

PhD Thesis

Calcutta (1900 – 1912): Aspects of Changes in the City

**Thesis submitted to Jadavpur University
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts (History)**

By

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2021

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Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks and gratitude goes to my mentor Suchetana di (Prof. Suchetana Chattopadhyay), under whose guidance and strict supervision this thesis could be finally completed. I like to thank my five year old daughter, Mammam Monu(Punyadyuti) who has shown great patience as she is seeing her mother researching since her birth. My thanks are due to my parents Shri Monojit Lahiry and Smt Sukla Lahiry. My sincere thanks goes to all the faculty members of the Department of History, Jadavpur University, especially Prof Kaushik Roy (Present H.O.D), Prof Rup Kumar Burman, Dr Debajit Dutta and Dr Sudhesna Bannerjee. I thank the departmental staff – Purnima di, Sajal da, Pratima di and our library assistant Jayashree. I am grateful to the Ex- Librarian of the Department of History Banani di. My sincere thanks also goes to Prof Ratnabali Chatterjee, Prof Omprakash Mishra and Prof Ujjayan Bhattacharyya for giving valuable advice on my research. I wish to express my thanks to the staff of the National Archives of India (New Delhi), National Library (Kolkata), Calcutta Municipal Library (Town Hall, Kolkata), West Bengal State Archives (Shakespeare Sarani, College Street, Kolkata), Kolkata Police Museum, West Bengal Secretariat Library (Writers Buildings, Kolkata), R. G. Kar Medical College Library who had given me access to their valuable collection.

My thanks are also due to my friends Dr Sekhar Mahapatra, Sumit, Sarfaraj, Azharul, Alapan, Upasana and Kaberi. Their constant support and technical assistance brought this thesis came to the stage of submission.

Atrayee Lahiry

Jadavpur

September 2021

Contents

	Page No
Introduction:	1 - 16
<u>Chapter</u>	
One: Ordinary Criminals	17 - 46
Two: Radicalism, Politics and Daily Life	47 - 70
Three: A Disease Ridden City	71 - 97
Four: Municipal Infrastructure and the Rate Payers	98 - 121
Five: European Life	122 - 155
Six: Transfer of Capital in Press	156 - 174
Seven: Everyday Issues during the Era of Capital Transfer	175 - 215
Conclusion	216 - 218
Bibliography	219 - 221

Introduction

The word Calcutta invokes a wide range of perceptions among scholars in different field of studies. As a colonial city, the history of Calcutta has been well documented as many historians have written on the city from diverse view points. The city in their studies have been represented as a site of political contests, as a socio cultural space, as an economic zone etc. The aim of my thesis is to provide an account of colonial Calcutta as a site of transition in a particular period of time during 1900-1912. Calcutta's position was altered in many ways during this time. The changes in Calcutta Corporation in 1899, the Universities Act of 1904, the Partition of Bengal in 1905, the rise of extremist activities in 1907 and finally the transfer of capital to Delhi in 1912, sealed the fate of a city that had so long served as 'the second city of the British Empire'. A. K. Roy had composed *History Of Calcutta* in 1901 where he used the phrase 'second city of the Empire' for Calcutta. In Roy's description the city appeared to be hyper prosperous. But in reality there were some anxieties that were creeping up in the urban environment. Since the beginning of the twentieth century there occurred some changes in Calcutta that left a permanent imprint on the city's future history. The objective of this thesis is to enquire into these changes. The city's modernization and the developments that had taken place during this time, shall be critically assessed. In the thesis, I have tried to examine the everyday issues in the city and in which ways the colonial governance touched them. To what extent ordinary life became extraordinary and in what ways it retained its ordinary character, shall be examined in this thesis. It was from the beginning of the twentieth century that the colonial rulers had started taking conscious steps towards urban expansion, that ultimately culminated in the formation of the Calcutta Improvement Trust in 1911. Similar steps had also been taken by the ruling authorities back in the nineteenth century through Lottery Committee, when by means of lottery subscriptions, some initial steps were taken towards city improvement. Owing to some oppositions in Britain and lack of funds, this initiative was abandoned which ultimately led to the closure of the Lottery Committee in 1860. During this phase the Calcutta elite was suffering acute financial crunch, as a result of the fall of the Union Bank in 1848. So no further investments for city improvements was seen. It must be noted here that the major amount that was raised through subscription of lotteries, came

from the Indian capitalists and absentee landlords residing in the city. So their financial crisis meant a temporary break in the initiative of town improvement. This phase too marked a phase of transition in the history of the city indeed. This was the first time when the colonial rulers had thought of urban improvement of the city and so its significance cannot be overlooked.

It must be mentioned in this context that this was not the first time that the city had experienced a transitional phase. Several other transitions had taken place in the city's history in previous centuries also. On a broader scale, the period from 1698-1750 also marked a phase of transition when with indigenous co-operation the English East India Company expanded the colonial city on its already existing foundation (of Dihi Kolkata, Sutanati and Gobindapore).¹ Like all other cities, Calcutta in course of time became the centre of maximum concentration for the power and culture of the cosmopolitan population. It became the place where the diffused rays of many separate beams of life fell into focus with gains in both social effectiveness and significance. The city became a form and symbol of an integrated relationship. Everyday life for a city dweller in Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century meant belonging to a world where the great masses of people unable to have direct contact with more satisfying means of living, took life vicariously, as readers, spectators and passive observers. It was to them being in a world where people watched shadow heroes and heroines in order to forget their own clumsiness or coldness in love, where they beheld brutal men crushing out life in a strike riot, a wrestling ring or a military assault, while they lacked the nerve even to resist the petty tyranny of their immediate boss, where they hysterically cheered the flag of their colonial masters. Living in the city was thus guided by the routine of the metropolis where the constant specter of insecurity and death hovered around its bold towers and shadowed streets. The inhabitants became victims of phantasms, fears and obsessions². It is in the backdrop of this reality, that I have made an attempt to study everyday life in Calcutta in the first decade of the twentieth century. It was from the beginning of the twentieth century that the colonial rulers again started making plans for city improvement. As a result, Calcutta witnessed a massive disruption

¹Hassan, Farhat, 'Indigenous Cooperation and the Birth of a Colonial City: Calcutta, c 1698-1750,' in *Modern Asian Studies*, February 1992, Vol 26 (No1), p.67.

² Mumford, Lewis, *The Culture of Cities*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1938, p.11.

of the urban order. Basti (slums in local parlance) demolition took place on a large scale in the name of improvement, without proper rehabilitation scheme from the government. This adversely affected the urban poor of the city, displacing them from their homes and compelling them to take shelter outside or in the periphery of the metropolis. The urban poor were actually a class hardest hit by the changes in the urban policies. They had to survive all the adversities. I have made an attempt in my thesis to explore the condition of the urban poor in the city in the first decade of the twentieth century. Kshitindranath Tagore, nephew of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, remembered how the Calcutta Improvement Trust (C. I. T) followed brutal policies to clear the *bastis* (in keeping with the recommendations of E.P. Richards)³ and demolish old structures to make way for multi-storied buildings.⁴ Altogether seventy-five *bastis* were demolished in the decade 1901-1911.⁵ Land was being acquired also for building hospitals, colleges and also for shopping areas as the corporation extended its civic networks. The C. I. T introduced housing schemes and plans to re-house the homeless, proved to be utterly impractical. In many cases there ensued a bitter struggle between the *basti* owners and the municipality not only with regard to *basti* demolition but also with medical and sanitary inspection issues.⁶

The early years of the twentieth century registered very different patterns of displacement and immigration in the city. Within just a decade from 1901-1911, the number of immigrants mostly male in Calcutta rose by 5.7%.⁷ Suburbs populated mostly by migrant labour, such as Manicktola, Garden Reach and Cossipore - Chitpore, also showed dramatic increase. With the expansion of jute mills and the rising demand for labour the number of immigrants grew rapidly in the city at the beginning of the twentieth century. Nearly a quarter of Calcutta's population was engaged in industry, a vast majority of them being employed as jute spinners and weavers.⁸ In 1911, Bihar supplied 155,000 and the United Provinces some 90,000 over a third of the latter

³ E.P. Richards was the chief engineer of the C.I.T in 1912.

⁴ Tagore, Kshitindranath, *Kolikata Cholafera: Sekale aar Ekale*, Adi Bramho Samaj Press, Calcutta, 1930, pp.121-2.

⁵ *Census of The Town and Suburbs of Calcutta*, 1911.

⁶ Ghosh, Anindita, *Claiming the City: Protest, Crime and Scandals in Colonial Calcutta, 1860-1920*, Oxford University Press, 2016, New Delhi, p.50.

⁷ *Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta*, 1911.

⁸ *Ibid.*

coming from the districts of Benares, Azamgarh, Ghazipur and Jaunpur. Migrants from Bikaner and Jaipur areas of Rajasthan were also providing a steady stream from the start of the twentieth century onwards.⁹

The cosmopolitan city that took shape in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries owed its origins to primarily mercantile and maritime interests.¹⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Calcutta had a mixed immigrant population from Europe, comprising of British, Germans, Austro- Hungarians, French, Armenians, Jews and Russians. The largest constituent element of the mixed population were the Chinese who in 1911 numbered 2349 and lived mostly in the Kalutala area.¹¹ Burrabazar (mart), Watgunj (port), and Alipore (cantonment) contained the largest number of immigrant population, where nine tenths of the population was foreign born.¹² A close examination of the caste constitution of the city's residents in the early decade of the twentieth century would enable us to form some ideas regarding the contemporary social profile of the city. While Brahmans and Kayasthas dominated the urban population, there was a significant presence of the lower caste of Chamars, Goalas and Subarnabaniks, followed by the Kahars, Tantis and Telis. The city provided multifarious opportunities for many of them.¹³

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the city of Calcutta become a politically motivated centre of nationalist consciousness. Calcutta, during this time, stood in the sufferings of a split character. On the one hand it was still the capital of the British Empire in India and on the other it was the seat of an emotionally motivated nationalism.¹⁴ Calcutta's position as a seat of this 'emotionally motivated nationalism' was mainly an outcome of the anti Partition Swadeshi movement. Calcutta had suffered in many ways as a result of this change. This thesis tries to focus on Calcutta as the epicenter of the Swadeshi movement and in what ways the wave of Swadeshi touched the city and its people alike in its everyday life. It was from 1905 onwards that the politics of agitation and the politics of resistance increasingly began to grip the city. In

⁹*Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta*, 1911.

¹⁰Ghosh, Anindita, p.80.

