much impressed with the paper by Mr Siddiqui. The question that was raised by my friend, Baidyanath Saraswati, we call it *varna-jati* complex. Textually it is *varna-jati* complex but from the 14th-15th century onwards to what extent *varna* was functioning in Indian Society? What function the *varna* has today in the society? It is a non-functional term. Mr. Siddiqui said, it seems to me, that the *jati* is very functionally operative in the Muslim community of this city of Calcutta. Some of the traits which Siddiqui has mentioned are essentially caste traits and they are very operative. Therefore, although we can speak of a *varna-jati* complex in an abstract sense but I don't think *varna* has been operative or functional for the last 8 hundred years.

My last question is in respect of Sri Panchbhai. If you accept his method of analysis then you are bound to accept his conclusions. Therefore, it is not so much the conclusions that bothers me; what bothers me is the method. In the methodology itself there are certain logical loopholes. I wish I had time to show where is the flaw in the logic.

*Nirmal Kumar Bose*

I have a few comments to make on practically all the three papers. Prof. Ray points out that standard Bengali which was used here or even the cockney of Bagbazar and Shyambazar is being altered considerably by our daily reading of newspapers. Newspapers are actually

not so much under the 'control' but I would say under the loving control of people from East Bengal and they wish to use their own idioms and phrases much more frequently than they try to assimilate local phraseology. It would be worthwhile to find out what are the words which are being used much more frequently, and so on. This is of course not a very much study of dialects but of language.

Now when I come to the structure of caste among the Muslims what enters into controversy—whether we should call it *varna* or *jati* or a complex of the two. What I would suggest is that after the Muslims came in, they gradually settled down into certain occupations more or less after the pattern of caste. But the whole point here is that occupations were not freely available in Calcutta. People gradually settled down in small groups and generally preferred their own kind and the kind was determined probably by language, religion or so. This persisted and the most important thing which led in the persistence of caste is the fact that professional organizations which would cut across kin groups, language groups and so on, were not developed at a sufficiently quick pace. This was the chief reason why language, regional and religious groups, when they gradually gravitated into certain occupations in certain *Tolas* or *Mahallahs* in Calcutta they found that they could rely on people who speak their language rather than on professional organizations which were absent. What is important is, even under capitalism one would expect that commercial interest should unify people who are in the same trade ; but actually in Calcutta it did not. It led to the formation of several Chambers of Commerce on the basis of linguistic or religious categories. Even at the level of Trade Unions, the work relationships do not tend immediately to dissolve the community affiliations. Trade Unions which include both Muslims and Hindus tend not to emphasize during a riot that they are neither Hindu nor Muslim, they are labourers. What I was suggesting at this point is that we did not build up fast enough the professional organizations which would cut across different smaller loyalties. This is probably one of the possible reasons for the persistence of what is caste-like among the Moslems. I would not call it completely caste. There is no legal barrier to a Siddiqui marrying, say, upwards or 'downwards.

But generally, even there, there is a feeling of hypergamy. Mr. Siddiqui will correct me if I am wrong.

Coming to third one, the Inter-group stereotypes, the paper is certainly very interesting. I have one feeling which I would like to share with you. It is this—if there is a Hindu-Muslim or Bengalee-Bihari riot the counts of the stereotype would vary very much. So, the picture which we derive from the stereotype at a certain point of time is also determined to a large extent by the current political and economic atmosphere. For instance, why the Muslims have been downcast, as I find from the paper, by all the non-Muslim groups whether Bengali or non-Bengali, is very much a ghost left over by the partition and the riot of Calcutta. Some Hindus tend to look upon the Muslim as someone who shared with the inglorious part of our history. If we had collected data on Hindu-Muslim stereotypes during the early Swadeshi days or during the Khilaphat Movement, it would perhaps give a different picture. Inter-group stereotypes thus appear to be contingent phenomena which are very much dependent upon current political tensions, social atmosphere, our likes and dislikes, which are due not so much to any inherent persistent cultural differences. We are not very often aware of these cultural differences but may take these upon ourselves temporarily in response to contingent situation. This is a caution which I am placing before Mr. Panchbahai.

*R Battacharya*

I studied three villages in Birbhum, one predominantly inhabited by the Hindu, one by the Muslim and the third by the Santal. I found there that there are some reflections of the caste system among the Muslims and the tribals also. In the caste structure of the Hindu village, there is a sharp cleavage between *Bhadrolok* and *Chotolok*, lumping some high castes in the former category. Muslims living in a dominant Hindu milieu try to approximate the Hindu caste stratification to make their interaction and communication with the larger society meaningful.

*M. K. A. Siddiqui*

As to the point raised by Dr. Saraswati I would admit that although the mythological basis of *varna*, as we are told, lay behind

the Hindu model, does not exist among the Muslims to the same extent, yet caste system is structurally operative in the Muslim society in Calcutta in the form I have presented. I would tend to agree with Prof. Ray that the *Varna* complex even among the Hindu society is not operative to the extent that it did centuries ago. As a proof of this I would say that many groups that constitute Hindu society, on the lower levels particularly, are not aware of the myth.

As to the question raised by Prof. Bose I would say that though there is no legal or religious bar on interethnic marriages among the followers of Islam; yet interethnic marriages do not take place and customary practices preventing it are followed. The situation that Prof. Bose has pointed out is present to a very limited extent only among the groups in the first block, as I have already stated in my paper. The groups in all the subsequent blocks avoid intermarriages with varying degrees of rigidity. The social sanctions against the violation of the rules of endogamy also vary.

Mr. Ranjit Bhattacharya has spoken of the existence of a sort of dichotomy of the society, in the field he has studied, which he terms as '*Bhadrolok*' and '*Chotolok*'. I may not be able to discuss in detail all the attributes of these categories but some sort of dichotomy is noticeable in the Muslim society particularly in regard to inter-dining. The first three blocks can eat together but these do not inter-dine with the fourth block.

### *Panchbhai*

The thing is that, whenever I tried to communicate across the discipline, i.e., with the persons from non-psychological disciplines, I have found difficulty in communicating our methodology.

The method which I have employed in my stereotype study is internationally accepted. UNESCO's international tension projects also employed this method.

Stereotypes are rigid and are not changed easily. Stereotypes are indicators of the directions in which the intergroup relations are moving. There had been a study in America in respect of Japanese stereotype before the Pearl Harbour and after. From many other

studies we find also that people usually come back to their original stereotypes after the effects of a particular incident or propaganda subside.

*Nihar Ranjan Ray*

Are the Calcutta Bengalee a homogeneous group? So how to categorize a group?

*Panchbhai*

In the mind of the other groups there is an image of the Bengalee as a whole. Here we are not distinguishing between the Bengalee from East Bengal or West Bengal or so.

*Surajit Sinha*

Mr. Panchbhai has a complaint thrown to all of us. He feels it difficult to communicate with us (anthropologists) with his method. One way to communicate across the discipline, I think, would be to ask two sets of questions. What are the social situations in which the stereotypes occur? The social psychologists do not investigate people in full context and expose the people of nodding acquaintance to a barrage of questions and accept this as a valid method. Trusting that this is an established method at arriving at stereotypes, social anthropologists can provide some contextual information on the pattern of social interaction which generates and sustains the stereotypes.

Secondly, considering that you have the correct stereotypes by Sri Panchbhai's method, what are the implications of these on behaviour? If psychologists start getting interested in the contextual implications I think some day we (social anthropologists) might start responding to their procedure as we have already done with reference to the concept of Diku (outgroups) among the tribes of Chotanagpur.

*B. P. Mahapatra*

Dr. Basu has discussed the linguistic multiplicity of Calcutta with excellent thoroughness, and now it would be interesting to know

how this multiplicity is resolved into a workable system through which the inter-group communication of various sorts are conducted daily in the city. The many dialects of Bengali to which I may also add Oriya and Assamese which one hears in Calcutta may or may be Bengali in a strictly technical sense, but it is significant that they all choose bilingualism in a certain form of Bengali as opposed to another language. Similarly, a number of other Indian linguistic groups like Marathi, Gujarati, Marwari, Sindhi, Punjabi, Bihari etc. choose Hindi for the same purpose. Interestingly enough, many small group like Parsi, Anglo-Indian and Chinese who are permanently settled in Calcutta for generations now and many of them no doubt are native speakers of Bengali, nevertheless are normatively aligned with Hindi. English, as in elsewhere, cuts across this linguistic duality of the city in its own peculiar way. Even now all the major advertising displays and sign-boards in Calcutta are in English. One can understand the value of English in one of the posh shopping centres of Calcutta, but it remains very much a riddle why a local barber serving mainly the slums puts up a dazzling English sign-board reading "Fancy Hair Cutting Saloon", unless of course it is accepted there still tradition plays an extremely significant role in the peculiar linguistic alignment of the sub-groups and of the occupations.

#### *D. N. Basu*

There is no doubt that Calcutta dialects have been influenced by the dialects of East Bengal. Even in the last three generations the language has changed markedly.

As regards Dr. Saraswati's comment, whether it is the inherent easiness of the Bengali language or the necessity of the people that make them learn Bengali easily, it is the latter which should be considered more relevant.

#### *Barun De*

Some of the questions which were in my mind had been answered here under the title "A city of cultural pluralism and the Bengali core."

One of those questions is—in Dr. Basu's paper with reference to his last point, mark the word 'puristic'. As I understand here that the emphasis is on the puristic and not necessarily 'correct'. This is a question of acceptance of stronger cultural norms but what are the stronger cultural traditions that are able to impose themselves in the context of strength and of sub-strength in Calcutta ?

My second point is with reference to Mr. Siddiqui and Mr. Panchbhair. I have a feeling that what is deeper than rivalry is location in specific locales of groups of people performing certain types of occupations. This is an important parameter of any discussion about the evolution of cultural pluralism in urban context. When Mr. Siddiqui talked about the composition of Muslim society in terms of endogamous ethnic groups and gave the details, I was looking at the map. It appeared to me that these groups were located in areas where predominant population is service population ; population who performs certain services to other parts of the city. And they do this in terms of the city, *not* in terms of an Indian service set-up. They are parts of an urban service set-up, they are *not* parts of an inter-urban or urban-rural service set-up. The Muslims are parts of Calcutta and they are parts of service loyalties. If they had an identity which was historical, it was not broader than Calcutta identity. This is what I am saying just to make the point that when we speak the terms like Great Tradition we might be a little more clear where the Great Tradition lies. Is it an All-India Great Tradition ? Or is it a memory of certain Great Tradition filtered down or refracted down to the urban level to the point where the myths have become very mythological. If that is so, then the urban context becomes clear. If it is not so then Calcutta is just a reflection of countryside around it.

When looking at the very useful data presented by Mr. Panchbhair, it seems to me that the Bengalees react unfavourably to those who compete with them with regard to the job opportunities in a *Bhadrolak* scale. In other words jobs, occupational structure, these are parameters in the urban context which probably would bear a bit more detailed scrutiny. This I think which Prof. Ray was actually suggesting

that it would be useful if in the urban context we disaggregated such blanket cultural categories like Bengalee, non-Bengalee, Marwari, etc. according to occupational factors in any urban context and Calcutta is a part of that broader urban context.