¹¹*Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta*, 1911.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴Sen, Ranjit, *Calcutta in Colonial Transition*, Routledge, Oxon, 2019, p.242.

post Swadeshi movement phase the city saw the rise of revolutionary terrorism. All on a sudden the city was grasped by violent anti colonial militant activities and daily life specially those of the bhadralok classes seemed to have been disturbed in many ways by such acts. The anti partition Swadeshi movement spearheaded by the bhadralok met with a success when the partition was revoked. Yet the city had to pay a high price too for which it was not at all prepared. The British colonial government in 1911 declared that the administrative capital of the empire was to be shifted from Calcutta to New Delhi and in 1912 such a move was completed. So the city's position in these ways was defined and redefined by the developments that had taken place in the first decade of the twentieth century and how the city's everyday life was moved or remained unmoved by these changes forms the theme of this thesis.¹⁵

Secondary Literature Review

In the course of my research, I have made some studies of the existing literature in this area of the discipline. Sumanta Bannerjee argues about the twin issues of crime and punishment in the colonial metropolis in a pre-industrial society that was rapidly transforming itself into a semi capitalist society. He focuses on the innovations, ingenuities, state of the art devises and new built contraptions that were being restored to by both the law makers and the law breakers in that transitional phase.¹⁶ Sumit Sarkar argues in details regarding Bengali nationalist leaders and their strategies, peasant movements, labour strikes, communal violence and politics. His arguments have helped me to a great extent to understand Calcutta's position during the Swadeshi movement and in understanding the role of bhadralok middle class of Calcutta in the anti colonial movement.¹⁷ Amales Tripathy's arguments offers an in-depth understanding of the radical current emerging out of the Indian National Congress.¹⁸ Semanti Ghosh's arguments¹⁹ on how Hindu Muslim collaboration operated at local levels only and failed

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Bannerjee, Sumanta, *The Wicked City Crime and Punishment in Colonial Calcutta*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2009.

¹⁷Sarkar, Sumit, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2014.

¹⁸Tripathi, Amales, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890-1910*, Orient Longmans, India, 1967.

¹⁹Ghosh, Semanti, *Different Nationalism 1905 -1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017.

to work on an all India basis have also helped me. Suranjan Das's²⁰ arguments have enabled me to understand the complex nature of Hindu Muslim relationship in Bengal, and how the streets of Calcutta in many cases became the site of communal contest. Rajat Kanta Ray's²¹ arguments have greatly contributed in shaping my ideas regarding politics of Calcutta Municipal Corporation and how and upto what extent the various business groups in Calcutta could exert pressure in policy makings of this body. Amiya Kumar Bagchi's arguments²² have greatly helped me to form ideas about India in the early twentieth century and regarding the nature of private investment in jute industry of Bengal. Pradeep Sinha's arguments²³ have helped me to know how the changing demography of the city at the beginning of the twentieth century made an impact on patterns of land acquisition. Anindita Ghosh's arguments²⁴ have been a very crucial for my research which has provided me an understanding of the urban processes that had shaped the city. Swati Chattopadhyay's arguments²⁵ have helped me to understand the notion of Bengali modernity and how the notion of public and private space acted as an important component of this modernity. Ideas regarding public space is important for my research as it includes planning and segregation within cities. Arabindo Samanta's²⁶ arguments have enabled me to understand the picture of epidemic stricken Bengal where such diseases like Cholera, Small pox, Plague, Malaria were taking huge toll on human lives and the measures that were instituted by the colonial authorities to combat such diseases. Ranjit Sen's arguments about the challenges of the city planning, has been very useful in my research. Partho Dutta's arguments²⁷ contributed to form my ideas regarding the town planning and civic infrastructure of the city. Dutta's arguments that Calcutta was a planned city and in due course became a magnet for the merchants conducted by the colonial state without any real intention of the authorities to address the problems of the

²⁰Das, Suranjan, *Communal Riots In Bengal 1905-1947*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990.

²¹Ray, Rajat Kanta, *Urban Roots Of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflicts of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1979.

²²Bagchi, Amiya Kumar, *Private Investment in India 1900-1939*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1972.

²³Sinha, Pradeep, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma K. L.M. Pvt Ltd, Calcutta, 1978.

²⁴Ghosh, Anindita, *Claiming the City Protest, Crime and Scandals in Colonial Calcutta,, C 1860-1920*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016.

²⁵Chattopadhyay, Swati, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Unncanny*, Routledge, Oxon, 2005.

²⁶Samanta, Arabinda, *Living with Epidemics in Colonial Bengal (1818-1945)*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2017.

²⁷Datta, Partho, *Planning the City: Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta C.1800- C-1940*, Tulika Books, Delhi, 2012.

city like overcrowding etc, has provided me an insight into the basic problems of the city in mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tim Allender's²⁸ arguments on presence of European women in public sphere of colonial India have assisted in my understanding of their role in city life. Shukla Sanyal's²⁹ arguments have also helped me to grasp the ongoing trend, the inner components of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal. Above all, the two volume book *Calcutta: The Living City (The Past, Present and Future)*³⁰ edited by Sukanta Choudhuri has contributed greatly in various aspects of my understanding of the city.

This thesis throws light on various aspects of the city's daily life, through which the transition has been explained. Everyday issues have received microfocus in this thesis, as it is extremely important for re-constructing the history of a city, particularly when the city's position was changing in many ways. Daily newspaper reports, government reports, memoirs and autobiographies available at the archives and libraries, mainly constitute the base of this thesis. But like many other works of history, this thesis too suffers from certain limitations, the first and foremost among them being paucity of sources, sources damaged by brittles etc. Using the available sources (both primary and secondary), this thesis is a humble effort of mine to rediscover a city's position in history once again. The arguments are entirely based on my own perceptions regarding the changes that were taking place in and around the city. The seven chapters in the thesis determines the six different aspects of the city's daily life.

Largely based on my own experience of reading Sumanta Bannerjee, the thesis deals with crime and criminality in twentieth century Calcutta. Crime is a common phenomenon in both cities and villages. But it differs characteristically when it occurs within the urban framework. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when certain changes were setting in Calcutta's fortune, crime and criminality was thriving well. While some committed crime to adjust themselves in the changed urban scenario, some committed it from habitual criminal mentalities. In the first decade of the twentieth century Calcutta experienced a wide variety of crime from petty thefts and house breakings to

²⁸ Allender, Tim, *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820-1932*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2016.

²⁹ Sanyal, Sukla, *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi, 2014.

³⁰ Chaudhuri, Sukanta, (ed.), *Calcutta: The Living City, Vol: I and II*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1990.

murders. While going through the contemporary police reports it was found that petty thefts were common in those areas of the city, which were adjacent to slums. So it was a kind of class struggle ensuing between the slum dwellers and their rich neighbour, acquiring the form of petty thefts. In many cases not much was stolen, bicycle or an umbrella being stolen items. House breaking as a crime originated in the city from the second half of the nineteenth century. In twentieth century more cases of house breakings were seen in the suburbs of Calcutta like Behala, than the city proper. Gambling although was a common crime in the city but it was precisely in the first decade of the twentieth century that the addiction to gambling became so widespread that its deep rooted impact could be seen among all sections of the city's populace. Even women from middle class households could not escape the attraction of this game, that was entirely based on speculation. Cotton gambling and rain gambling were some forms of gambling, that became most popular in the city at the beginning of the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Calcutta also witnessed cases of forgeries, specially note forgeries that was uncommon in the city in the nineteenth century. One Annoda Mohan Roy was found to be the chief culprit with many of his associates in a note forgery case. The instruments of printing false notes were seized from his home and his link in this case was found to extend as far as Burma. This kind of crimes evoked extreme sensation among the city populace as well as within the police department itself. The city during this time also witnessed murders that mainly fits into the category of property crime. Sumanta Bannerjee while studying crimes in nineteenth century Calcutta had observed that the chief victims of murders in this century were the prostitutes. They were mainly murdered by their paramours or else because of their property mainly jewellery. The similar feature, persisted in twentieth century Calcutta also. Women were victims in most of the murder cases, be it a family feud ensuing between a husband and wife or that in which prostitutes were involved. It was actually the patriarchal norms of the society that were never ready to accommodate women within its threshold. These murders were only a manifestation of such mentalities, that had firmly rooted itself within society long back. The thesis also deals with the policing system in the early twentieth century city. Some common crimes within the city police force like taking bribes, allowing illegal occupation on public thoroughfares, neglecting their duties

and indulging themselves in gossips during duty hours etc has been explored too in this thesis. This thesis also tries to enquire into the kinds of measures that were taken by the police in various criminal cases, as keeper of law. Although law was meant to be equal for all individuals but the real story of policing proved to be very different.

The first leg of the twentieth century saw Calcutta emerge as the epicenter of political movements and protests. In 1905 the infamous decision of partitioning Bengal by the colonial rulers into East and West Bengal was completed. As an inevitable result of this, a huge storm of protest swept over Bengal in which of course the pivotal role was played by the educated Calcutta middle class from a Hindu upper caste background. The year 1907 saw the Indian nationalist movement to take a violent turn that ultimately culminated in the rise of extremism. Calcutta once again played a dominant role in spread of revolutionary terrorism. This thesis, enquires into the reasons why Calcutta had emerged to be the epicenter of these movements, how the reverberation of these movements were felt in the daily lives of the city populace. It was indeed an era of transition. The city of Calcutta never before had witnessed such massive political upsurges. Although the Swadeshi movement had certain limitations and failed to gain a mass base, yet its impact on the city itself was not limited. The city streets became sites of swadeshi processions, the squares and parks became sites of Swadeshi meetings and so on. The British Indian government responded by closing such squares where swadeshi meetings were held, arresting the Swadeshi leaders etc. At several instances Beadon Square, College Square was closed down by the colonial rulers to prevent political gatherings of any kind. Mass arrests of the Swadeshi leaders like Maulavi Liakat Hossain, Bipin Chandra Pal etc were also a part of the repressive measures followed by the rulers. This phase of political unrest also saw importation of fire arms into the city. The city as a result of all these witnessed the Calcutta bhadraloks to turn into criminals in the eyes of the colonial police force. This phase saw series of house searches in Calcutta, specially in those belonging to the bhadraloks and the bhadraloks to get entangled in false cases. In fact it was a strange face of Calcutta with which neither the rulers nor the ruled were habituated.

The colonial rulers were genuinely puzzled that the bhadraloks of Calcutta who had always been moderate in their opinion and loyal in their position to the government,

could be instrumental in provoking an anti-British movement like that of swadeshi. On the other hand to the middle class and elite bhadraloks of Calcutta, it was a kind of night mare that they would be subjected to such kinds of humiliation like house searches by the colonial police authorities. It was indeed a source of anxiety for both. This mutual distrust further aggravated with the rise of the extremist movement. With the rise of the extremist movement the city saw political murders of government servants. Nanda Lal Bannerjee, Asutosh Biswas, Shamsul Alam and Srish Chandra Chakroborty were murdered in Calcutta in between 1908-1912. Some other attempts to challenge and disrupt the colonial authority in the city were also made. Dalhousie Square bomb outrage, throwing bomb on a tram car at Grey Street, an unsuccessful attempt at destroying the May races of the Europeans were manifestation of such attempts. All these attempts proves beyond doubt that revolutionary violence was rapidly increasing in Calcutta and also points to the fact that how distrust and disgust against the British rulers were accumulating in the minds of the Bengali youths. The British government definitely felt highly alarmed with these political developments in Calcutta. They could by now understand that if this zeal of the young revolutionaries could be channelized and motivated through proper way, it would surely result in the overthrow of the British rule. So this was indeed a phase of political transition for the city and its people. It is amidst of all these political developments that daily life in the thesis has been studied. In their everyday life what kind of anxieties and tortures, the city dwellers had to face as a result of these political developments has been delved into in this thesis.

This thesis also tries to explore Calcutta as a diseased space. At the turn of the twentieth century life in the colonial metropolis of Calcutta was paralysed by occurrence and re-occurrence of a number of diseases like Cholera, Plague, Pthysis, Beri- Beri etc. While Cholera, Malaria, Pthysis had their beginnings in the preceding centuries, Plague was an exclusive twentieth century phenomenon. In this thesis, we will deal with those diseases only that had taken huge toll of human lives in the city, during the period of our research. Main focus has been given on Plague and Beri- Beri or Epidemic Dropsy as both of them were new additions to other existing diseases, at the beginning of the twentieth century. How disease became a source of anxiety for daily existence of the city dwellers has been addressed in the thesis. The measures adopted by the colonial

government, to combat these diseases has also been explored. The role of the bhadralok middle class in extending health care facilities among urban poor of the city has been examined too.

The urban poor of the city were the worst sufferers. The ill ventilated habitat and the unhealthy surroundings along with malnutrition actually rendered this class hardest hit by these diseases. Those for whom poverty was the daily companion, to them there was no alternative measure to combat diseases. Among the urban poor as well as in the middle class households women were the worst sufferers. It was once again the patriarchal instrument that always wanted to exert tighter control on women. Hence mortality rate was higher among women than men in the city. The Muslim section of the city population too were suffering more than the Hindus of the city. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century it was a common picture to see the Muslims to be concentrated in manual work in the city like that of daftrees, syces, khansamas, baburchis etc. These low paid jobs demanded intensive physical labour but to compliment it, these workers were not in a position to take full square meals a day. So they were more prone to get infected by disease, as natural immunity in their body was at a declining stage because of stressful manual work.

Poor quality of life, ill ventilated and poor housing, over-crowding, population explosion, under nutrition, large families, early marriages were some of the social factors directly or indirectly responsible for producing various kinds of diseases. The colonial government practically paid no heed to these problems of their subjects. They rather tried to restrict the diseases within the Indian part of the city. It was not that the remedy of this diseases was not known to them. But lack of initiative on their part and very little expenditure on public health and hygiene actually worsened the effects of the diseases. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, in 1911 the contributions of the Europeans for the health care purpose in Calcutta was Rs 13,321 and that of the Indians amounted to Rs 43,786.³¹ The role of the Bengali bhadralok class in extending health care facilities among the urban poor was not above question. While a handful of them had made some generous contributions for establishment of charitable dispensaries in the city, most of them remained silent spectators during the ongoing health hazards in the city.

³¹ *Notes on Annual Returns of the Hospitals and Dispensaries in Bengal for the year 1911.*

The charitable and reformist initiatives of the Indian doctors although had a wider democratic concern yet it could not protect the urban poor from mass death during the epidemics. The general role of the colonial doctors of the period has also been touched in this chapter too. Their collective initiative towards eradication of tropical diseases ultimately culminated in the establishment of the School Of Tropical Medicine in Calcutta in 1911. The thesis also deals with various perceptions of the city dwellers regarding disease.

Any attempt to write a historical narrative on Calcutta remains incomplete if Calcutta Municipality is not taken into account. So in this thesis I have addressed to what extent Calcutta became affected or remained unaffected by the reforms of the municipality which were enacted during the period of our research. In the thesis an attempt has also been made to show how the colonizers and the colonized were affected in different ways by the municipal infrastructures. While examining these issues, the rate payers and their problems that had been thrust on them by the authoritarian colonial rule has also been delved into. In 1899 the new Calcutta Municipal Act came into force and under this new act the re-organization of every department of the municipality was to be done. By recommendations of this new act some constructions of public utility were undertaken in the city at the beginning of the twentieth century like that of Lansdowne Market, extension of New Market, Sterndale Road, the new municipal office building, the model dwellings at Convent Road and the incinerator at Entally. At the turn of the twentieth century the city corporation had also vigorously pursued the policy of ending obnoxious *bastis* without adopting alternative housing measures for the poor inhabitants of these *bastis*. As an invariable result of this some areas of the city witnessed abrupt overcrowding during this time.

As far as the municipal infrastructure of the city was concerned, this thesis deals with water supply and electric supply and in what different ways it left its impact on public life. It was in the first decade of the twentieth century that water supply in Calcutta became mechanized. In 1911, the establishment of Tallah Tank was an event of great significance in the history of water supply in Calcutta. But in reality no significant achievements could be made to minimize the problem of water crisis in the city. It rather became acute. Specially in the Muslim *mahallahs* of the city this was a grave problem.

On the other hand it was again at the beginning of the twentieth century that to ensure smooth supply of water in the Fort area the colonial rulers established a big tank namely the 'Havildar's Tank', where two tanks were already there in existence. So the problem of filtered water supply was seen in the Indian quarters of the city only and the European portions of the city escaped it. The thesis also deals with colonial surveillance on usage of water in Calcutta. At the turn of the twentieth century Calcutta became electrified. The city corporation had granted license for supplying electricity to a European company – Kilburn and Company. The European quarters of the city were as usual the first to reap the benefits of the introduction of electricity and gas lights continued to be there at the northern part of the city. Initially the price of electricity in the city was so high that a man of ordinary means found it difficult to afford it. However, complaints from the Indians as well as the Europeans were published in contemporary newspapers regarding exorbitant price of electricity in Calcutta. Often crooked type of manipulations were seen in electricity bills. Distrust and dissatisfaction among the consumers against the electric supply company led them to urge for establishment of a Consumer's Protection Association. Complaints regarding bad lighting too were seen in contemporary newspapers. This thesis deals with the oppression inflicted on the rate payers in the city. It was complained that the majority of rate payers had no voice in the huge expenditure of the Calcutta Municipality in experimenting with such constructions like new markets, dhobikhanas, gowkhanas and model houses. So the rate payers insisted on forming a Central Rate Payer's Association which was thought to exert a better and tighter control on the municipality. It was during this time that the corporation had carried on an extensive *basti* demolition programme and in many such cases only a months time was given to the owners. The underlying motive of the corporation was to increase the land value and the land rent in the city and this was the reason why such reckless eviction policy in name of city improvement was carried on by them. This thesis throws light on the changing physical landscape of the city too in the first decade of the twentieth century.

European life in the colonial metropolis of Calcutta in the first decade of the twentieth century has also received attention. European life in Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century also underwent certain changes. From the second half of the

nineteenth century European women started to appear in the public life of Calcutta. The twentieth century saw their increased and in many cases their exclusive participation in public functions. The Victorian Era had kept them away from public gaze. The beginning of the Edwardian era saw rise of feminist movements in the west and as a result life of European women underwent certain changes. From the late nineteenth century they constituted a vital part of the fabric of imperial social circles.³² In Calcutta they were seen to become more active in charity shows and official get-togethers. At the onset of every year there were various entertainment shows in which they played vital part like the Fancy Fair organized at the Zoological Gardens, the Ladies Paper Chase Cup and other official and semi official parties. These kinds of gatherings where European women participated actually provided them with an opportunity to socialize in public but with members of their own community. However their public conduct revealed a carefully cultivated racial awareness. Other events which formed important components of European socialization process were also regularly held in the city at the beginning of the twentieth century. Under the patronage of Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A) hockey matches, annual sports etc were held. Boxing Day, annual dinner at the Turf Club etc had also become popular among Europeans in Calcutta. Needless to say that these social functions of the Europeans in the city were marked by strict racial segregation. Participation of the Indians were strictly prohibited. The thesis also explores the business and commercial world of the Europeans in Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century. The business concessions they had been enjoying till the time, continued to be so. It was from this particular time that trade relationship between India and Argentina commenced. The South American consumers were becoming more and more demanding for gunnies from Calcutta. As a result direct steam communication started between Calcutta and Argentina. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Government of India had proposed to impose an export duty on jute and jute products of India with a view that this raised tax would be utilized for Calcutta's improvement. But the Dundee merchants vehemently opposed to this proposal as this would have been detrimental to their business interests. They were never ever ready to spend even a small part of their profit for the improvement of that particular city which acted as a life line

³² Proscida, Marie. A, *Married to the Empire*, p.7.

of their business and commerce. The thesis also throws light on other import and export items in which the European business men fared well like salt, tobacco etc. The thesis also focuses on advertisements published in European owned newspapers. It is through advertisements that we have also made an attempt to study those items that had become an integral part of European life in the city. In this context, the glorified languages that has been used to explain the attributes of the particular product for which the advertisement was given has also been explored too. Even while exploring the languages of the advertisements one can find that European exclusiveness was asserted here also. Advertisements became a vehicle through which racial arrogance was expressed. So in the thesis an attempt has been made to draw the picture of European life in the city at the turn of the twentieth century in which smaller events that had become a source of anxiety for the European in the city. This too has received focus in the thesis.

The thesis also deals with the contradictory perceptions on Indian press reports surrounding the issue of transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi. It examines the condition of daily life in the city, when it was losing its pre-eminent position as the capital city of the British Indian Empire. The thesis also enquires into the impact of the transfer of capital on Calcutta and how this issue of transfer was taken up by various sections of the city populace. In the political realm, the early years of the 1910s were of momentous significance. They were marked by the re-joining of the East and the West Bengal and the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1912. The year 1912, as Suranjan Das has pointed out, again altered the balance of Bengali *bhadralok* morale. The transfer of capital indicated the British determination to evade future challenges to its authority.³³ Although the move to Delhi was made to take the wind out of the sails of anti colonial Bengali politics, there was little doubt that Calcutta's status was much reduced by the move. The decision to transfer the capital and abandon Calcutta was taken hurriedly. The plan of transfer was announced by King George V at the Imperial Durbar, a gathering of Indian princes at Delhi. It was a closely guarded secret before it was formally unveiled. In 1911, when King George V made the announcement of the shift of capital, the Calcutta Improvement Bill was being debated at the Bengal Legislative

³³ Das, Suranjan, 'The Politics of Agitation, 1912-1947' in Sukanta Choudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta: The Living City*, Vol: 1, p. 15.

Council. This ultimately culminated in the establishment of Calcutta Improvement Trust (C. I. T) and this co-incidence suggests that it appeared as a consolation to Calcutta, as it had lost the status which it had been enjoying for 150 years. This chapter focuses other spectacular events in the city at this particular time like I.F.A shield victory of the Mohun Bagan Club. This victory of the Havildars over the Goras invoked immense nationalist spirit in the city. So this chapter narrates the story of the capital transfer and along with it various other events, which had greater or lesser connections with it.