#### PAPER DISCUSSED

*Kalighat Temple and the City of Calcutta.* by S. C. SINHA

*Burun De*

Is there persistence of cultural traits when old elements take to new shapes and functions? Or, is it a case of drying up of cultural force so as to adjust unfillingly to the new order? We are not discussing adaptation, but only describing how the old has changed. Different cultural elements coexist with the dysfunction of other cultural functions.

I sometimes wonder whether the culture of Kalighat temple has anything to do with the general public apathy about repairing the crematorium in the neighbourhood.

*Radharaman Mitra*

Dr. Sinha has described in his paper the changes in and around the Kalighat Temple. It will be more useful if we study why the changes are taking place and whether they are for good or bad.

If you could find out the answers for these questions, then this seminar could be making useful contribution.

*Surajit Sinha*

In my paper on Kalighat temple I have only pointed out that this religious center has shown enough resilience to draw modern occupations within its orbit, and also to accept recent social changes. It is difficult to ascertain whether in such a process the vitality of the new forces of modernization has been toned down. I do not know how far it will be possible to correlate the public apathy about the repairing electrical incinerator at the crematorium and the proximity of the Kalighat Temple.



## PAPER DISCUSSED

*Changing Bengali Elite.* by BENOY GHOSH

*Surajit Sinha*

There are distinct connotations of the terms 'intellectual', 'power', and 'business' elites. If the analysis was confined to the first category it would perhaps be more meaningful.

Although the problem of alienation of the Bengali intellectuals has been raised it is not clear to me whether the Bengali intellectuals are really alienated from the middle class social matrix.

*Barun De*

Are the Bengalis the organizing elite for modernization in India ? Is this not a myth that Bengal is in the vanguard and others are not, though actually others e.g., Marathas, Tamils etc. have played almost the same role in their respective regions in creative response to the challenge of the British Rule.

*Purnima Sinha*

One of the problems of the Bengali intelligentsia is that they carry the burden of history of a past when they were apparently in the intellectual forefront. Perhaps the intelligentsia of other cities in India do not operate under such pressure as the Bengali of Calcutta.

*Hiren Rakshit*

I understand from Shri Ghose's paper that Marxists intellectual elites are going to dominate the field in Bengal (West Bengal). I wonder to what extent it will be possible for the Bengali elite to remain Marxist when the all-India trend is non-Marxist.

*Benoy Ghose*

I only said that in future the Marxist led group will be the strongest elite group but not the only group.

I could have dealt with only the intellectual elite as Dr. Sinha suggests. But as other categories of elites are also very important

and are mutually interlinked I chose to include the entire spectrum of elites.

Professor Barun De has pointed out the elite roles in other regions of India, but I have the impression the role of the Calcutta based Bengali elite during the 19th century has been relatively more creative and dynamic.

## SESSION II : A CITY OF GRINDING, POVERTY, ECONOMIC DISPARITY AND SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION

### PAPER DISCUSSED

*Life in a Calcutta Slum.* by DIKSHIT SINHA

*Sudhendu Mukherjee*

I thank Dr. Surajit Sinha for initiating this Seminar which goes beyond the limit of traditional Anthropology but breaks the barrier across the different branches of social science. I agree with the author (D. Sinha) that the C.M.P.O. programme is inadequate for the slum dwellers. The money required for the physical and economic improvement is beyond our present resources. So efforts should be made by the slum people themselves in improving their lot instead of expecting that the sophisticated plans of the C.M.P.O. will deliver the goods.

*R. Bhattacharya*

The poverty of the urban slum dwellers stand out in contrast to the conditions of the poor in the villages. Though there are bad economic conditions in the villages there is no limitation on kinship pattern as in the slums.

*Dikshit Sinha*

Those who are having stable income even within the slum set up have 'normal' family relations, kinship ties and role performance

but among unstable income groups there are deviations and alterations of the ideal middle class model of social interaction.

In the village situation the content of poverty is quite different from the urban slums. Its burden is only on the caste category of *chotojat*.

#### PAPER DISCUSSED

*On the Goondas of Calcutta* by SABYASACHI MUKHERJEE

*Sudhendu Mukherjee*

Though the American society is affluent there is increasing rate of crime. How can we correlate poverty of our society to crime?

*Barun De*

Whether there is any relation between these terms: gangster, *Dakat*, *Goonda*, *Rockbaj*. The problem is of definition from the point of view of law and sociology. Any one who breaks the law cannot be termed as *goondas* e.g. the students.

The author has mentioned that the *goondas* are descendants of the Lathiyals of the pre-British India. Does it mean that pre-Calcutta society had no goondaism? What was the form developed in course of time? Why *Dakati* has become individualistic now?

*Nihar Ranjan Ray*

It is unfortunate that no one here takes the trouble of defining the terms. What does the term *goonda* mean? Where has it come from and how? Why do we call a person *goonda*? In an academic discussion we should first deal with the definition of a term.

The term *Dakat* has come from *Dak*, a call given by *Dakats* to take action in a moment. How far the dacoits of today (or yesterday) are collective?

Through history we learn that to keep the authorities in power there is always a need for *goondas*. In feudal society some people

in power used to have some men able to break the law in their own interest. This is no exception in 1969.

### *Benoy Ghose*

As, many *goondas* come from well-to-do families, economic reason is only one among many other reasons for people turning into *goondas*. It seems that those who have no direction in life, no clear goals or objectives may become *goondas*.

All *goondas* are not interested in the three W's— most of them are interested in money, some of them in wine and few in women. The problems of their area of operation or jurisdiction and their leadership should have been discussed in detail in the paper. Sociologically it is very important to have definitions of different categories of criminals, rowdies etc.

### *Ajita Chakravorty*

There are personality problems behind *goondaism*. Many individuals may have *goonda* nature but all of them do not become *goondas* really. How the *goonda* nature is channelized and what factors lead to unsocial modes of life need to be probed.

Unstability due to migration, socio-economic change, unemployment etc. is responsible for more crimes in the present society which were not the problems in the past.

### *D. Basu*

The problem of semantics has been raised by Dr. Barun De. *Goondas* who shatter social peace are different from dacoits. The term dacoits, as Prof. Ray has pointed out has come from *Dak* i. e. to call. All *rockbajs* are not *goondas*. Dacoits are professionals unlike many *goondas*.

### *Sabyasachi Mukherjee*

I admit that I am neither an anthropologist nor a sociologist. I have tackled the problem from the points of view of law and criminology. I traced the meaning from the legal side and there are distinctions between different terms like *goondas*, *rockbaj*, dacoit

etc. When the means is force, the end is property and if more than five individuals are involved, then legally it is a case of dacoity. The *goondas* live on and by force.

As Calcutta became known after the British Rule so I have traced history of goondaism from that time. This refers to the question raised by professor Barun De.

I agree with the dissident notes raised by various commentators on my paper that there cannot be a one-to-one relation between poverty and goondaism, but from by case studies the factor of poverty and congestion in urban settlement stand out as decisive forces in generating *goondas*.

#### PAPER DISCUSSED

*Problem of the Mentally Disordered in Calcutta.* by AJITA CHAKRAVORTY

*Sudhendu Mukherjee*

Dr. Chakravorty has raise the point that from rural to urban society there involves strain. This is debatable. What is the exact strain in agricultural and industrial societies? Industrial society also lessens strain by providing comforts. Again, there is the problem why Western society suffers more from mental illness? Rest and unrest should be defined. What exactly is the psychiatrists' contribution in lessening tension of people in industrial society?

*A. R. Banerjee*

Some chromosomal aberrations may lead to congenital factors behind schizophrenia. Most of the patients suffering from chromosomal aberrations do not have reproductive fitness. If we could check this then there will be less schizophrenics.

*Barun De*

I thank Dr. Chakravorty for her brilliant paper. I am placing an anecdote for your consideration :

(1) In Ranchi Hospital the beds for schizophrenia were woefully few. In a hospital in Calcutta, the environment created by Tiljala

slum conditions is worse. I wonder what help Government is giving to these institutions.

(2) It is the fault of the society that has no sympathy for such patients. We are more concerned with Cancer and T.B. but have no awareness about mental illness.

(3) The prohibitive fee for psycho-analysis is beyond common man's reach.

There is total malfunctioning of civic sense in the city life. We can do for those who can provide for themselves. But we cannot do anything for the helpless.

*Tulika Sen*

Dr. Chakravorty did not give any male female ratio among the mentally disordered. How is the ratio changing? I feel that the wives and children aspire higher standard of living than the husband is capable of providing. Husbands are incapable to cope with the increasing demands of the wives, so frustration and disorder is seen in the whole family.

Some diseases are hereditary. I will like to know whether the psychiatrists will advise the discharged patients to marry or to have children.

*S. C. Panchbhair*

Among many reasons behind the increasing number of mental patients the following may be mentioned

(1) Disorganization of social order due to economic, political and other reasons; loss of anchorages in the old values and hence conflict of values in a transitional society.

(ii) There are more cases in the middle and upper middle class than the lower class as the former suffer more from mental strain.

*Ajita Chakravorty*

Perhaps Mr. Panchbhair has misunderstood me. I agree with him that strain and number are increasing. I said that in higher class the number is more than in the lower class.

With reference to Mrs. Sen's question—in the West, the hospital data suggest that the male-female ratio is 2 : 3, whereas in our society it is 5 : 1. Of course the data is biased.

Now, whether marriage will be advisable—In most other countries, marriage will not be advised to schizophrenics. But this is not in all cases. In our country there is no conscious endeavour like this.

I have not heard of chromosomal aberrations. It seems to be very interesting. But I don't know whether it is related to Schizophrenia. We are not sure whether it is clearly hereditary.

#### PAPER DISCUSSED

*The Culture of the Business Executives in Calcutta.*

by G. CHATTOPADHYAY

*Sudhendu Mukherjee*

I like to differ with Prof. Chattopadhyay :

(i) There are some who do not belong to the category of executives mentioned by him. They are of the traditional Swādeshi type. India's future industry does not depend only on those mentioned by Dr. Chattopadhyay.

(ii) What is the role of Anthropologists in training the executives ? I do not find any basis. What education they can impart in such a mess as we have in our country ?

*Surajit Sinha*

Let me first congratulate Dr. Chattopadhyay for his interesting paper although he may have overplayed the tool of 'social caricature.' From Dikshit Sinha's paper we came to know how the slum dwellers have a 'conscious model' for following the middle class pattern of culture. But the limiting condition of poverty leads them to an operational model which is quite different. The victims of executive culture also want, in their hearts, to come away from their ephemeral culture towards the ideal middle class culture but that spurious affluence leads them to adjust themselves to the operational model

of executive culture. The slum dwellers and the executives thus appear as sufferers of social situation—in one case that of affluence and in the other that of poverty. Both seem to hold the conscious model of the middle class *Bhadralok* pattern as ideal.