This thesis thus traces the history of an imperial city at a time when it was gradually losing its imperial character. A new age was emerging. The seat of supreme colonial administrative power, now became the seat of confrontational nationalism. For so long Calcutta was ruled by a paramount imperial will. Now besides that will and parallel to it an indigenous will came up to shape the everyday mood of the sections of the people.³⁴ This thesis unravels this transition.

³⁴Sen, Ranjit, *Calcutta in Colonial Transition*, p.256.

Chapter – 1

Ordinary Criminals

Crime and criminals form an integral part of a city's daily life. Twentieth century Calcutta was no exception. While writing the history of crime, one has to agree with Sumanta Bannerjee's interpretation of Karl Marx that the root of crime lies in the cut throat competition for jobs, in a market economy dominated by capitalist run factories.¹ It was definitely this "cut throat competition for jobs" intermingled with other factors, that pushed some of the city dwellers to take the path of crime. Crime in its varied forms was not a peculiar feature of twentieth century Calcutta alone. Similar features existed in other metropolises in the early twentieth century. It must be remembered that Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century provided various job opportunities. However, if thought in terms of an ever growing population, these opportunities were so meager that it was hardly possible for the greater city populace to find jobs, even jobs that were not suitable for them. Among those who had jobs, hardly a handful of them, were well paid. Others, the majority, were half fed. Their earnings were not enough to ensure a square meal a day. Such a situation (when the city had become saturated in terms of its population, job opportunities, living space etc) provided a natural breeding ground for crime and criminals. In this chapter we shall mainly enquire into various types of case studies of crime in twentieth century Calcutta. Our focus shall be in what ways criminality touched the daily life of the city dwellers and in course of this, the question of colonial policing will also be addressed. Although in some cases crime in twentieth century, seemed to be a continuation of that of nineteenth century but it shall be an aim of this chapter to give a micro focus on those aspects in which it marked a departure.

The needs of the migrants to the metropolis of twentieth century Calcutta, were shaped by different values. Since nineteenth century they continued to be a part of the growing market and the indigenous work force. In the battle for existence in the

¹Bannerjee, Sumanta, *Crime and Urbanization: Calcutta in nineteenth century*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, p x.

metropolis, they were motivated by the competitive spirit to improve their status. It is this value of self advancement that continued to mould the behavior of the citizens of twentieth century Calcutta. Urbanization—with its new goals and commercial opportunities ignited the expectations and desire to acquire material goods became intense. These expectations spread through various sections of the society and percolated down to the poorer classes.²Urban life also pronounced fewer informal bindings upon the individual. The dominance of traditional collective socio religious norms, which had ruled the minds of the common individual in a pre industrial society, disappeared in the new metropolis where an alternative set of norms that privileged individual self pursuit prevailed. In Calcutta since nineteenth century, it led to a declining respect for the sanctity of property. Since property was concentrated in a few hands at the top, among the colonial rulers and the Indian rich who acquired private property by exploiting others, no sacred aura surrounded the owners of property before ordinary people. Through out the nineteenth century, they were satirized in popular culture. Thus, among the urban population the capitalist ethics of “grab all and devil take the hindmost” had become deep rooted. In such circumstances where there was a general acceptance of acquisitive morality, the thief could rationalize his act as an attempt to adapt to prevailing social goals. Acquisitive morality forms the theme of this chapter.

Petty thefts and dacoities in press

Petty thefts were mostly committed by the lower orders of the city, obviously to adjust themselves to the growing needs of the urban metropolis. *Sanjivani* (24 August,1911)³ highlighted the activities of goondas at the Kalabaganbasti in Calcutta. According to the writer, who claimed to be a man who had already suffered ,petty thefts was a everyday occurrence there. He wrote “no ones umbrella or bicycle was safe amongst the budmashes of the basti.” If a thief was caught, twenty others set on him and released the culprit. Even women helped the criminal and forcibly took things from people. The writer bitterly complained that the bhadralok who inhabited the area were afraid of doing anything against them. The budmashes were organized. They had their

² Ibid, p. xviii

³*Sanjivani*, 24 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

sardar who kept horses and carriages. If any person who had been robbed could detect the item taken, the sardar returned his property.

Thus, Calcutta during this period, registered the persistence of organized crime born of poverty. Among criminals from the impoverished lower classes, if the correspondent was to be believed, certain codes of survival and honor persisted. They took from the rich and helped themselves but occasionally returned the goods through their leader. These Robin Hoods of Calcutta, were definitely a continuous threat to the local inhabitants particularly the upper and middle classes, who in contrast to them had more.

It must be said in this context, that the colonial administrators had taken an efficient move, to alter the urban layout of Calcutta since the beginning of the twentieth century. This ultimately culminated in the foundation of the Calcutta Improvement Trust (C.I.T) in 1911. Under the C.I.T's development programme, many slums in the city were dismantled. Instead high class mansions erected by colonial capitalist firms and some Marwari traders came up. These slums were mostly inhabited by poor Muslims. This formed the background of a continuous antagonism in the form of petty crimes which can otherwise be labeled as a form of class conflict between the mansion dwellers and the slum dwellers. This was the feature of the city at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Navayug* (26 January, 1901) said that 'on 7 January last, thefts were committed in no fewer than five shops in Old China Bazaar, Calcutta. It is said that a constable was hurt by the thieves and was admitted in hospital.'⁴ So the police force, considered to be the keeper of law and orders, was not spared by the thieves. The extent of their notoriety could be well understood from this incident. In this case also, the shop owners were the victims obviously showing the same face of class tensions as the previous case also revealed.

Dainik Chandrika (6 September, 1900) complained of the 'recrudescence of thefts' in and near Kaliprasad Dutt's Street, Calcutta. It reported that 'sometimes ago thefts were committed in broad daylight in the shop of a mudi (grocer) of the name Ratan Chand Rudra. Lately there was an attempted theft in the same shop, but the thief not being able to steal anything, left the padlock broken. A daring theft was also committed in the house

⁴*Navayug*, 26 January, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

of Babu Ramlal Mullick, and the thieves had carried away about Rs 1400 in ornaments and cash. The theft had not been traced. Sometime ago a small theft was being committed in the same house, but it was not reported to the police, as it was thought useless to do so.⁵⁶ *Prativasi* (5 November,1900) also said that “there had been a recrudescence of theft in Calcutta. A theft here and a theft there need not cause anxiety; but there was a novelty in this recrudescence of theft. Harmless passersby were often decoyed into bye lanes and robbed. Well dressed thieves frequently entered into houses without exciting any suspicion and left with something or other adroitly stolen. But this was the first time we hear of daring thefts being frequently committed on public roads in Calcutta. There had very lately been some thefts of a daring character in College Street, in which the thieves, forcibly took off from the doors of houses the rings to which padlocks were fastened.”

These cases points out a certain fact. In nature they may have been of a daring type but if thought in terms of volume, not much was stolen. In many of the cases, padlocks of door or the rings to which padlocks were attached were the stolen properties. These incidents indicate that the thefts committed were not for huge gain. It could serve the immediate purpose of the thieves but did not have any long term impact. In these types of thefts the thief was not driven by economic deprivation alone. Some other factors like addiction to drugs or some form of gambling might have acted as a motivating force behind occurrence of such thefts. These incidents, in a reverse way, reflected the extreme incapability on part of the police authorities, too. The constables were repeatedly reported to spend their time in betel and tobacco and thereby of no worth as the keeper of the law and orders. The laxity regarding petty crime indicates that the state was not interested in preventing crimes which did not lead to significant monetary losses.

Mihir –O- Sudhakar (7 December,1900) reported that ‘on the night of 4 December, a daring dacoity was committed in the house of GhanteswarYugi in Behala, only a mile and a half from Belvedere. The dacoits had visited the house sometime ago, but on that occasion the neighbors having assembled at the cries of the inmates of the house, they

⁵*Dainik Chandrika*, 6 September, 1900, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶*Prativasi*, 5 November, 1900, *Report on Native Press*.

went away unsuccessful and threatened that they would come again. This they did, on the night of the 4 December 1900, and assaulted a girl with a lathi, fractured the skull of a woman and two men and decamped safely with considerable booty. In this case, the dacoits were all upcountry men, probably coolies of the Kidderpore docks.”⁷ It is to be said in this context that Kidderpore was the part of the city, identified with the docks. The serpentine alleys that glided behind the wharfs of the dockyard housed taverns, brothels and the coolie lines etc. The labyrinth of lanes and alleys, acquired a dangerous reputation in the minds of the colonial administrators. To them, these were inhabited by criminals who shared the same territory with slum dwellers. Since nineteenth century this zone was criminalized by the colonial administrators and was usually perceived as a “no go area”.

Cheatings

A correspondent writes to *Sonar Bharat* (19 September, 1908), that ‘the fruit sellers, shoe makers, cobblers and shop keepers on both sides of the Harrison Road, between Manohar Das’s Chowk and the Strand Road were regular robbers. Gentlemen were often insulted by them and their oppressions became unbearable. They did not allow purchasers to make their choices and compelled them to buy bad things from their shops.’⁸ The hawkers in the locality were seen as bad characters. Under the law they could not obstruct the footpath, but they were doing so in broad daylight by giving bribes to the constables. The correspondent gave some instances of insults offered to respectable gentlemen who happened to be there for marketing. Though there were parawallas in Burrabazaar, they all accepted gratification from the hawkers and shopkeepers and did not interfere in the interest of the purchasers. The oppression of the hawkers on their customers, was thus highlighted in the press. They have been labelled as ‘bad characters’. The equal bad characters were the constables of the area. They exacted illegal gratification from the hawkers and thereby remained silent when it was a part of their duty to redress the grievances of the common people who came as customers. The customers thus fell prey to the greed of the hawkers. The hawkers either cheated them in

⁷*Mihir –o- Sudhakar*, 7 December, 1900, *Report on Native Press*.

⁸*Sonar Bharat*, 19 September, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

weights or deprived them from making their own choice and in this way made illegitimate profits.

Navayug(18 May, 1901) said that worthless and pernicious imitations of ‘quinine and De Jongh’s cod liver oil’ were being manufactured in Calcutta, and sold to people in the mufassal. Calcutta during this phase , thus witnessed manufacture of false medicines too like quinine. In a tropical, malaria infested country like India, quinine was a very important drug. It was the only medicine that could probably cure malaria. So preparation of false quinine could have brought a good deal of profit , and many of the fraudulent manufacturers of Calcutta had a thriving business in this. Thus, ignoring the concern for public health, they were busy in making profits in dishonest ways.⁹

A correspondent writing to *Daily Hitavadi*, of the 31 July,1905, said that the neighbourhood of JugannathGhat and Mint on Strand Road in Calcutta, of late had become the scene of operation of a number of lawless characters. Near the north corner of the mint, was situated a go down of Messers Mc Neil and Co’s which accounted for the presence at this spot at all hours of the day, of a large number of drivers of bullock carts. And right opposite to this godown was situated the shop of a bhunawala , presided over by a male and a female, which forms the focus of crime here, so to speak. The modus operandi followed was,“ When a purchaser came to make a purchase at his shop, an immoderately high price was demanded from him, and on his objecting, some pretext for a quarrel was found, where upon a dozen lathials were down upon him in no time. These lathials were mostly the drivers of bullock carts referred to above. The correspondent was a personal witness of three or four such occurances. One day he saw a respectable gentleman being assaulted with a broom stick by the female who, as before mentioned, ran the shop, in company with a male. On another occasion at about 10 o clock in the morning, a female aged 25 or 30 was seen being dishonored. On another occasion he saw the same female catching another man by the hair and in the art of raising a nagra shoe to strike him with.¹⁰

Another case went was as follows,

⁹*Navayug*,18 May, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁰*DailyHitavadi* ,31 July,1905,*Report on Native Press*.

On the evening of the 25 July 1905, a highly respectable gentleman while passing along in front of this shop, halted and took up a mango from the dish on which it was lying, evidently exposed for sale, in order to examine it with a view to purchase. After he had examined the mango, he enquired the price, where upon the female shopkeeper flew into a rage and insolently demanded of the gentleman why he had taken up the mango in his hand, who had told him that these fruits were for sale, and what business he had to ask about the price from her. The gentleman recovered from his surprise, and by the time he had restored the fruit he had taken up to his original place in the plate, found himself surrounded by a number of local roughs, who began to thrash him. At this point a second gentleman arrived on the scene, and by his efforts to get the first gentleman out of the difficulty drew upon himself, the wrath which was hitherto finding vent on the first gentleman. A policeman, who was a witness of all this rowdism on a public street, did not deem it his duty to interfere.¹¹

The correspondent concluded by alleging that the ferriwallas (hawkers of goods) on the Harrison Road also were in the habit of first taking the price and afterwards refusing to take part with their goods in return. If any intending purchaser in these circumstances proved disagreeable, he was stripped off all valuables he might have on his person at that time. These practices were indulged in with, the collaboration of the beat constables who were won over by bribes. All these cases point out how the city dwellers, were pressurized by dishonest shopkeepers. On the other hand, it must be noted that the role of the policemen is questionable all through. Their excessive indulgence in exacting bribes, the chief patrons being the shopkeepers, kept them aloof from performing their legal duties. Thus the dishonest shopkeepers were shielded by the police, continued to harass the innocent buyers, at many instances, in a violent form. Their grievances, most of the times went unredressed.¹²

Sandhya, (18 February, 1908) reported that Babu Abinash Chandra Bannerjee of No 2 Kasi Ghose's Lane, wrote to *Sandhya* of 18 February that the vendors who sold fruits on the footpaths at Barrabazaar were regular rowdies and often bullied people into paying double the proper prices of the things which they may have to buy. These

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Daily Hitavadi*, 31 July, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

fellows even sometimes assaulted people if they refused to submit to such extortion. On the evening of the 17 February, the writer himself with the help of some other men rescued a Bengali gentleman whom these ruffians had robbed off all his money and were assaulting. A neighbouring shopkeeper tried to help the gentleman and was threatened with bodily injury. After the row an eight rupee Lord (police constable) came up, and after asking the men not to make a disturbance there, quietly slipped off. The paper lamented that could nothing be done to put a stop to such hooliganism?¹³ The shopkeepers of the northern part were thus repeatedly described as villains in the newspapers. But there were instances where the shopkeepers themselves became victims.

Samay (6 April, 1906) reported that the lands branching off Harrison Road between College Street and Chitpore Road had long been notorious as the haunt of the goondas and budmashes who committed oppressions on passersby. The shopkeepers in this quarter also were terrorized by those lawless characters into complying with any and every call for subscription which they might get up. These men had lately taken to a new dodge to rob people. They loitered about with fierce dogs which they set on to any inoffensive passer by they met, and when the victim cried out in terror, they came up to rob him of all the valuables that he might have carried.¹⁴ All these incidents reveal before us a clear picture of various kinds of crime that were occurring in the Indian quarters of the city. The names of some particular areas became associated with crimes. In other words, these areas in course of time, got a bad reputation as crime enclaves. Burrabazaar, Harrison Road, Cornwallis Street, Mechua Bazaar- all these became criminal pockets in Calcutta.¹⁵

Gambling

Gambling had already taken on the appearance of crime, in the eyes of the Bengali gentry and the British administrators since the thirties of the nineteenth century. New issues were discovered by cunning speculators to attract gamblers to stake on them. Thus, rain gambling became a popular attraction. According to a contemporary British official: Rain gambling was introduced into Calcutta many years since by the Marwaris,

¹³*Sandhya*, 18 February, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁴*Samay*, 6 April, 1906, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁵Bannerjee, Sumanta, *The Wicked City : Crime and Punishment in Colonial Calcutta*, New Delhi, Orient Black Swan, 2009, p.95.

who are more addicted to play and wagering of one kind or other, and is practiced in the Burrabazaar quarter, where they chiefly reside. For some years, it was confined to one house, containing a large courtyard where the gamblers could assemble. Two more houses were subsequently opened and facilities for gambling were offered at 3 establishments.....Attached to the houses were a number of men who registered bets for the proprietors, charging them or the successful wagers a commission of one pice or one anna, respectively, on each rupee won. The bets were made on the occurrence of rain within a certain time, and they were registered three or four times daily. The proprietors of the premises offered odds against rain, and these depended chiefly on the state of the weather, ranging from level money to 2 to 1, 3 to 1, and so on and sometimes upto 50 to 1. Those who backed the rain did not win unless the fall sufficed to cause an overflow from a small raised tank through a spout, which was visible from the courtyard. A clock was kept on the premises to regulate the time¹⁶. The government passed in 1897, a special Act banning rain gambling in common gaming houses, on the ground that it had done much harm among certain classes of the community in Calcutta, and tended to effect larger and larger numbers.

Bharat Mitra (15 July, 1905) was sorry that the provisions of the Rain Gambling Act had failed to check the nuisance at Calcutta entirely as there were still some houses in Burrabazaar, where it was carried on secretly. The respectable people passing by such houses were shamefully insulted by the police, while the persons who were really guilty of the offence were, intentionally or for want of any knowledge, not arrested by the police. During the previous week some twenty respectable men had been arrested and handed over by the police. The paper requested the police commissioner to pay his attention to the matter with a view to put a stop to the rain gambling and its addas.¹⁷ *Nayak* (23 November, 1911) reported cases of gambling that ruined poor people and went unpunished since they were tolerated by law. It emphasized the serious growth of the cotton gambling habit in Calcutta, which involved speculating on the prices. It reported that even women and boys were sometimes found playing to their ruin. The names of certain areas were attached to particular kinds of gambling among which

¹⁶Bannerjee, Sumanata, *Crime and urbanization: Calcutta in nineteenth century*, Tulika Books, New Delhi 2006.p.104.

¹⁷*Bharat Mitra*, 15 July, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

Burrabazaar deserved special mention. Since this form of gambling was legal and connected with speculations, characteristic of colonial capitalism, the lure of money enticed even the poor and the disempowered including women and children, to engage in them and there by loose their savings or earnings.¹⁸

Satya Sanatan Dharma(26 October,1911) in the context of gambling said in its Calcutta Notes that the Calcutta market was dull. Its sales were decreasing. Open gambling known as opium, cotton, ring or picture games was rife everywhere. It was not illegal and so illiterate people could not be protected from them. The paper remarked that there was hardly any “respectable” man who was not sorry to see the poor people thus robbed but the situation was hopeless. It was the insecurities and material hardships of the common people especially the urban working class and the lower middle class that lay at the roots of gambling. Unprotected by the colonial system and a hierarchical society, they tried to earn money by gambling or borrowing and thereby face ruin and violence.¹⁹

Contemporary newspaper reports as well as administrative measures indicate that gambling in Calcutta since nineteenth century was taking on new colours. It was becoming a metropolitan game attracting higher stakes and promising a fortune to the gamblers. The sheer volume of money that was generated by this new mode of gambling made it a target for criminals. Rooms were rented out in the sleazy lanes of the Black Town for housing gambling dens, where professional card sharpers, experts in rigging games and shills (their accomplices in the audience who encouraged unsuspecting players to bet) made money by cheating the gamblers. Like alcoholism and drug abuse, addiction to gambling became a part of the urban pathology of the metropolis. The craze for amassing a fortune - which marked the lifestyle of the rich citizens at the upper level - successfully infiltrated other levels too, and reproduced itself among the middle and lower strata in the form of casting lots in the dingy gaming houses, in the hope of hitting the jackpot.²⁰

In early twentieth century Calcutta, perhaps no other form of gambling became so much popular like cotton gambling. Here lies an extract from the memoirs of Dr Atul

¹⁸*Nayak*, 23 November, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁹*Satya Sanatan Dharma*, 29 October, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁰Bannerjee, Sumanta, *The Wicked City*, p.104.

Sur, who was born in the closing years of nineteenth century in Calcutta. He reminiscised about how the addiction of cotton gambling became widespread in the city in the first decade of the twentieth century. “From Shyambazar to College Street innumerable shops on both sides of the road had same signboards hanging in front of them – American Cotton Figure. All on a sudden there sprang up thousands of cotton gambling shops throughout Calcutta. The play attracted the city dwellers in such a manner that the game of gambling became so wide spread within the city. It was a peculiar scene. The master played and the mistress played, the daughter played and the daughter- in- law played, the son played and the son- in - law played, the cook played and the servant played, the coolie played and the labour played, the shopkeeper played and the business personnel played. The school boys started playing it with marbles. The number in cotton game was determined by the speculative rate in the cotton market of New Orleans, America. The board those hanged in front of the shops contained numbers from 1 to 10 and also two or three extra multi digit numbers. Everybody had the intention to determine the exact numbers from those many numbers present on the board for the next day. In fact the city dwellers in order to determine the exact number often took assistance of astrologers. But no one disclosed the actual number on which he or she betted, in case others could reap the benefit of that.”²¹

A funny incident in this context was narrated by Dr Sur. One day a maid from the neighbouring house of the Mallicks came and handed a plate of sweets to his mother. It was sent by Mrs Mallick to whom Mata Chandi had appeared in her dreams and ordered that she should bet Rs 5 on number 5. Accordingly she did that and won Rs 40. After watching Mrs Mallick’s success many from the locality went to Kali Temple at Kalighat and prayed for fortune from betting on cotton prices. This cotton gambling game became so deep rooted in the contemporary society, that people became each others rivals. Many families lost their everything as a result of betting. Contemporary newspapers carried on extensive propaganda against this vice. After passing of eight to ten months the colonial government issued injunctions on this game. It was the Bengalis from whom the wealth was drained out and the Marwaris were the beneficiaries of the situation. After the game stopped once again there was a change in the situation that had been

²¹ Sur, Atul, *Tinsho Bochorer Kolkata: Patabhumi O Itikatha*, Ujjal Sahitya Mandir, Calcutta, 1988, PP. 144-148.

prevailing. The cotton game shops once again turned into food joints, laundries, umbrella and watch selling shops, shops of steel trunks etc. Never before the city had witnessed such a massive flood of gambling.²²

This shows how global market forces sparked imaginations and aspirations of all classes of people in society irrespective of class, caste, gender, language, religion or station in life. How potent the dream of betting reached through avenues of capitalism is revealed by these incidents. The colonial authorities resorted to restrictive measures on gambling since the nineteenth century onwards. They enacted the Bengal Public Gambling Act as early as 1867, with a result of increased police surveillance on the gambling dens followed by punishment of gaming house owners. But inspite of these restrictive measures on part of the colonial authorities, there was an everyday increase in the number of gambling cases. The number of arrests and convictions related to gambling showed an ever increasing graph. Gambling cases in early twentieth century Calcutta thus showed an upward trend. This was perhaps lack of executing exemplary punishment on part of the colonial law makers that led to an increase in gambling. The offenders could get away by paying a paltry amount by way of fine and resume business soon after the acquittal. In this way, the colonial government failed to check the habit of gambling.