*P. K. Das Gupta*

It seems through all the papers of this session that a profile of disorganization, frustration etc. emerges. But are these things applicable to Calcutta alone or they are true of any urban or industrial area?

A village is a closed society, economically and socially and have a non-competitive caste system. But a city is not. There is competition and struggle for existence etc. which generates a picture of disorganization in the city. Prof. Redfield has also shown in his study of the city of Merida that disorganization, secularization and individualization are the criteria of urban life.

*Ramkrishna Mukherjee*

With reference to Dr. Chattopadhyay's paper—there is an impression that when we industrialize our society we not only bring in tools but also values etc. from others. Is it very necessary? Can't we do with the traditional values? How much have the Chinese and the Russians westernized themselves in course of industrialization? They are successful industrially. They have sometimes changed the tools to fit in to their convenience.

### SESSION III : A CITY OF CREATIVITY AND FRUSTRATION

#### PAPER DISCUSSED

*The Growing Community of Scientists in Calcutta.* by PURNIMA SINHA

*Samik Bnadopadhyaya*

From my personal experience I know that industrial suburban people from Calcutta are undertaking education in Calcutta including in science. The proportion of the boys from suburb is not known



but the barrier between the scientists and the subordinate rank of scientific workers namely the mechanic and mistry can be overcome if the scientific education is popularized.

The question is whether leading scientists have taken positive steps to popularize science among the wider section of the community which can take greater care and wider interest than the generation working at present. We get work from foreign scientists for popularizing science among lay men for creating interest but not from Indian scientists. Here only some journalists do the job who have got very little background in science.

In Calcutta, where creative interest and enthusiasm have been generated in various spheres, if scientists take a very positive role to popularize science, may be, a new class of people with greater enthusiasm for scientific research may emerge. I do not know whether this possibility has been taken up seriously by the scientists or the scientific personnel.

Mrs. Sinha has very rightly concentrated on the problem of physicists and chemists which probably she knows better. I believe there are people working in other disciplines of science specially anthropology where active participation of other disciplines is taking place. They would like to throw light on the problem from their points of view. It may be admitted that the problem varies from discipline to discipline.

*Tulika Sen*

Our social background is possibly responsible for the backwardness of our science. For generations we are made to learn that our elders are right. The relationship between the teacher and the taught is also of the same pattern. We do not dare to question and if we do so we meet the consequences. Informal talk with the teacher is also not possible. It is only in India that review of papers are made in pseudo names. Also some sort of colonial, bureaucratic and zamindari attitude which are the legacy of the past also persists in the field of scientific research.

*Amlan Datta*

Let us concentrate ourselves on the main theme of Mrs. Sinha's paper. I think she has successfully shown that Hindu religion does not stand in the way of scientific advancement.

Another point she has raised is that scientists are still a small group and this stands in the way of easy and frequent interaction. Also the gap between the scientists and artisans is real and is a factor that serves as a barrier to progress.

*Nihar Ranjan Ray*

I do not know how scientists are working in laboratories in Calcutta at present. I know a little about how earlier scientists worked. As the Chairman of a committee of the C S I. R. for seven years I had occasions to visit various laboratories under the organization. Quite a lot of money has been made available for these laboratories. As a result lot of instruments have been bought.

I have seen Prof. C. V. Raman working. He worked in his laboratory since early morning quite unassumingly and would even not hesitate to repair the instruments himself. I have also seen Shri J C. Bose. Although he observed a certain degree of extra sophistication and may be termed as *babu*, yet he would work along with the *mistry* for repairing his instruments.

When we did not have enough money we were compelled to make and repair our instruments ourselves. Today the situation is different. We get lakhs of rupees for our instruments which we import from foreign countries. We use instruments but we do not know how they are made and repaired. The fundamental question is that if one does not know how an instrument is made, how is he to use it. I ask this to the scientists. Here the situation is that when an instrument goes out of order, it remains idle and unrepaired so long a mechanic from W. Germany does not come to repair it. Thus instruments worth millions of rupees lie idle in unrepaired state in our laboratories.

*Baidyanath Saraswati*

The learned speakers' comment that cooperation and mutual exchange of data is absolutely necessary for the development of science

is very true. In course of my work on pottery I found that potters of India do not teach certain techniques of pottery making such as glazing etc. even to their daughters, because they fear that their secrets may pass on from one family to another.

Looking back to our tradition of learning we notice that learning of sanskrit called *Dev Vani* was confined to the Brahmins only. Brahmins alone could decide who could be *adhikary* or eligible for learning. Certain *vidyas* were called *guhya vidya* or secret learning. Many crafts disappeared because the secrets could not pass on from the craftman to others. Perhaps this state of affairs is not peculiar to India. It came in the newspapers recently that the people of China have not been told that the Americans have landed on the Moon twice. I do not know if the secretive character is peculiar to the Asiatic mode of learning.

The relationship between *guru-shishya* and *shishya-shishya* is traditional to our country and India has been at the top in the past so far as the history of science is concerned. I would therefore, beg to differ from Mrs. Sen in criticising the traditional mode of learning in a blanket manner

*Surajit Sinha*

I am in full agreement with Mrs. Sinha about utilizing our accustomed social norms to scientific activity. I would first deal with the question of the role of informal relationship raised by Mrs. Sen. The informal relationship is a double edged instrument. If you look at the history of the development of scientific tradition in Calcutta you will certainly realize that the kind of relationship that existed between P. C. Ray and his disciples was not totally inconducive to science. Actually P. C. Ray was able to enthuse a band of scientists whose involvement in research activities continued for more than a decade. Take the case of terminologies used in our laboratories such as *dada*, *master moshai* or even perhaps *guru*. One may jump to a conclusion by using Parsonian dichotomies that here is 'tradition vis-a-vis 'modernity' running rampant. I asked

a capable researcher about the role of this *dada* model in our laboratories and I was told that it makes people easily approachable which would otherwise not be possible in a formal bureaucracy. An incapable *dada* would of course create lot of difficulties as is the case in many laboratories in Calcutta. In other words we can not say that this form of relationship is 'good' or 'bad' in a blanket manner. But it appears on the basis of the little record of effective operation of science in Calcutta that the prospects of informal mode of relationship is not as gloomy as might be assumed if you look at it in terms of uncritical acceptance of either Parsonian or Weberian model or the kind of stereotypes which the Britishers used to impress upon us as the constraints of a national character. The main source of failure of scientific research in post-independence India is not the assertion of traditionalism but the historical situation in which opportunities have opened up too fast without the availability of properly trained man power. As a result a group of mediocres have often come to occupy many of the new positions.

### *Kanan Bagchi*

Relationship between the student and teacher in former days were somewhat informal because, say during the time I was a student, there were ten or twelve teachers for about twenty students in the Geography Department of the University. Now the number of students has gone up to seventy or more for each year while the number of teachers remain constant.

Another factor that affects the situation is that the teachers and the taught can not shut themselves exclusively in the laboratories. Outside events, either local or national or even international, have their repercussions in the laboratories as well.

Also now-a-days the students do not make up their mind about ultimate vocation before loosing a number of years. In a number of cases the students are equally bright for either science and politics and the pull between the two affects the total situation.

Again, I do not think the knowledge of repairing the sophisticated instruments made by specialized talents is prerequisite to their use,

I use X-ray apparatus to find out the atomic structure of clay in the alluvium but I can not repair them, but I hope I continue to remain a successful geographer.

*Ranjit Bhattacharya*

The question as to why science is not developing in our country is being answered here in speculative terms. The development of science in fact depends upon the attitudes of the scientists themselves. The real motive of acquiring scientific education appears to be governed by our desire to be better placed in life. The pursuit of scientific education in our city, therefore, is not often with the genuine motive of the quest for knowledge. Had this been so the problem of interaction with the mechanic and the scientist or even the problem of formal or informal collaboration between scientists would have not been a difficult one. With genuine interest in our work we can overcome these difficulties. So the problem remains why there is lack of genuine interest in the pursuit of science for its own sake.

*Purnima Sinha*

As to the question of genuine interest raised by Mr. Ranjit Bhattacharya, I would say that there is considerable difference in attitudes towards the pursuit of knowledge between those who work for Ph D and those who are job holders. The former have genuine involvement in their work and the latter seem to be more inclined towards maintaining and upgrading their position in the job hierarchy. As such, a good part of our genuine research efforts are limited to the level of doctoral work.

Mr. Bhattacharya has advocated the popularization of science by scientists. If the scientists who are so small in number undertake the task of popularising science their own work is bound to suffer. As for example we are drawing very heavily upon our top scientists like Prof. Satyen Bose or Prof. D. M. Bose and it may not be wise to put further strain on them. We are already trying to popularise science through such projects as "Science for children" and "National

Talent Search" etc. I have a feeling that if we bring boys from suburbs in small proportion they may suffer from inferiority complex and the situation may not be quite conducive to the growth of science. This problem may perhaps be overcome if *large number of suburban boys come for studying science.*

In answering to Prof. Ray I would recount my own experience of work under Prof. Satyen Bose. I had to prepare an X-ray tube, required for my work, under the instruction of Prof. Bose. I had to do that in collaboration with a senior scholar and for that I had to frequent junk stores for spares and spend two long years only in the preparation of the instrument. The period I took for my Ph. D. was five years. At present it may not be wise for our scientists to devote so much of their time in preparing an instrument they may require for their work. We are in an age that is fast moving where we cannot avoid appropriate role specialization. We do not lack in the basic intellect required for making or repairing instruments. Our problem is that we do not know how to interact with the mechanics.

The lack of mutual exchange of data is not only traditional as exemplified by Dr. Saraswati with the case of potters. It is present even in our laboratories and, in fact, we are perhaps a little more secretive in the sphere of our work than the traditional potters. The secrecy of the traditional potters had at least a social and technological function namely, to keep the knowledge confined to a hereditary group and to maintain a certain standard of excellence. Unco-operativeness and secrecy in our laboratories do not have any social or scientific objective. It is mainly aimed at preserving self-interest in a scarce and uncertain job market. Further, the secrecy is also because science has brought power. Pursuit of knowledge alone is not a factor in the advancement of science to-day. Secrecy has to be maintained in some cases for national interest although the discipline demands free interaction among all men. We have to suffer from a sort of tension due to this political impediment standing in the way of free interaction.

## PAPER DISCUSSED

*Social and Cultural World of the Men of Literature.* by ALOKE RANJAN DASGUPTA.

*The Drama Movement in Bengal : 1944-69.* by SAMIK BANDOPADHYAYA.

*Painters and Sculptors in Calcutta.* by MOHIM ROODRO.

*Dancers in Calcutta.* by MANJUSRI CHAKI-SARKAR.

*Movie Makers of Calcutta* by MRINAL SEN.

*Co-existence of many Musical Traditions* by RAJYESWAR MITRA.