Drug pedling and Alcoholism

In the process of criminalization of society a researcher cannot ignore the role of narcotics and alcohol. Addiction to drugs was not driven always by criminal motives alone. Its composition produced a temporary euphoric effect followed by a feeling of reaction and depression but for time being it gave a feeling of *bien etre*, and a freedom from the pangs of hunger. The consumption of these items gave a temporary relief to the low class poverty ridden inhabitants of the city. They sought a psychological escape from their monotonous life of hard physical labour, immersing themselves in these drugs. They were of course labeled as criminals by the colonial rulers. But the same intoxicants also acquired popularity in the homes and clubs of the city's affluent classes.²³ The members of these classes were of course not criminalized by the colonial authorities. Hemp smoking became a form of exciting diversion for the otherwise lethargic members of the

²²Sur, Atul, pp.144-148.

²³ Bannerjee, Sumanta, *The Wicked City*, pp.261.

idle rich society on whom time hung as a heavy burden.²⁴ In the official colonial vision Calcutta slum youths were habitual cocaine consumers in twentieth century and were usually characterized as those who had swallow look, sunken eyes, and blackened teeth. This blackening was most marked in the lower teeth and extended to the last molars and was even more marked on the inner and posterior surface of the teeth. This blackening could usually be differentiated from that produced by dirt or by tobacco and in course of time became the yard stick by which the colonial police authorities could single out the cocaine eaters. It was for the first time at the beginning of the twentieth century that these kind of typical characteristics of the cocaine addicts came out in medical publication.²⁵

The readers of the daily newspapers in Calcutta were aware that prosecutions for selling cocaine without license was a standing feature of the Police News Columns, but it was a surprise to many to learn the extent to which this habit had spread among all classes, particularly among the youths, no matter whether rich or poor. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the Central Jail at Alipore there were some 200 youths, among whom as many as 37 were convicted for three, four or even five times before that. A survey during the same time at the neighbouring Reformatory School revealed that 18 more youths, here were found to be habitual cocaine consumers. Although in terms of legal code these boys belonged to the criminal classes of the city and were in every way typical products of life in the slums of the big cities but the vice of cocaine eating was by no means confined to the criminal classes. Considerable quantities of cocaine were secretly sold everyday to known customers by the pan sellers. The cocaine sold, was pure or nearly pure and it was sold in minute paper packets containing half or one grain each at the price of half or one anna respectively. At this rate it was sold with a considerable profit. Many customers bought three, four or even six packets daily. The drug was seldom eaten by itself, and in Calcutta it was taken with pan and this was suppose to enhance the pleasure of cocaine eating. Although the police had

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *The Indian Medical Gazette*, October, 1901.

considerable knowledge about cocaine vices in the city but effective measures were not taken by them to put a stop to this menace.²⁶

Navayug(24April, 1901) said that on “ 14 April 1901, a constable arrested a drunkard who was making a great row in Manicktolla Street”²⁷. *Navayug* (23 February, 1901) said that on the night of the 16 February 1901, a prostitute was dragged by a constable from the threshold of her house in Manicktolla Street, and forcibly carried to the Jorasanko police station on a false charge of intoxication. The constable beat her and greatly outraged her modesty. To prove her drunk, he procured a glass of wine from a liquor shop and tried to pour the wine into her mouth, but did not succeed. On being asked by BabuBijayendranathMitra, Inspector of the Jorasanko police station, she said that the constable did all this, because she refused to pay him illegal gratification. The Inspector let off the woman and charged the constable with bribery, assault and unlawful confinement. On the case being put up before Mr James, he suspended the constable.²⁸ But suspension of police personnel in such cases was a rare event. In most of the cases they could be won by paying bribes thereby allowing crimes to thrive well in the metropolis.

The growing habit of cocaine consumption was reflected in contemporary newspapers also. *Navayug* (2 February,1901) had the following,

“For some day, people saw sellers of cocaine fined, and thought that its sale would, perhaps be put a stop to, but that was not the case. We again see constables standing at the doors of shops in which cocaine is freely sold. In No: 58 Pathuriaghata Street cocaine was sold in an inner room and not in the outer room. In house No: 29, by the side of the Bengal Theatre, the proprietors of the cocaine dispensary plied their trade day and night perfectly unmolested. Constables were seen at the doors of these shops. Were these licensed shops? Besides these old haunts, some new ones were also reported to have started . At No 1 Gour Mohan Chatterjee’s Lane a grand establishment of this sort was carrying on a good trade. Petty thefts on the other hand, were frequent in the locality. The paper hoped that the police commissioner would look at this.”²⁹*Navayug* (19 April,

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Navayug*, 24 April, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁸*Navayug*, 23 February, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁹*Navayug*, 2February,1901, *Report on Native Press*.

1902) directed the attention of the commissioner of police, Calcutta, to the unlicensed sale of cocaine in betel shop at No 97 Upper Chitpore Road and in another betel shop a few yards to the south. A man named Govinda, was making most fortune by the unlicensed sale of cocaine in Beadon Street by the side of the Aurora Theatre. He had already been fined five or six times but he did not care at all, the amount of fines being too small in comparison with his large income from the sale of cocaine. The paper asked why the Lieutenant Governor did not order a strict enforcement of the regulation regarding the sale of cocaine³⁰.

Cocaine trade became such a menace for the city dwellers, that even children were attached to this trade. This trend had its beginning in the nineteenth century. Children were not only used as vendors of cocaine, but they were also fed on it. Cocaine was also used to drug girl prostitutes to immunize them against sexual assaults during the period of their initiation into the profession. Thus the sale of cocaine was thriving well in the urban environment of early twentieth century Calcutta. The British government inspite of adopting certain restrictive measures on the sale of cocaine, could not put a stop to it. The sellers of cocaine could amass a great fortune by selling this drug in early twentieth century Calcutta.

But was the British government really concerned about the spread of alcoholism and drug addiction among its native subjects? *Daily Hitavadi* (19 June, 1908) referred to the Resolution of the Bengal Government on the Report of the Committee to enquire into the liquor trade in Calcutta and said that the Government had been very cautious in dealing with the question of reducing the number of liquor shops. It feared that the restriction on the opium trade would have a disastrous effect on the finances of the province and hence thought it would be injudicious to diminish the sale of liquor. The above report definitely points to the fact that the concern for revenue was very much there in the minds of the British colonizers. This concern in fact , made them handicapped to take a stern action against alcoholism and drug pedling, in the colonial city of Calcutta in the twentieth century. Thus the liquor distilleries, grog shops, cocaine shops had a flourishing business and had become well integrated with the daily life of

³⁰*Navayug*, 19 April, 1902, *Report on Native Press*.

the city dwellers. The revenue from these shops was extremely lucrative for the government exchequer.

Fraudulent Firms in Colonial Calcutta

Early twentieth century Calcutta also witnessed the existence of fraudulent or bogus firms. These firms by means of alluring advertisements induced people living at a distance to purchase articles of inferior value. They also ordered articles from upcountry, took delivery but did not pay for them. There was existence of both indigenous and European fraudulent firms. The paucity of free or cheap healthcare also led to flourishing of fake physicians.

Navayug (8 April, 1905) said about a bogus Kaviraj (native physician) in No 2, Dan's Lane, Baneatollah Lane, Calcutta, under name of Dasarathi Kabiratna. The man was at first a dealer in pictures in Canning Street, then he established a stationer's shop at the same place. Afterwards, he procured the title Kaviratna from a man named Apurva Krishna Gupta Vidyanidhi and turned out to be a bogus Kaviraj.³¹ In 1910, one BibhutiBhusan Ghose opened a fraudulent firm, under the style of B. Friend and Co. Jewellers. His operations consisted in advertising for agents who were to deposit Rs20 and in lieu thereof receive jewellery worth Rs 100 for sale. He used to misappropriate the amounts so deposited. He was arrested on the basis of a warrant in Calcutta and sent to Peshawar where he was convicted and sent to one year, rigorous imprisonment for cheating³².

In 1910, one Nabin Kristo Dutt and two others represented themselves to be assistants in the firm of J. Smith and Co., cooley contractors, a firm which had no existence. They fraudulently induced people to advance money in expectation of obtaining contracts for loading and unloading ships. A case was instituted in the Alipore Court in February 1910. Later in 1911, Nobin Kristo Dutt and Srihari Das (one of his accomplices) were each sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 100, and Behary Sirdar (another accomplice) to pay a fine of Rs 200 for cheating³³. This same gang, including one Rajendra Nath Chatterjee, were prosecuted for a similar

³¹*Navayug*, 8 April, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

³² *Annual Report on Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1911*.

³³*Ibid*.

offence by the government Railway Police, Howrah. Behary Sirdar and Rajendra Nath Chatterjee were sentenced to four years rigorous imprisonment and ordered to notify their places of residence for three years after release from jail, and NobinKrishtoDutt was sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment by the Sessions Judge of Howrah.³⁴

In 1907, a huge swindling establishment namely Calcutta Provident Institution ceased its operations. Three of its supposed organizers were prosecuted at Rajmundry (Coconada). Two were convicted and sentenced to 18 months rigorous imprisonment whilst the third was acquitted. Radhika Prasad Misser and Bhagabati CharanSen were sentenced to imprisonment.³⁵ In 1907, once again a prosecution was instituted against one SatishNath Misser and Amar KantaHazra for cheating by sending worthless watches to different parts of India.³⁶ Thus Calcutta in twentieth Century had no dearth of these kinds of false concerns whose primary motive was to cheat common people. Their false business brought them profit to a good deal. The British government in spite of their serious attempt to deal with these kinds of fraudulent establishments, failed to certain degrees.

Forgery

The forgerers also occupied a prominent place in early twentieth century Calcutta's underworld. Here, in this chapter we are going to deal with those class of forgerers who were engaged with manufacture of false government notes. They imbibed the art of reproducing the original in its exact form. Of course they had to rely on mechanical tools for manufacturing false notes.

In this connection the sensational news of our research period was perhaps that of Annoda Mohan Roy or Tollygunje note forgery case. In 1911, one Babu Annoda Mohan Roy along with his other associates were charged with manufacture of forged currency notes. On approval of the District Magistrate of 24 parganas, police searched Annoda Mohan's house at Mollarhat, Tollygunje. Mr Taylor of the Survey Office, found two impressions of Rs1000, notes from an electro block from Annoda's house. He found these specimens to be interesting which showed the excellence of workmanship. Apart

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Annual Report on Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1908.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

from Annoda Mohan, the others who had their names on the charge sheet were Jibon Kristo Sarkar, Radhika Kristo Nandi, Nidhu Dhara, Jugal Kristo Bose, Rakhal Ghose and Debendra Sapui.³⁷ From the Calcutta police office, a strictly confidential letter, dated June, 1911 was circulated through the Currency Office to the Manager of the local banks and treasuries and other places where business was done in large notes. It was notified that on receipt of information it was supposed that forged G.C Notes of series XA/8 39813 for Rs 1000 was in circulation. The bank managers were cautioned against receipt of such notes.

The case acquired a new turn when a letter bearing a Mandalay post mark was received by the post master, Tollygunje, addressed to Babu Annoda Mohan Roy. The post master knowing that the addressee was in Alipore Jail, sent the letter there where it was opened by the police and found to contain a communication from a firm styling themselves Shudut Roy Bireswar Das, Bankers of Mandalay, asking Annoda to send them a fresh supply of notes as those sent previously were almost all disposed of. On receiving such a letter, Inspector Darpa Narayan Sinha, immediately proceeded to Mandalay and with the assistance of the Burmahpolice, searched the premises of the above mentioned bankers, but nothing of an incriminating nature was found. The paper on which the letter addressed to Annoda was written, was found to differ from that usually made use of by the firm, and these facts led the Inspector to believe that it is possible that the letter may be a hoax. However, while the trial against Annoda was going on, on his defence it was said that he was an insane and so was incapable of distinguishing right or wrong. Colonel Calvert, a civil surgeon, as directed by the Magistrate of 24 parganas was to examine Annoda on the evidence of the above mentioned surgeon. Although no insanity could be proved, he was accepted as insane by the jury.

Thus, Annoda Mohan Roy, a wealthy zamindar, once upon a time, could go free from the charge of forgery. Had Annoda Mohan happened to be a member of the lower strata of the society, probably his punishment could have been of a different type. The British colonial authority would have inflicted rigorous punishment in that case. But thanks to the British sense of justice. Annoda Mohan Roy, due to his privileged

³⁷*Government of Bengal (Political / Confidential) Proceedings: 1911,181/11(15-19).*

position in society could escape punishment precisely because of his social origins in the colonial zamindari system.

Kidnapping

Early twentieth century Calcutta also witnessed kidnapping the young girls and channelizing them into the profession of prostitution. *Bengalee* (12 March, 1901) reported that there was a band of budmashes at Burrabazaar, who made it their business to kidnap girls for the purpose of prostitution. In making enquiries into the loss of a little girl one day, the police discovered another girl, who had been kidnapped on 23 January that year. With this girl, there were discovered two other Marwari girls who had been kidnapped also. Two persons were awaiting trial then for kidnapping. The paper raised its voice, saying that the budmashes should be hunted down and punished³⁸.

These under aged girls being kidnapped, were firstly trained to steel their bodies and minds to cope with the grim reality. It was a physically violent and a mentally traumatic process which they had to go through.³⁹ At the end of this process, they finally landed at the red light areas of the city. The colonial rulers failed to put a check on these sorts of crimes. Had the police surveillance been stricter, it could have stopped the little girls being driven into a world, which had been completely unknown to them. *Sanjivani* (15 February, 1906) referred to a case in which two young females (who visited its office in the previous week), had been seduced by a female 'arkati' into leaving their village homes for Calcutta, where they were kept under surveillance in a cooley depot, from which however, they were rescued in time.⁴⁰ The paper then, went on to publish, in extensor, a petition, dated 1 February 1906, filed by these females in the court of the Magistrate at Sealdah, under Sections 363, 343, 379 and 109 of Indian Penal Code.

Prostitution

Women occupied a definite place in the Calcutta underworld. It was ofcourse the prostitutes who constituted the bulk of female criminals in the police records of

³⁸*Bengalee*, 12 March, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁹Bannerjee, Sumanta, *The Wicked City*, p.313.

⁴⁰*Sanjivani*, 15 February, 1906, *Report on Native Press*.

Calcutta. It must be noted that prostitution in pre-colonial Bengal was tolerated more as a social transgression. It was not branded as a legal crime. But in the course of the clash between pre-colonial value systems on the one hand, and the British administration's formal attempts to introduce institutionalized mechanisms of control on the other, the profession of prostitution in Calcutta underwent a reconstruction in terms of both definition and occupational behavior. Prostitutes became the symbolic representation of urban vice⁴¹. Probably this was the reason why the city's red light areas and their actors were looked down upon by the respectable strata of the society. They labeled the prostitutes as 'dangerous outcasts', but failed to analyze or rather ignored to take into account, the complex socio economic situation that pushed an innocent girl, into the world of prostitution. A distancing from the natives in everyway remained the spoken and unspoken official directives. The Indian rulers were perceived by the colonial rulers as the actual source of "miasma", which was sought to cause disease. Surrounded by garbage, domestic animals, crawling children and the stench of human excretion, the whole area was a scene of filth, pollution and vice. Superimposed on this was the fear of the "native" as a rebel. The native prostitute was thus by her very origin perceived as an amalgamation of all three – filth, disease and crime.⁴² She was also the most powerless person in the colonial social order.

Mihir-o- Sudhakar (14 February, 1902) called the attention of the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta to a serious public nuisance in Chitpore Road in front of Natun Bazaar, near the Tramway Co's stables. A large number of low class prostitutes appeared on the footpath, used obscene language, sang obscene songs and solicited low class passersby obstructing the public passage. It complained that very often constables were seen either as silent spectators of the scene or participating in it. It reported that one day, a gentleman, passing along the footpath, was shoved by the motley crowd into the front of a tramcar while changing horses.⁴³ *Basumati* (15 February, 1908) was glad that the authorities had ordered the prostitutes living in the west side of the Beadon Street to

⁴¹Bannerjee, Sumanta, *The Wicked City*, p.130.

⁴²Chatterjee, Ratnabali, 'The Indian Prostitute as a Colonial Subject, Bengal 1864-1883.' *Journal of Canadian Women Studies*. Volume 13, No.1., p.52.

⁴³*Mihir-o- Sudhakar*, 14 February, 1902, *Report on Native Press*.

remove from their houses which were located in the respectable quarters.⁴⁴*Prativasi* (3 November,1900) complained that brothels were then being opened even in respectable quarters and at night peace was disturbed by drunkards. It reported that constables were never seen to prevent these disturbances and they were generally seen in the company of the prostitutes, who solicited on the public streets. Instead of putting down immoral solicitation, they openly encouraged it. *Utkal Varta* (18 July, 1908) gives an account of the Khali Kothi (empty house) trade that was being carried on in Calcutta, mainly through the agency of the Uriya beharars(bearars). This was a nefarious trade of procuring women for bad men, who spent a few hours in these houses. These flats were well furnished and were generally vacant. ⁴⁵

All these reports leads us to know that how criminality was breeding in the urban environment of early twentieth century Calcutta. Crime was acquiring new colours and was taking on new shapes , catering to the needs of the metropolis. One by one from petty thieves, burglars , swindlers , pick pockets, cheaters, gamblers, prostitutes etc, all achieved their respective positions in the criminal hierarchy, of the twentieth century Calcutta.

Murders

Need or greed pushed an individual into the world of crime. Often these same factors motivated an individual to commit murders. As in nineteenth century Calcutta, similar was the case in twentieth century. If we look into the murder cases of the period under our research, we will find that a striking feature was the prostitutes falling victims of the murderers. Sometimes the murderers were their old paramours. Being lured by the heavy weight ornaments possessed by these prostitutes, the murderers made them their victims. However prostitutes constituted the majority of the murder victims. But they were not the only murder victims. There were cases of other murders also.

⁴⁴*Basumati*, 15 February 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁵*The Utkal Varta*, 18 July, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

On 26 July, 1902, the attention of the police attracted by an offensive smell to premises No.7, Ganga NarainDutt's Lane, the door was broke open and the body of an aged prostitute, highly decomposed , was discovered with the head almost severed from the body. The motive of the murder was robbery, as the deceased's ornaments were said to be missing. Some suspicion rested on the paramour of the deceased , who disappeared at the time of the murder . He was traced to Midnapore , and sustained enquiries made , but no clue to the murder could be obtained.⁴⁶ The body of one Bhobo Raur, an aged prostitute, living in 51, Pathuriaghata Street, was found in a highly decomposed state, nude and denuded of all ornaments on the 21 April 1902, by the police. The deceased received casual visitors of the cooley class, and was last seen alive on the 17 April. No clue could be obtained as to the persons who visited her on the particular night and the case remained undetected.⁴⁷

In April 1907, a woman of the town, named Rangamoni was murdered at night by throttling for her ornaments by some unknown persons ; no clue was discovered in the case. On the night of the 23 January 1911, a woman of the town residing in Beadon Street received an unknown visitor who stayed with her for the night. While she was asleep, the man strangled her to death, stripped her of all her jewellery and decamped. No clue was discovered in the case. ⁴⁸ On the night of 24 December 1911, a woman of the town living at Ultadanga was murdered by a supposed unknown visitor who cut her throat and decamped with her ornaments. In the course of the investigation that followed , two servants of the deceased were suspected for complicity in the crime and were arrested , but were discharged for want of sufficient evidence. No trace of the stolen property or supposed unknown visitor was discovered. The case had the appearance of being the work of a professional murderer.⁴⁹

On the evening of the 12 April, 1910, a woman of the town, named Nalini Raur living at Jorasanko, was stabbed during a quarrel by her paramour, one Lal Mohan Shah, and died almost immediately. The murderer absconded and was evading arrest , at the close of

⁴⁶*Annual Report on the Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1903.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Annual Report on the Police Administration in the town and suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1912*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the year. He had since been arrested and was waiting for trial.⁵⁰ On the night of the 3 July, 1910, a woman of the town, named Basanta Raur of Jorasanko was strangled to death, by an unknown visitor, who stole all the jewellery from her room. No clue was discovered in the case.⁵¹ All these cases, as mentioned earlier, were knitted with the same thread. In all of them, the motives of the murders was ofcourse jewellery. In many of these cases, while the victims were murdered by their paramours, in some cases the murders were committed by some unknown visitors. These visitors ofcourse, had prior knowledge regarding the wealth or jewellery of the victims. In this way the murderer, disguised himself as a visitor, made the prostitutes their victims about whom they had made prior inquiries through some agents or others.