*Samik Bandopadhyaya*

In the second, third and fourth paper we have tried to make a common case for some kind of Governmental or society based initiative in providing these three fields of culture, the drama, the Movie and the art and sculpture with some kind of place or forum where we can exhibit our works or contribution better. For any experimental effort in these field we are dealing with a special kind of language—the dramatic language, the romantic language of art that requires initiation for the general members of the community. It is not always recognized that almost same kind of intellectual effort is necessary to appreciate these different kinds of art as it is necessary to understand literature. Again unless the community is exposed to the language of art for a considerable period of time and is given a chance to see and judge the objects of art it is not to be blamed. This is a minimum requirement for the development of honest allegiance to art.

Mr. Mrinal Sen for example referred to 13 film societies and a part of new emergent audience for appreciating new kind of film but probably most of us know what an infinitesimal fringe we have been able to reach. So levels of responses for appreciation will not undergo a change unless we expose the widest section of the people to our production in the field. The same is applicable to the case of artists, the theatre movement and sculptors.

The artists and sculptors need a gallery which could provide real opportunity for exhibition at the lowest possible cost. The theatre

people need a stage for their performances easily. So basically the problem boils down to the same point.

In case of the community of dancers although Mrs. Sarkar has referred to Tagore's contribution in introducing a kind of respectability for dancing in Calcutta, she has missed a point that there has never been any real dance tradition in Bengal as it is in South India or in some parts of North India. As we are not used to the dance as a form we do not respond to it and we do not have the Bengali audience for the dance. There is no use blaming the critics. We just don't know the dance and that is the problem. So even when Uday Shankar or his great successor Santi Kumar Bardhan had to work creatively in the field of dance they had to leave Calcutta and go elsewhere. So with all the blending of styles and with all the imaginations in choreography unless the dance is correlated to the urban culture of Calcutta we can not hope to make any real creative impact in the field of dance and I expect Mrs. Sarkar to tell something more on the problem in the light of her experience

Only recently two outstanding Kathakali artists Kalamandalam Krishna Nayar and Karunakaram Nayar visited Calcutta and performed some traditional dance dramas in traditional Kathakali. It was a real improvisation on an old style using new contents. This should have been an event in Calcutta. I attended both the performances and in an auditorium containing one thousand audience I carefully estimated the Bengalis to be 10 out of 1000; others were mostly South Indians. I, therefore, have a serious doubt that those who attend Tagore dance dramas do so for any sincere and honest interest in the dance. Probably they go to hear songs and to see some colour and spectacle. So the absence of basic focal response to dance is a problem. Uday Sankar did not exploit, the success he had, fully with the diligence the artists show in other fields; as Mrinal Sen and Satyajit Ray have shown in the field of movie making, and other artists show in theatre.

*Radha Raman Mitra*

Shri M. Roodra has stated that Government college of Arts and Crafts came into being in 1864. In fact it came into existence in



1854. Houston Pratt of Bengal Civil Service called a meeting mostly of Europeans in which a few Indians had also participated. According to the decision taken in the meeting the institution was established at a place where the Basumati Sahitya Mandir is situated at present. At that time it was only a Government aided institution but subsequently in 1864 it became a full fledged Government institution.

### *Ajita Chakravorty*

There appears to be a sort of universal contradiction on the question of the livelihood of the artists and I wonder if Calcutta can overcome this dilemma. Buying and hanging a piece of art is an expensive luxury and the artist would certainly like their work to go in the hands of those who like and appreciate it. Their art lovers are, however, hard up and can not afford to spend money for the piece of arts they like. In Delhi, however, possession of, say for example, the work of a Gujral is a status symbol and some business executives have it for that sake. Calcutta does not have any such tradition.

Again the question of Government patronage of the artists and sculptors introduces a paradoxical situation in the sphere. Too much of dependence on Government patronage is also not very conducive to the development of art.

### *Purnima Sinha*

As for the resentment expressed by Shri Roodra over absence of good market for the pieces of art and sculptors although expenditure on other entertainments are freely incurred I would like to point out that expenditure on entertainments like a film show involves only time. Time does not occupy space. A picture or a sculpture however, occupies space and there is acute problem of living space in the city. To get out of the difficulties I would offer a practical suggestion that a box should be kept behind a piece of art in the gallery where lovers of art may put some money as a token of their appreciation.

### *P. K. Das Gupta*

Modern creative artists usually portray the picture of city life as full of frustration and disorganization. The comparative study of

rural and urban based films makes it clear. Compared to Satyajit Ray's 'Pather Panchali' dealing with rural life his 'Mahanagar' based on urban setting is a picture of frustration. Similarly Mrinal Sen's 'Bhuban Shome' seems to get his mental balance when he moves to rural atmosphere. I would like to raise the question whether in the eyes of the creative artists the city life is only a picture of frustration and disorganization.

### *Surajit Sinha*

I am trying to respond to all the six papers with an effort to find some common denominator. It appears that the creative artists in all the six fields are trying to find their place as 'modern' creative artists with a base in Calcutta. Now, what is their nature of modernity? It varies to a certain extent from one medium to another. In some of the media, the trend is more or less towards completely accepting 'imported' modes and in others the effort is towards naturalizing them. For example, in modern painting and sculpture, the history is pretty specific, namely the model is entirely Western and foreign which the Calcutta painters and and sculptors are trying to absorb in the home ground with modes whose basis were more or less worked out elsewhere. Their main effort is to naturalize the technical and spiritual element of the whole system. In the case of the movie makers and the people involved in modern drama movement also we know that a good part of the inspiration has come from the West. In movie it has come not only in the form of mode of expression but also in terms of tools and equipments. But fortunately or unfortunately, these have to be used with such a concrete medium, namely, the local human beings. Thus there is a compelling pressure of localism or regionalism upon it which is not there in fields like painting and the plastic arts which are amenable to more abstract expressions.

In the case of music and dance we come to a third category, namely, the creative modern expressive efforts primarily use native folk and classical forms. Modern cultured taste in Calcutta does include a taste for classical Indian music. Calcutta continues to patronize classical musicians in a generous manner. As a result the top creative artists (this level does not include the performers in

Rabindra Sangeet) meet the modern world with a confidence without really bothering whether they are 'modern' or not. The most effective creative innovation in music in Calcutta, namely, Rabindra Sangeet, although incorporating some Western musical forms, is primarily built on Indian Classical and folk traditions.

I would like to know from the participants in this seminar how they assess the role of the existence of a strong aesthetic tradition in a particular field, or the absence of such a heritage, in affecting the quality of the different creative arts in Calcutta. If we assume that exponents of modern creative arts in Calcutta to-day are not primarily stimulated by nationalism what are the major social and cultural pressures to which are they responding? How do they assess the impact of cultural communication between decisively dominant West and the decisively subordinate (in technology and economy) in India (including Calcutta)?

*Barun De*

Last year it became rather evident in one or two seminars on social sciences in Delhi and in Simla that a group of scholars were very interested in attacking the Western impact on the development of creativity in India. The way this was done was to say that Indians have responded in 19th and 20th centuries in the field of the creative arts and also in the field of academic knowledge only to the initiatives that have been put forward by the West.

There were two forms to that attack on Indian creativity. One was what I will call in my own shorthand, the *Sanghi* version, the Jansang version, which said that there should be the development of Indian creativity. With the term Indian not always explained these group in some sense reject all Western influences on Indian creativity as being either controlled by outside, foreign controlled or based on what is being called a craze for foreign. This is the modern *Sanghi* version that certain approaches should be attacked as imperialist, neo-imperialists, proto-colonialist and all the jargon that people pick up from other sources which do not always have the premises. That is one type of variant.

The other types of variant was to say, and this has been said in many seminars, that the way in which creativity has developed in India is the product of historical circumstances, which historical circumstances were the composite of the development of culture under imperialism. Today our culture, whether it is developing or not, should be developing outside imperialism. Therefore, we should not accept any influences from the Western world. The question of whether we should accept influences from the Eastern world, particularly China, is quite often avoided in this sort of argument. But at least it has been said that we should not accept any influences from the Western world. Therefore, we should have an indigenous development of creativity of our own.

This problem, I think, could be answered not by the scholars who have their own theories to trot out but by practioners in the field of creative art. The question is in two forms. Later on, I will give one or two reasons why this interest sparked off this morning. The question—first : do practioners feel that their creativity or the roots of their creativity, I mean social roots not individual roots, has been sparked off by Western influence? Secondly, whatever be the answers to this question, do they think if it has been sparked off, this is something that they consider to be desirable ? These are the two questions what I am asking in general to those who feel it necessary to reply to the points that are being raised.

Why I raise this question is because, I personally think that one need not have straight answers and the best example of it I got from what Shri Mrinal Sen said so perspicuously about the movie maker. He made certain points which are very relevant to this question. The first one was his emphasis on how there was this breadth of fresh air in new forms in the movie in Calcutta in the early 1950's as a result of seeing internationally reputed films. The point of all that he was saying is that one seeks far too much meaning in a creative activity. All that he was saying was that the people saw a few movies in Calcutta. These movies were being made available from a certain channel which are a group of films coming from the West. But they

need not come from the West. They might have some from somewhere else. As it happened there was no creative movie in India just as that time and a certain stimulus came from outside and there was a reaction to it. But that reaction was an *indigenous* reaction to it.

The second point that he made was intriguing. He emphasized immediately after that the development of Satyajit Ray in terms of this great 'gusto of mind', far more than a breadth, which was 'Pather Panchali' both to the movie maker, I suppose, but certainly to the audiences who learnt to look for something new. Could there be yet another stimulus and that was the direct institutional stimulus of the fact that a few of Satyajit Ray's group worked for "renaissance" in the filming the River, if I am not incorrect on this point.

Now, why I am raising this is because this has appeared to me as an example of how the Renaissance takes place in Bengal. I happened to have known closely, at that period of time the cameraman of 'Pather Panchali' who, I do know was very greatly stimulated by the experience of looking for new things in filming the River and I can remember the institutional way in which this developed in his case and in the case of the group of which he was only a part. They look for the same sort of images that we found in the River in the short film they had made either of Paus Utsab in Santiniketan or of the small documentary that they have attempted to make of Konarak.

The question that I am trying to ask, I am asking this in a tortured way, because I think it is not a easy question to ask or it is a more difficult one, I think, to answer. Were these experiences of working under Western stimulus the only or the guiding reasons for doing what they did in 'Pather Panchali' or were these 'stimuli' only parts of a much broader response to the environment in Calcutta—the whole of which they distilled into their actual work as it developed in Pather Panchali? The point being was the stimulus the main urge or was it only a part of a set of broader urge? This is the question that I am asking.

Mrinal Sen again pointed out that Satyajit Ray in the words of the Lue Male was a product of the Renaissance. Now this is the actual work of Renaissance, the production of creativity in response to one's own environment, partly under foreign stimulus. But all the question that he delved, whether there is a Renaissance in Bengal, whether it was a sham Renaissance, whether it was a colonial Renaissance, whether it was stultified or whether as Prof. R. K. Das Gupta has recently said in a book which is about to be published, a non-renaissance, an impoverished Renaissance. All these questions hinged on this point. What was the factorial element of the foreign stimulus. My own answers would be that factorial element of this stimulus was important, but not so important that it can be used as a term of abuse or as a term of praise. But there could be another answer that the factorial element was so great that it stultifies the whole concept of Renaissance and that the second answer is often given by the people of all shades of ideological pigments ranging from Sanghi variety to the left extremist Marxist variety and I am seeking an answer to that in terms of the practical experience of those who have participated in creation.

*Manjusree Chaki-Sarkar*

I would agree with Mr. Samik Bandopadhyay about the absence of appropriate criticism in Bengal in the field of dancing but not about what he said in respect of the sympathetic audience. It is, however, a fact that the audience in South India is more technically alert than in Bengal. Excepting a short span of 3 years, I have throughout been in Calcutta and in spite of odds, I have been able to keep my interest in dancing alive. I will have to explain this in terms of general stimulus in the Calcutta environment. The absence of adequate audience at a classical performance in Calcutta can be explained by a similar situation where Rabindranath's drama is performed at Ahmedabad or Madras. It is wrong to assume that one is not interested in dance if he is not able to appreciate Kathakali, Kathak or Bharat Natyam. In spite of my involvement in the dancing profession, I too am, quite often, unable to be inspired by classical dance. The generation that has been brought up in Tagorian tradition is different

from those brought up within the classical tradition. An example from the classical dance will explain the situation. When Draupadi expresses her love or when she fondly asks for *parijat* flower, she ultimately describes the eyes of Bhim as a lotus and thus makes it clear that she wanted Bhim. Things do not appeal to us now if they are expressed in such a round about fashion.

### *Mrinal Sen*

The charge levelled against me for painting the picture of city as full of frustration and disorganization is incorrect and based on misunderstanding. I have no undue passion for the village. In my film I have simply made fun of the absurd business of bureaucracy in the city.

Dr. Barun De has made my task more complicated. I think the business of creativity is too complex for a man like me to comprehend. For this one does not have to build a case for Indian tradition. In making a picture I try to put my views objectively. I am not anatomically separable from Indian tradition. I am rather a logical extension of the Indian tradition and within this tradition I observe the conventions for the artists in the particular line. The tools and equipments I use have the properties of their own which are not unique for any particular country. If you speak about Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* as an Indian theme, can we say 'Nayak' to be Indian picture in the same way? I question the existence of any national cinema but I do not deny the existence of Indian tradition. Although I derive enormous lessons from foreign films but while engaged in making my own film I am to act within the framework of Indian tradition and I do not feel ashamed if I bring some innovations within the sphere of my work. Some foreign critics commenting on my film '*Bhuban Shome*' has said that it has Western influence but is Indian to the core. It was meant as a compliment but I do not profess to understand it. A film is an Indian as far as it is physically perceptible in dress, ornaments and landscape. Beyond this the whole picture is my personal realization.

REPORT ON AN *ADDA* AT DR. SURAJIT SINHA'S  
HOUSE ON 20th FEBRUARY, 1970

SAMIK BANDOPADHYAYA  
*Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta*

The dialogue started off with a few questions as to whether the works of the modern artists of Calcutta had in themselves certain weaknesses which stood in the way of general public appreciation ; doubts were raised as to the national affiliations of these works of art ; questions were posed as to whether these works were not too derivative from western models.

Answering these questions, Shri Mohim Roodro said, "Modern Art is the product of the fusion of all art forms anywhere in the world. The awareness may have come first to certain men in the West who felt that art had come to a dead end. But modern art as it stands today is an international heritage." Dr. Alokeranjan Dasgupta added, "We often take our own forms from the West after they have rediscovered these forms. Marianne Moore is one of the major poets who have responded to Eastern experiences. Allen Ginsberg has been influenced by certain elements in the poetry of Sunil Gangopadhyay. Modern poetry in the United States responds not only to the Ganges in Banares, or to hashish, but to something more, to something more essentially Indian, an Indian mood. It would not be true to say that their attitude is only one of a master race towards the conquered race. It would not be true to say that they hand down elements to us from the heights of civilization and that we are in the receiving end, sitting in the depths of poverty."

Shri Mrinal Sen said : "I have to respond properly to the needs of the machine at my command. I have to respond to the urge of the world within myself and outside myself. With the tremendous achievements of science and technology, with the compression of time and space, we have a persistent fear that we may lose our identities. From that haunting fear we try to cling to traditions or to



a sense of Indianness. Ozu the Japanese director is often described as one who produces truly Japanese films. We always place the camera on the ground, he uses a low angle viewpoint because the Japanese sit on the ground. It is only a particular style based on a particular rational. In fact Ozu often makes a fetish of it. Kurosawa's characters move differently, speak differently in his 'medieval' films and in his 'modern' films. Noh and Kabuki elements are obvious in the movements of his characters in his 'medieval' films. The pattern of disintegrated visuals used so effectively in the traditional Kabuki technique to show an emotional transition can be consciously used in a contemporary situation to provide a more cinematic expression than the usually literal exploitation of the camera properties. My brain starts operating from the Japanese experience, that's all. This is the kind of cross-fertilization that goes on all the time. I have the freedom to do as I like depending on the properties—there lies my only limitation. Otherwise I am exposed to the world I see, I am exposed to the films I see. I can personalize all these experiences. That becomes my own. I forget that I am an Indian. I react simply as a man.

"I discovered a little of myself in the principal character of Roman Polanski's film *Knife on the Water*, an intense probing into an apparently happy marital relationship. I don't have to be a Pole to respond to this crisis. Without any experience of war, I could respond to the crisis at the core of Andrej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*. Intellectually I could merge completely with its principal character."

Emphasizing the modern artist's basic commitment to his form and to his individual artistic conscience, Shri Mrinal Sen said, "Champions of tradition often reach absurd conclusions. Sri Ashok Mitra had once shown excerpts from *Pather Panchali*, *Battleship Potemkin*, Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*, Clouzot's *Picasso*, to one of the remotest Santhal communities, and claimed that he saw the reverence of a new experience on their faces, though they did not have the benefit of the spoken word. They are said to have discovered the logical extensions of their own traditions in the ceremonial and rituals of the 'Mexican's film or in the Odessa Steps sequence

in *Battleship Potemkin*, when they remembered their own past struggles. Such championship of the sensibilities of a tradition-bound people I regard as fake. Chidananda Dasgupta once told me that his servant found a Jamini Roy-painting lifelike. I said that my servant would never say such a thing."

"When Flaherty showed his film *Nanook of the North*, filmed entirely in Eskimoland to an Eskimo audience, they once looked at the screen and then at the projector. As a seal came straight towards them on the screen, they jumped on the screen only to find the pictures on their back, which they naturally found funny. It is a kind of participation, but it does not spring from any artistic stimulation; it is a purely physical participation."

"Any art form, especially the cinema, is largely a technocrat's medium; hence without an awareness of the medium and its limitations, there can be no proper aesthetic response. A physical participation is just scratching on the surface; the arrow does not quiver into the flesh."

Sm. Manjusree Sarkar said that the audience in India is too tradition-bound. The Western auditor in his turn has his own conception of the traditional Indian dancer. "In the West", Sm. Sarkar said, "my individual creative role is not recognized properly. I am compelled to present myself in terms of their conception of the traditional Indian temple dancer." Sm. Sarkar complained against the predominance of *srinagara* in our traditional dance expression and the associations thereof. Very few Indian dancers can go beyond these traditional associations and bring in any considerable creative thinking into the performance. While modern Western ballet is prepared to lift its idioms from anywhere in the world, the Indian dancer is inhibited by his tradition.

Speaking about the Indian spectator, Sm. Sarkar complained, "The spectator is not yet mature enough to react aesthetically, to accept a female dancer as a dancer; to the spectator she is still only a young girl, a performer exploiting certain physical attributes. Historically speaking, it was Tagore's interest in the dance that

created a non-professional interest in the dance ; girls from respectable families learnt dancing ; but the dance was not cultivated as an art form ; it was more a social form than an artistic form." Sm. Sarkar said that she had found greater communication in the West between dancers and artists in other creative fields, something that she misses here.

Taking up the last point, Sm. Purnima Sinha tried to explain it in terms of a quantitative drawback : "We have too small number of adequately trained practitioners" She raised the question whether the inadequate development of science and technology in our country affects the creative expression of the artists.

Answering her question, Shri Mrinal Sen said, "We do not have the proper creative atmosphere". He spoke at length about a Canadian short film which captures a game of tennis faithfully ; "not a stroke is missed" ; and yet in terms of time it is a faithful record of the game in question, though normally filmic time is shorter than actual time, and time has to be elongated so that a split second accident on the screen takes longer than actual. Yet this film, which is a remarkable cinematic experience, can be made with the simplest gadgets which were available to us way back in 1925. In fact, Shri Sen pointed out the new generation has a greater familiarity with the new mechanism, which places them in a more advantageous position. He referred to his son seeing a flash of lightning and immediately thinking in terms of "a flash on a 70 mm screen."

Shri Sen took up the point of the Western response to Indian creative expression and said "Treating our arts and artists as exhibits of an exotic or primitive phase is more a part of the political attitudes of the English-speaking world than an attitude shared by the continentals. The English have left our country. But from a sense of intellectual superiority they refuse to grant us the liberty of reacting or responding in the urban manner. They refuse to recognize that alienation on so many planes can be our problem too".

Dr. Surajit Sinha pointed out how American sociologists tend to highlight to a disproportionate extent Caste in India and Calcutta as an overgrown village. The emergent urban features of life in

this country are not properly explored ; there is a proliferation of Caste studies as if modern Indian has no other problem.

Dr. Sinha was not convinced of the truth of the suggestion that there was in Calcutta serious lack of coordination between creative artists. Speaking of an American experience, Dr. Sinha said : "I interviewed forty top social scientists at Stanford Behavioural Sciences Centre. I asked them a number of simple questions : how many of you know a creative artist ? a member of the Senate ? a moviemaker ? Almost cent percent answered nil. On the other hand, any one of us here would know an important dancer, a political leader, a moviemaker. The class at the top here is so small that the very demography of it pushes us to get to a very wide dimension. It is an advantageous situation. The average American has a broadbased participation in life. But in the intellectual or higher creative sphere, he moves about in loneliness. He would have to come all the way to India to know a major creative artist, a Satyajit Ray, a Mrinal Sen or a Mohim Roodro. On the other hand, this gathering itself disproves the point about a lack of communication".

Shri Samik Bandopadhyaya said that Dr. Sinha's contention was only "a half truth" ; for "we do know one another, but the knowing does not extend to the point of creative involvement". Dr. Aloke-ranjan Dasgupta referred to Salvador Dali's collaboration with Banuel on a film. Shri Roodro said, "In Paris I found tremendous interaction between artists, dancers, writers, film-makers—Picasso doing backdrops for ballets and so on. We miss this creative interaction in Calcutta. It is a very unfortunate symptom".

Trying to explain this lack of communication between artists, Shri Bandopadhyaya referred to an investigation he had carried out among theatre workers, asking them why they did not think of trying to involve artists in other fields with their creative activity or to communicate with them. The answer he received in most cases was that they did not have the time. Professionally engaged elsewhere for almost the whole of the day, they could rehearse only between 7 and 9 P.M. Their devotion to their own form being primary, they could not afford to disturb the minimal rehearsal schedule.

Shri Bandopadhyaya commented, "We are passing through a difficult phase ; we have enough problems of our own to be solved by ourselves. At this stage itself, more communication will not be possible".

At this stage of the dialogue, Dr. Sinha asked the artist participants : "What are your social incentives ?" There was an immediate answer from Shri Mukul Roy, who said "The constraint itself may be the incentive." Shri Mrinal Sen commented, "It sounds too romantic".

Shri Arghya Kusum Dutta Gupta said that patronage had once been an incentive to creative endeavour. But the present situation is utterly chaotic in terms of social sustenance to the artist. He raised the question whether inspiration was in any way related to material prosperity or poverty.

Answering his question, Dr. Alokeranjan Dasgupta said that the Noh plays written in 15th century Japan were placid plays written in days of crisis ; while Kabuki with its emphasis on horror and greed was written in the 17th century, in days of peace and quiet and harmony. The Kabuki plays did not share the general temper of the period. Dr. Dasgupta drew the conclusion, "Art is not always positively related to the social context ; there is often a contradictory relationship ; it may often vary concomitantly".

Trying to answer Dr. Sinha's original question, Shri Samik Bandopadhyaya said, "From a number of social and historical factors, creativity in Calcutta is basically non-professional creativity ; artists have to be employed professionally elsewhere. Individual patronage and official support have never assumed any significant role in the creativity of this city. The responsibility of society towards the arts should be and is in fact being handled by an enlightened minority. Private patronage has never been an important factor behind creativity in Calcutta. It should not be allowed to become a factor ; for there is always the danger of interference.

Shri Bandopadhyaya referred to the experience of Shri Mrinal Sen, who had not been provided with the basic opportunities of filmmaking in Calcutta for five years. Yet his new film "Bhuvan Shome",

defying all the conventional formulae of the box office, has proved to be a success. It is a reward that Shri Sen richly deserves for his fidelity to his form and to his artistic self. It is just likely that some one some day will like a painting by Mohim Roodra and would like to possess it, someone not expected to like it.

Shri Roodro commented, "Our incentive is something of a mystical faith" Shri Mrinal Sen spoke of his own experience, "I have never had a second experience with the same producer. Every single film I have made so far has made the chances of making a second film lesser. Yet I persist in film-making. For one who wants to serve one's conscience, one has to go on working, almost with the passionate involvement of a wholetime political worker. It is a passion for the art form, an urge to communicate that saves us from the lesser temptations of simple security. It is a mystical involvement". Shri Roodro said, "I have a tremendous faith in our educated middle class. This middle class as yet does not afford to buy our paintings. Yet it constitutes the main feeder of our inspiration, our soil. I am confident that this class will respond some day. That faith sustains me. I do not know when it will happen. It must happen all on a sudden".

Shri Roodro suggested, "If this community learns to feel the urgency to go to an exhibition, we can introduce gate-money at our exhibitions. When our people are willing to spend one rupee to see an exhibition, it will be a major step to a partial solution for our problem". Dr. Alokaranjan Dasgupta referred to an occasion a few years back when Sudhindranath Dutta, the celebrated poet sponsored a poetry reading session for which gate-money was charged and the Mohabodhi Society Hall had a full house. Shri Roodro stated that the proposal for charging gate-money at art exhibitions had been mooted by Shri Jyotirmoy Dutta who calculated that a lac of rupees could be collected in a year in this way.

Dr. Surajit Sinha complained that the discussion was confined to universals, the problems that modern creative workers would face anywhere in the world. But, he asked, "Can individual mystique alone explain Calcutta's participation in the creative experience,

in spite of a serious lack of incentives ? Or should we underline a historical pressure ?" 'Dr. Sinha tried to trace back creativity in Calcutta to the *bhadralok* culture that developed in Calcutta in the 19th century or even earlier. "To belong to the world of intellection, to belong to the world of *charcha*, this was a birthright or one of the desirables of this culture. For a *bhadralok* to write poetry, to make movies when the medium became available, or to avoid the easy way to success in commerce and undergo privations for a cause was accepted as natural. Dr. Sinha commented : "A historical structure provides the basic incentive to creativity in Calcutta. The Permanent Settlement had helped in a way, for after the Settlement, the Bengali middle class chose to keep away from commerce and industry. Call them as you like, the *bhadraloks* or the *babus*, they had chosen a wide world of *charcha*. There is thus a long chain of many people belonging to a common world of intellection ; this tradition hangs on us super-organically".

Shri Samik Bandopadhyay had a "tentative" suggestion on the matter . "There has been in recent years a quantitative and qualitative expansion of creativity which I cannot trace to the 19th century tradition ; for this has been only a very recent development. There must have been a more immediate provocation apart from the 19th century tradition. The freedom movement had provided artists with a political interest. To be aware of international political developments was part of being cultured, an attitude reflected in the monthly 'Prabasi'. But after independence and especially after the split in left politics, there was a loss of a focal centre. Artists had for a long time felt that by joining or just remaining close to a leftwing party, they could keep their national, social and international commitment. At first the commitment to national independence and then the commitment to Leftism had been the artist's way to social responsibilities. After these simple commitments had been shaken up, the need was felt for a more autonomous creative existence. Our emphasis on the word 'mystical' can be understood only from this perspective. Politics no longer provides a safe shelter for the artist. This itself provides a creative urge, a search for a distinctive creative identity, not necessarily remote from political overtones and yet the

result of the political erosion." Dr. Surajit Sinha said that social correlations cannot be applied too strictly to the arts, for the art forms have to be considered more in terms of dynasties of styles.

Shri Prashanta Sanyal complained that selfconsciousness in a particular group of the community is outstripping creativity; creativity is diminishing concomitantly with the development of selfconsciousness. This selfconsciousness, Shri Sanyal claimed, is very largely artificial, without any social foundations: "Our international connexions are superficial enough, so that we remain Krishna Menon-type Indians". Addressing the artist participants, he said: "You have become too much the victims of critics, from your selfconsciousness. Whenever you choose a medium, you ask yourselves: is it valid by the standards of so and so? I consider it a self-negating process". Shri Mrinal Sen commented: "It is difficult to draw a line between selfconsciousness and selfimportance, the latter serving as a creative stimulant". Shri Sanyal said, "Art needs a sanction beyond art, which we are lacking today".

Dr. Surajit Sinha said that the Parsi/Gujrati middle class of Bombay has a different background from the Bengali middle class—a background in commerce and industry, craft and agriculture. He asked, "Does this background affect their creativity in any way? Is there any difference there in the patronage pattern?"

Answering Dr. Sinha's question, Shri Mrinal Sen said that their rootlessness has led to a ruthlessness among Bombay's young intellectuals; it is a very effective ruthlessness that finds expression in the short films they make; they can go beyond the mores of the establishment from their moral or social nonconformism and can operate with greater cross-fertilization.

Dr. Purnima Sinha said that the participation of Sarabhai or the Tatas in Science has been fruitful. She also pointed out that scientists in Bombay have a closer relationship with the technicians or mechanics, from their business or artisan background.

Shri Prashanta Sanyal said that Bombay should not be confused with Maharashtra or Gujarat: "those whom Mrinal Sen has observed



are not the authentic Bombay types, they are a minority". Shri Mrinal Sen admitted, "They do not have the political or social involvement we have in Bengal. They often take political attitudes as fashions. Yet their nonconformism contributes to their creativity".

Dr. Surajit Sinha referred to an anthropologist friend of his who complains that Calcutta cannot take new things; people here are said to be very reticent about taking new material items or material consumption habits. This friend of his feels that on the cultural level also Bengalees are resistant to absorbing new things. Shri Mohim Roodro asked whether it is a virtue to take over new things without any serious consideration "It is more important to absorb". Shri Ranjit Bhattacharya asked "Is this resistance to new things a part of our *bhadralok* culture, or is there a sense of risk from our basic condition of poverty?"

At a second informal sitting, Dr. Purnima Sinha raised the question of internal constraints in creativity. Answering her questions, Shri Mrinal Sen spoke of the father image presented by veterans in particular fields and how it inhibits creativity and related this phenomenon to the conventions of religion and politics in this country. He complained that the importance of particular works is often exaggerated from the small output in general. He complained against the irresponsibility and ignorance of statements on films made by important public figures. He admitted that idealizations of the national or racial temperament sometimes tended to inhibit a more critical or ironic treatment of some social tendency; but exposure to creative attitudes abroad helped the modern creative artist to be more daring and nonconformist. He referred to the recent growth of an anti-establishment minority, which sustained modern creativity.

Shri Mohim Roodro said that the fewness of artists and connoisseurs alike created a kind of parochialism. He said that direct censure by an artist of another artist's work never affected personal relationships abroad, while such censure would create complications here.

Dr. Purnima Sinha asked whether religious or regional factors inhibited creativity in any way. She said that religious faith, predominant in the United States, did not affect scientific activity.

Shri Mrinal Sen, Shri Mohim Roodro and Shri Samik Bandyopadhyaya said that religious convictions did not interfere with creativity in Calcutta, as far as the important artists were concerned.

Shri Mrinal Sen referred to the long tradition in Calcutta of the *adda*, an informal get-together of people with a wide variety of interests, acting as a stimulant to creative thinking; and complained that artists showed a tendency of withdrawing into isolation once they reach a point of success. He found this a tendency that weakened the creative artist.

## GENERAL REMARKS BY SHRI RADHARAMAN MITRA

(translated from Bengali)

Respected Chairman and friends,

I have listened with great interest the papers presented by different scholars on different aspects of Calcutta life. I find all of them informative and substantial. You have labelled the Seminar as : 'a Seminar on Social and Cultural Profile of Calcutta'. I would like to know from you what you actually mean by the term 'profile'. Why do you use the term 'profile', instead of a more familiar term 'face'. If people of Europe could write a book entitled *Mind and Face of Bolshevism*, why do you avoid looking squarely on the face of Calcutta ? Is it because if you have preferred to have a partial view of it ? If you had made an effort to look at the full face of Calcutta you would have found not only diversity but varieties of 'contradictions' in this city. Only one of her eyes smiles, the other is full of tears. It appears to me that tears dominates her look, with rare breaks in flashes of smile.

We could laugh heartily in this city a hundred years ago. We had our laughter in theatre, in *adda*, even in our get together for smoking hemp ; the gay laughter was everywhere. How many of us can laugh heartily to-day ? Even the culture of *adda* which was the essence of Bengali life is drying up. To-day, old people like us, feel completely bewildered and move around aimlessly somewhat like the stray bulls of Burrabazar.

Should we remain contented just by bringing into relief the picture of utter despondency in the faces of Calcutta people ? Should we remain the same neutral spectators after going through the experience of this seminar, as we were before ? I think we should contribute in a positive manner to remove the anguish and squalor that pervades this city. How do we go about performing our task ? We must do something specific, not individually, but collectively in an organized manner. Our political leaders have been crying hoarse

about Socialism. The case for a socialist state's determination to remove poverty and inequality should be decisively tested in this city.

As I was listening to the papers on the various creative arts in Calcutta I was wondering how the artists could function in this general milieu of ugly poverty and social deprivation. Art is often ideally defined as the pursuit of Truth, Bliss and Beauty. I do not understand how the artists, dancers and musicians of Calcutta can pursue a serene path of excellence when he is surrounded on all sides by innumerable uprooted humanity for whom life is an uninterrupted sequence of misery. I feel that genuine art in this environment can only reflect social uprootedness and despair, and not joyous affirmation of life. When I move along the roads, lanes and alleys of Calcutta at night as a habitual wanderer I see the unbearable sight of hundreds of thousands of uprooted human beings. I often wonder how do I manage to preserve a will to survive in this helpless situation. I should have joined the dead instead. At least a hundred thousand human beings are destined to remain pavement dwellers for generations. They are born on the pavement, live there all their lives and die on the same pavement.

My earnest appeal to this gathering of scholars is that whether you pursue anthropology or sociology or psychology you will have to constantly keep in mind what exactly you are studying, for whom and how thoroughly you are doing your job. Your object of study has many facets and your mode of study will depend upon your notion of priorities. Let me give an example from history. Lenin died in 1924. Commenting on Lenin, Sir Winston Churchill stated that Lenin had the uncanny power of grasping the crux of the matter in a political situation, on which he hammered his actions. Even in literature and art a grasp of priority is most fundamental. I learn from the Seminar papers that the artists and the writers are feeling too lonesome? What is the source of this isolation? This happens only when the artists deliberately aim at keeping themselves isolated from the people. Personally, I cannot ever imagine that I would like to be so isolated from the main currents of our social life. My

appeal to you would be that you please do not keep yourselves confined to your ivory towers and throw yourself open in communion with the masses. No forces will then be able to subdue your endeavour. You must come out of a make-believe dream world and find your genuine place in the throbbing reality life in this city.

It is not true that the objective conditions of the material world determine our lives in a mechanical way. We also have a conscious role to play in guiding the course of history. Karl Marx has stated "we make our own history, but according to the historical conditions in which we have been born" We are, therefore, not mere passive spectators, more conscious and active role is demanded of us. If I have to give any concrete example of the ideal type dear to my heart I will point to my friend Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, the Chairman of this concluding session.\* I have some major ideological differences with Prof Bose but I have profound admiration for him. I admire his great mental powers, his remarkably active habits and warmth of heart. He is not merely an academic anthropologist. He has deeply immersed himself in the totality of Indian masses. His writings are vivid demonstrations of the depth of his life experience. This truly Bengali gentleman from Bagbazar is a living example of what I am trying to drive at in my meandering speech. I warmly wish that Professor Bose lives upto his 100th birthday. We have many more things to learn from him.

## CONCLUDING SPEECH BY PROFESSOR NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE

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It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I stand before you this evening. I was never told that this Seminar on Calcutta was being held on the occasion of my attainment of the age of 70. This puts me into a rather awkward position for I have always tried to forget my own age. Yet I am glad that the Indian Anthropological Society, whatever its excuse may have been, has been able to bring together a large number of scholars who have presented their views on different aspects of the social and cultural life of this city, and have made the two meetings extremely fruitful and educative. As all of us have listened to the speeches and papers of the different participants, we have been able to learn quite a lot about our old city. It will not be my purpose in any way to sum up the main points raised by the papers or the discussions but I have been struck by one particular aspect of the papers which you will please allow me to present before you. This seems to me to be of particularly great significance.

I shall begin with the comments of my friend, Shri Radha Raman Mitra. He has said that all our intellectual efforts should ultimately lead to some kind of moral action. They should help in the removal of the distress and poverty which we see all round us; and if intellectuals do not dedicate themselves to this task, their noble professions are of absolutely no use. I find myself largely in agreement with Radha Raman Babu on this score. But let me also remind him in great humility that it is often the habit of many people to rush into action without adequate intellectual preparation. Many of them try to imitate certain models of either social or political action which have proved successful in other countries. When they apply these remedies without adequate adaptation to the social situation in which they work, the results are often disastrous.

It is from this point of view that I believe that intellectual work and exercise is also necessary to a very large extent in order to make

a moral action really effective and meaningful. We must remember that even Marx and Lenin retired from time to time into the recesses of libraries in order to think more clearly about the economic or social situation by which they were confronted. They even tried to do so in order to understand the march of events in history; so that intellectual work of a really meaningful kind could itself be a necessary prelude to action of the right kind.

We should moreover be a little more cautious about the use of intellectual work in regard to a projected revolution. All those who may prove to be good intellectuals may not perhaps be good in their work as revolutionists. There can be a kind of division of labour between intellectuals and revolutionists. Of course, there may be cases where the same person can combine the two duties gainfully. But the task of the intellectual is indeed great. He must be able to prepare a correct picture of the social scene; and this must be made available to others who are called upon to act in order to bring about necessary changes. There should be no pressure upon the intellectuals to drive them into action. But I do agree with my friend, Shri Radha Raman Babu, that the inner commitment of the intellectual must be to a great and noble cause.

Now, please allow me to comment upon a few of the many papers which have been presented in the Seminar. The papers on the Goondas, on Language and also on Slums were very interesting, but these left me with a feeling that the data should have been more adequate. This should not, however, be taken as a matter of complaint. Everybody has tried to do his best and worked under limitations. But the findings of these papers do help us by defining the nature of the problems and invite us to a fuller and deeper investigation of the problems connected with the three subjects named above. These three papers have thus undoubtedly succeeded in opening up a new view of the characteristics of Calcutta as a city.

Please allow me at this stage to make an autobiographical submission.

Many years ago, I was interested, not on the origin of the caste system, but the role which caste played in the economic life of our

country. Many of us are naturally impatient with the caste system, because we find that it interferes with politics and is also supposed to prevent a free mobility of occupations which are now springing up as a result of widespread economic changes in our country. But the question which always bothered me from the beginning was that if 'Caste' is only 'Class', then why is it that during 2500 years of the dominance of the upper castes, its anti-thesis never occurred in a sufficient measure? There was revolt in the Buddha's time as well as in course of the mediaeval ages in various parts of India. Islam gave a tremendous blow to caste in the urban and even in the rural areas of India yet, even when the upper classes did not enjoy political authority, how is it that caste succeeded in maintaining itself over such a long stretch of time? When a radical reform like that of the Vaishnavas took place in Bengal, it resulted sometimes in the growth of a new caste from a religious unorthodox sect. What then is the deeper reason of the perpetuity of caste?

Some anthropologists have said that this is due to the concern of the Hindus for ritual purity; and castes are graded into ritually pure and impure, high and low. Some have found the answers in the strength of the Brahmins who succeeded in creating a myth of a peculiar kind. My friend, Shri Nirad Chandra Chaudhuri, thinks that India is the Land of Circe. And whoever comes into this Land completely becomes debased into swine. But these explanations have all failed to satisfy me and, therefore, I have tried to look for other sources of strength which have given caste the ability to survive even when political power was not in Hindu hands. When I started this enquiry, caste was not looked upon as a subject which lay within the confines of orthodox anthropology; because in those days anthropology was supposed to be exclusively concerned with tribal communities. But it is a good sign that many scholars have, in the past decade and more, devoted themselves to the functions of caste in our present-day economic and political life. We have thus developed new interests and also new techniques for dealing with those problems. In the same manner, when work was started on a rapid social survey of Calcutta by the Anthropological Survey of India, we were warned that this was not anthropology. But I am glad that the Survey has now



decided to work not only on the city of Calcutta but also on cities like Banaras and, if possible, Bombay and Madras. This new move is indeed very welcome.

Let me now turn to some of the papers. We have been very happy that many of the papers have been presented, not by professional social scientists, but by those who are themselves connected with literature, painting, sculpture or the cinema. Each of their reports has been very educative and interesting. The authors of these papers have tried to report from their own experience the changes which they have witnessed in their special fields in recent times. Almost everyone has said that there is a progressive conflict between tradition and modernity. Sometimes the conflict is between the East and the West. But, as I listened to these papers with deep attention and also tried to compare the results arrived at by different practitioners, one thing gradually came to my mind which, you will please permit me to share with you.

It appeared to me at once that the amount of conflict, or the degree of influence exercised by the West upon Indian cultural life has been extremely unequal in different spheres. For instance, what is happening in the sphere of scientific knowledge and enquiry is not the same as what has happened in either literature, music, drama or dance. In music the amount of influence of Western modes, or, if we may say so, of modern tendencies, have been rather limited. We had a strong tradition of music in our country which was built up by both Hindus and Muslims. Some of our best musicians are Muslims and they are respected equally by all Indians. It is because we had this strong and living tradition of music that, perhaps, Western music has been hardly able to exercise any influence upon our own.

It is the same with dances. Our dances whether they belonged to States in North India like U.P. or Manipur or to South India like Madras or Kerala have remained free from the infliction of models from outside. There has been a marginal amount of absorption in our music and, may be, in some forms of dances also, but the amount has always been very little.

In contrast to this let us examine what has been reported with reference to the growth of Science in India. We did not have a native tradition of Science. Whatever we had in early times was based upon empirical observations which were often not subjected to scientific scrutiny as it should have been. There were attempts in the past to classify different phenomena in nature; but this was done quite often on the basis of pre-conceived theories. For instance, temples, the stars and even gods and goddesses were classified into four *Varnas*, and the *Varnas* were differentiated from one another by the amount of the universal *Gunas*, namely, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, which each of them incorporated. This was not much of Science; but there were feeble attempts at real scientific thinking in some other spheres. For instance, Manu initiated a rudimentary Theory on Heredity in which he said that some authors believe that the father is more dominant than the mother; the 'seed' is more important than the 'field'. By a kind of scientific reasoning, he argued that the field is also not unimportant as is proved by the birth of the Rishi Rishya-sringa who inherited the head and antlers from his mother, who was a deer, while the rest of his body was human. This can be looked upon as a very elementary Theory on Heredity, in which Manu finally came to the conclusion that, in spite of what can be said to the contrary, both the seed and the field are important; and people take naturally to the occupations for which they are endowed by their hereditary qualities.

What I am suggesting is that this kind of rudimentary science was all that we had in the past. So, when the scientific method and way of thinking was introduced into our intellectual climate as a result of Western contact, the whole of the sphere of our life was dominated by Western modes in contrast to what had taken place in the case of either music or dances. It appears that where there was a living native tradition, the influence of alien contact has been meagre, while where it was weak, the influence has been great in contrast. In our economic life, the influence of the West has indeed been great, while it has also been great in the development of India's modern literature whether it is in Bengal, Maharashtra or Gujarat.

This is a fact which has to be borne in mind as we try to compare the results which have been presented before the Seminar by different participants.

My friend, Shri Radha Raman Mitra, placed very forcefully before us that our commitment should be to the service of the millions of exploited people in our country, so that we can raise them from the degraded condition into which they have been sunk in course of our history. It is interesting that in all the reports which have been presented by either literary men or artists or sculptors, there is another characteristic which is noticeable when we compare them with one another. There is a conscious movement in literature and in arts like cinema, or even in the field of dances and drama, towards identification with the masses. Each of the practitioners of these different professions has tried in the recent past to come closer and closer to the people, in order to represent the sorrows of their life as well as make an appeal to them more directly.

The whole country has in the recent past been inspired by various types of socialistic ideologies. A certain measure of this political interest is also reflected in the development of the various arts named above. But what is much more significant is that each artist, within his own field, tries to come closer and closer to the people in one way or another. Some may do so in the name of the Communist Party, some in the name of Gandhi, but the intention is, as I have said, identical in all the cases. It is as if these artists are trying to escape from the constraints under which they are placed by means of their own class-structure. Apparently, they are trying to escape from their class-culture by seeking an identification with the larger masses. This tendency is more evident in literature, the theatre and the cinema than it is in the field of dances.

From the reports it also appears that the endeavour of the artists has been partly successful; they have come closer to the urban masses and the masses also have responded favourably to the new trends in the theatre and the cinema. We cannot, however, say that the endeavour to spread out or, if we can say so, to drive roots in the fertile soils of the peoples' indigenous culture has not been equally successful

in the different fields. But the tendency is certainly noticeable among all of an intention of escaping into a new freedom, the freedom which comes from a larger and a deeper identity with the common people of our Land who are disinherited. As there is a certain amount of unevenness in regard to the above movement in the different arts, there is also sometimes a tendency of artists in each of these fields to raise a complaint against practitioners in other fields, because the efforts of the latter are not adequate in their own opinion.

What they are thus all trying to do is consequently an important feature of the cultural life of the middle and the upper classes in the city of Calcutta. There is not merely an inequality in this respect in the different fields of the arts, but also between various practitioners of the same art. Thus, some literary men are more energetic and more successful in their identification with the masses, while others are probably not so. The conflict between different practitioners of the same art, all of whom are trying to draw their sustenance from the soil of labouring humanity, also goes up mounting and this tension between, let us say, different generations or schools is an important feature again of the cultural life of Calcutta, whether it is in the field of literature or of drama or the cinema. In some areas, the conflict leads to violence. In politics, this is evidently natural. If I may use a simile from physics. We may say that the disturbed conditions, which we notice in the cultural life of the city, can be compared to the deflections of a magnetic needle when the atmosphere is subjected to a magnetic storm. When there is such a storm, the needle does not point steadily in any one particular direction. Similarly, when there is a storm in the intellectual atmosphere of the country, the directions in which various movements take place cannot also be steady. Then the orientation is in several different, though evidently related, directions or ideologies. We seem to be in a similar fluctuating condition in our intellectual life today in Calcutta.

If that is so, then how shall we steer our course in a direction which shall bring about desirable change and also find nourishment from the soil from which the citizens of Calcutta ultimately strive for their sustenance? My plea is that, as intellectuals, we have to understand the causes of unequal social and cultural development in different

sectors of our life and do so scientifically. It is only when we try to answer these questions successfully that we will be able to prepare ourselves for significant action. I am not trying to say that such intellectual exercise should be a substitute for action; but it is necessary that we should have a correct understanding of the efforts of the upper and the middle classes to come as close to one another and then proliferate as possible through different doors of different sizes.

In the world of today, there is no doubt that all our commitments should be towards the liberation of mankind. Economic liberation is undoubtedly necessary, but it forms only one part of the kind of liberation which I have in mind. I am not trying to under-rate the demands of economics, but far more than economics, I do believe, that the mind also has to be set free from the clutches of past thoughts or of the bonds of orthodoxy\*, whether it belongs to the Right or to the Left. We have to remember again that there is only one human family whether we live in the East or in the West. Each part of the world is trying for greater liberation. Let us find consolation in the fact that the goal has not been achieved by any one country, and all are in the process of finding a solution for, what is ultimately, the same human problem of Freedom.

If this Seminar in which we are all engaged today succeeds in helping us to gather a clearer picture of what is happening in Calcutta, as a part of what is also happening in the whole of India, and if with thought and knowledge in our possession, we dedicate ourselves more clearly to the task of great intellectual liberation as a prelude to liberation of every other kind, I believe, this Seminar will indeed have amply achieved its immediate purpose.

In the end, let me thank you once again for the patience with which you have allowed me to present my views on some of the papers presented by the participants.

## EPILOGUE

As I review the deliberations of the all too brief seminar days and of the two informal get together (*adda*) that followed, I get the feeling that in spite of an uneven coverage of topics, the encounter between anthropologists and scholars in other disciplines and in the different creative fields, has been quite fruitful. First of all, we have become keenly aware of the lack of detailed systematic information on almost every aspect of social life in Calcutta. It has also become apparent that this gap in our knowledge cannot be filled up by the researchers of any single field. There is need for continuous exchange of information and ideas across the disciplines.

Certain aspects of the cultural profile of the city come out in relief as we scan the series of papers discussed in the seminar. We find that the urban milieu of Calcutta is particularly permissive about the persistence of primordial social identities—languages, dialects, religious groups, castes etc. The co-existence of these nearly isolated social worlds is not however as peaceful as it may appear on the surface. The study on inter-group stereotypes indicate the existence of sharp unfavourable images between the groups in some cases. We would naturally like to know more about the mutual interaction pattern of the numerous ethnic groups and also about the institutions and processes through which they maintain their social and cultural boundaries.

The social significance of the resilience and proliferation of the religious institutions in contemporary Calcutta continues to intrigue us. We have observed how the temple complex of Kalighat accommodates the pressures of urbanization and modernization, but it is not clear how this adaptive persistence of religion affects the growth of a secular approach to civic life,

The paper on the slum-dwellers brings out a dismal picture of the almost irreversible perpetuation of poverty. From Dikshit Sinha's report it appears that the slum dwellers do not feel that they can find a way out of the social quagmire into which external social pressures have pushed them. We would, however, like to know from a wider spectrum the range of social deprivation in the Calcutta slums.

Gouranga Chattopadhyay's paper on the social world of the business executives emphasizes the feature of alienation of this professional class. They seem to be isolated from kinship network and also from the society at large. Since this career is increasingly attracting the imagination of the educated youth, the picture of alienation and built-in social incapacity is quite alarming.

Although Calcutta may not breed as many psychotics as one would have expected under the various pressures of the city, Ajita Chakraborty portrays a sad picture of social apathy about care of the mentally ill. The paper on the *goondas* bring out the factors of congestion and poverty but spells out only feebly the links of power and business elites in the matter. Also, the penal code definition of a *goonda* needs to be supplemented by a broader sociological understanding of the phenomenon. What we need now are depth studies of the world of the rowdies from close (participant ?) observation.

It has been reported by Benoy Ghose that the Calcutta intelligentsia (elite) are predominantly leaning towards Marxism. Here again, we would like to know about the shades and quantities. Much have been said in recent years about how Indian scientists compartmentalize their world into science and rationality inside the laboratory and traditional rituals at home. One may find similar compartmentalization among Marxist intellectuals—their revolutionary egalitarian ideology coexisting with the middle class social drive for upward mobility. The kind of rationalization that make this possible should be deeply probed. This may bring into relief the latent persistent values of the *Bhadralok* class in Calcutta,

In the session on creativity it was evident that our contributors felt that there was a sizeable core of personalities in the various creative fields in Calcutta who sought and asserted their identity as *modern* practitioners in their respective fields, expressing their arts in a language which had a certain degree of universality beyond the province and the nation. The concensus was that although the stimuli and models for modern forms came decisively from the West, Calcutta personalities in the various creative fields have naturalized them quite effectively. Obviously, the pattern of naturalization will vary according to the home-base of the particular arts and also in their levels of abstraction. The degree of positive correlation and relative independence of the various art forms from the contemporary social and political stresses needs detailed exploration. \*

Calcutta claims a high level of political awareness of her citizens. Are there spokesmen of the different prevalent political ideologies among the creative artists? Professor Nirmal Bose stated that regardless of the particular political ideology of the creative artists, one observes in recent years an urge for communication with the masses. Alokeranjan, however, has indicated a recent trend towards loneliness and withdrawal from politics among the poets. All these impressionistic ideas and insights demand detailed corroboration in the field. We would like to have a clear picture of the social nexus of the creative artists, their *addas*, cliques, factions and leadership, the actual process of emergence avant-garde groups, and so on. Apart from these details, the social sources of vitality of the creative spirit in Calcutta, which seem to defy all the pressures of congestion, poverty and malnutrition continues to intrigue us. We have talked about the Bhadraklok's thirst for a refined style of life, the role of *adda* in stimulating free circulation of ideas, the tenderness of *dada-bhai* relationship, response to the spirit of nationalism and a quest for social justice in an urban situation. But we now need concrete observations to substantiate our hunches,



In the natural sciences, particularly physics and chemistry, the main problem of the Calcutta scientists was not that of developing a local intellectual tradition but to participate in expanding the universal frontiers of science and to apply the results for improving the material condition of the people. Although the number of scientists and their publications have grown rapidly since independence, confident and enthusiastic schools of researchers have not grown in this city. Among the various factors responsible for such a state, the historical situation of expansion taking place without the support of a critical number of able and active leaders of science, has been highlighted.

Calcutta provides a series of contradictory pictures—the assertion of universality of the creative artists and the intellectuals vis-a-vis social isolation as linguistic and religious groups; the urbanity of the Calcutta middle class and village like intimacy in neighbourhoods; the soaring wealth of the new rich and the perpetually condemned poor. Over-riding all these is the elemental and unbearable pressure of population. There are too many people in all spheres of life—in homes, neighbourhoods, buses, trams and suburban railways, offices, courts, class rooms and streets. Calcutta's pattern of adaptation to this elemental pressure of all round over crowding demand very serious probing. One gets the feeling that the pressure has been carried even beyond the unlimited threshold of tolerance of the Calcuttans. There are symptoms of 'loss of nerve' in the control system of Calcutta society and a fundamental breakdown of communication and credibility across the generations and the classes. It is high time that social scientists and intelligentsia of Calcutta get seriously involved in systematic study of the operation of the key control institutions of the city such as, bureaucracy of the Secretariat, the police system, the judiciary, municipal administration. education etc.

Before concluding I take this occasion to record that Indian Council of Social Science Research has not only favoured us with a substantial grant for the publication of the proceedings

of the Calcutta Seminar, but, we have also received a grant from them for the study of the social world of four important minority groups of Calcutta—the Marwaris, Punjabis (Sikhs), Hindi Speakers and the South Indians. For all these, we are very grateful to J. P. Naik, Member-Secretary, I.C.S.S.R., who has taken a lively interest in our research programme. We also hope that an active *addu* group will grow around this programme, generating new ideas and research activities.

I must also express here my deep appreciation of the work of my colleague Arabinda Basu, Managing Editor of our Society's Journal. Without his untiring zeal the publication of this volume would not have been possible. We are very thankful to Purnima Sinha for the cover design and drawing in which she has made an attempt to graphically depict the spirit of the seminar. We are grateful to Subrata Kar for his active help throughout the processing of the cover.

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