There were other murder cases also, taking place in and around the city. Lure of money or ornaments, was the common factor in all these cases. On the night of 9 January, 1902, the accused, Seikh Arjun, a carter was engaged by the deceased, Sanatan Bairagi, to take him from the suburbs into Calcutta. The deceased had with him a gunny bag containing Rs 53. On the road, at about 4.30 am, the deceased, as well as the accused, got off the cart, and the accused struck him on the back of the head and on the face with a dao, and absconded with the bag containing the money. The deceased was removed to hospital, where he died soon after admission. The accused was sent up for trial and sentenced to death at the Alipore Sessions under sections 302, Indian Penal Code.⁵²

Bhooban Chunder Kurmoker was arrested by the police on suspicion at 4 am of 1 October, 1902 with certain property in his possession, and taken to the police station at Alipore, when it was discovered that he had murdered his mistress, Ganoda Raur, by means of a cutting instrument and robbed her of ornaments etc valued at Rs 400. The accused was sent up for trial and sentenced at the Alipore Sessions to transportation for life under section 302 of Indian Penal Code.⁵³ In November 1902, in consequence of a dispute over some monetary transactions, the deceased Seikh Moosokh was stabbed by the accused Seikh Kulloo, and died from effects of the injuries on the

⁵⁰ *Annual Report on the Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1911.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Annual Report on the Police Administration in the town and suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1903.*

⁵³ *Annual Report on the Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta, 1903.*

spot. The accused was sent up for trial and committed to the High Court, where, however, he was declared not guilty by the jury, and the judge acquitted him on 19 December 1902.⁵⁴

There were some other murder cases also, taking place in and around the city of Calcutta with different twists and turns. On the night of 5 January, 1910, a notorious goonda or bazaar bulley, by name of Jantuman, was found lying alive on Harrison Road but with a dangerous stab wound on the left side of his chest. He was immediately removed to the Medical College Hospital, but expired the next day. He named two persons as his assailants on arrival in hospital, but subsequently retracted this statement and died refusing to inform the police or the Honorary Magistrate who visited him of the true facts. The case was not detected.⁵⁵ Thus we see the death of a notorious criminal and the type of the murder was definitely daring. Inter-gang conflicts among criminal gangs or some accumulated previous grudge on the victim might have resulted in such a type of murder case.

On 3 June 1902, the accused Topsis Patuk, a telegraph peon, living in Harrison Road, stabbed his brother Mahabir, with a knife, and caused hurt also to Bartun, the latter's wife in consequence of her carrying on an intrigue with a Bengali and he then tried to cut his own throat. All three parties were removed to the Medical College Hospital. Mahabir died on the following day while Bartun was cured and discharged. The accused was sent up for trial at the High Court sessions and sentenced to be hanged, but on the recommendation for mercy by the jury being forwarded to government, the sentence was committed to one of transportation for life.⁵⁶ On 27 July 1902, in consequence of the deceased, Latifun Bibi having left her husband Golan Mohammad alias Punjabi, the accused and living with another man, he stabbed her repeatedly with a knife. She died soon after admission to hospital. The accused was sentenced by the High Court to be hanged but reprieved by government and the sentence committed to one of transportation for life.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Annual Report on the Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1911.*

⁵⁶ *Annual Report on the Police Administration in the Town and suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1903.*

⁵⁷ Ibid.

In these murder cases we find they were the consequences of love triangles, an inevitable result of extra marital affairs. Loosening bond between family members and challenges to the patriarchal authority of the husband over the wife often led to homicide or attacks on women who could no longer adjust or live with their spouses thereby violating male domination in some way or the other. This pattern of crime also conformed to 'acquisitive morality' where women were necessarily seen as properties of men.

In January, 1906, the dead body of a new born child was found lying by the side of Princep's Street, Bow Bazaar. The post mortem examination showed that the death was due to 'dislocation of neck and violent injury to the head'. No clue as to the identity of the child or the offender was discovered.⁵⁸ On the night of the 21 January 1910, the dead body of a new born child, wrapped up in a piece of cloth, was found in a timberyard at 43, Canal West Road, Ultadanga. The child had been strangled to death with a piece of cloth which was found twisted round his neck. No clue was obtained in the case nor any trace of the parents.⁵⁹ On the morning of the 23 November, 1911, a new born child was found lying on the footpath of College Square. It was immediately removed to the Eden Hospital, but died a few hours later. The post mortem examination showed that the child had been partly strangled before it was abandoned. Efforts to trace the mother of the child failed.⁶⁰ Hence infanticide was also practiced in the city. These unlucky children were either born as an illegitimate child, or born of poverty stricken parents. Unable to face the social and economic consequences that was inevitable with the child's birth, these unfortunate parents had no other choice, but to kill their new - borns. We thus have sketched Calcutta underworld. We have tried to analyse how criminality was breeding in the underbelly of the city's daily life. Early twentieth century Calcutta witnessed crimes of all categories. From petty thefts, cheatings, gamblings, forgery to murders. Crimes were committed with different motives. There was class distinction among the criminals also. While many of them belonged to the cooley and other laboring classes, as we have already discussed, there were criminals of

⁵⁸*Annual Report for the Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1907.*

⁵⁹*Annual Report on Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1911.*

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

higher orders of the society like Annoda Mohan Roy. Criminal underworld of Calcutta thus showed a heterogeneous composition.

While tracing the history of crime and criminality in Calcutta, in the twentieth Century, we must keep in mind that the rise of crime, as we have traced, was the inevitable consequence of rapid urban developments. Urban life demanded a wide range of things. Unable to meet the needs, a handful of people, being chased by these needs chose the path of crime. Perennial problems of daily life like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, patriarchy could be traced as the common roots of crimes. Once again as mentioned earlier, crime as a problem, was not a peculiar feature of the colonial metropolis of Calcutta alone. It was the same story in all other contemporary metropolises of the world. We have also discussed in this chapter, about the participation of women in various kinds of crimes, and how women were victimized by the criminals. They participated in gambling, in cocaine trade, as mistress for procuring young girls for prostitution etc. As prostitutes once again they fell prey to the greed of their paramours. Many of them being murdered for the sake of their jewelery. The effort and negligence on part of the British colonial authorities to deal with various forms of crimes taking place, in and around the city, has also been delved into. In various cases their negligence has come to the forefront.

Crime therefore reflected social and economic deprivations of various shades. In this chapter we have discussed how some particular areas in the city became crime enclaves like Burrabazaar. Located in the heart of Calcutta, known to be the principal Indian business center, the Burrabazaar area housed brothels, gambling dens, liquor distilleries etc and in all these crime definitely thrived well. Till now we have depicted only a partial picture (Indian part) of the city's underworld, which remains incomplete without locating the Europeans in it.

The Europeans

The Europeans occupied a prominent position in the underworld of Calcutta. Without them one cannot get a clear picture of the early twentieth Century Calcutta underworld. Although they were alien in the colonial metropolis of Calcutta, yet they successfully expertised in the art of crime, in the same manner as their Indian

counterparts. In this section, we will try to deal with the European official class as well as the non official European community and the various forms of crimes in which, they were engaged. While discussing the Indians and the Calcutta underworld we have already taken in view that it was either need or greed or the urge to improve their status in the metropolitan framework, that pushed an individual into the world of crime. But the case of the official European class was quite different . In most of these cases, a sense of racial superiority, arrogance and ofcourse their privileged position in the colonial bureaucracy, acted as a motivating force to make them enter into the world of crime.

Sanjivani (27 December, 1900) complained that one day, some European soldiers came to the Sealdah station with a prostitute in order to go to the Dumdum Cantonment . They were drunk and began to dance and sing on the platform No.2. Some of these soldiers got into a first class carriage, and some began to cry out from the footboard of the female compartment. The native females, who were in that compartment cried aloud , and it was with much difficulty that the station staff could remove the soldiers from the place. The paper regretted that railway travelling had become very unsafe for native females on account of drunken soldiers.⁶¹ White soldiers often abused or assaulted Indian women and men. Labelled as inferior Sahibs by the Indians, the white soldiers even shot natives for asserting rights recognized by the colonial law. *Samay* (13 March, 1908) referred to a case, in which a European named Du Rose of Bhowanipore shot a Mohammadan through the palm of his right hand, because the latter had the audacity to demand the pay of his younger brother, Ismail, whom the Sahib had dismissed from service. The paper complained that incidents like this happened in India only and that the number of contemporary cases in which the European accused were let off without any punishment, had abnormally increased.⁶²

Surprisingly there were cases where Europeans themselves became victims of unruly soldiers of their own community. In 1912 there was a furore in the *Statesman* over the harassment experienced by Europeans at the Maidan. On 18, January, F.A. Gubboy, a local merchant, gave the following complaint to Ellis, the Detective Superintendant for redressal. "Last night at about 1.30 I was going up the Red Road

⁶¹*Sanjivani* , 27 December, 1900, *Report on Native Press* .

⁶²*Samay*, 31 March, 1900, *Report on Native Press*.

from north to south in a ticca gharry with a lady, whose name I decline to disclose, when a European soldier, in uniform peeped inside the gharry. He was a member of the Black Watch Regiment, I judge, because I saw the letters B. W on his uniform. I asked him what he wanted. He told me that he wanted to find out whether it was an empty gharry or not. I took no further notice of this. The soldier retired to the rear of the gharry. Soon after this episode I ordered the gharrywallah to turn round. We then drove north up the Red Road for about two minutes. Then I heard foot steps. This soldier referred to above with 2 others of the same regiment – I say so because all three were dressed alike, together with a fourth European soldier in a Red uniform followed the gharry. I ordered the coachman to drive off whereupon one of the soldiers went forward and caught hold of the reins and stopped the horse. On this one of the soldiers assaulted the coachman and the remaining two got inside the ticca gharry demanding money. I gave them Re 4 viz Re 1 each. Then the two men inside the gharry asked for more. I gave another 4 or 5 rupees, I cannot say exactly the amount. This latter sum I paid to the soldier in red uniform. He was one of the two soldiers inside the carriage. After receiving this amount he got down and persuaded the other three soldiers to come away. Two of the soldiers went away a short distance but the second soldier who had got into the gharry declined to leave, asking me to give him all that I had. On my refusing to do so he struck at both my companion and myself. I struck back at him. I do not think I marked him. I had a large diamond ring on my finger (valued about Rs 6000) but I had turned the stone towards the palm of my hand, so that it would not be noticed. By this time the coachman had got his wits together and whipped up the horse which started galloping. Finding that he was being left alone the soldier jumped out of the gharry and disappeared. Neither I nor my companion can identify either of the 4 soldiers. It was very dark. I believe the number of the carriage was No 32-, 1st class phaeton, driven by an old man with a beard- engaged at the Great Eastern Hotel. I have reported to the Deputy Commissioner with a view to this sort of thing being put a stop to, but I would not make this a matter of police investigation if possible, as I do not wish to put my companion to any inconvenience.”⁶³

⁶³ *The Statesman*, 20 January, 1912.

In December during the same year Evelyn Welehawber of 41, Ripon Street complained of being waylaid and robbed of her purse at Esplanade in a letter to Sir Fredrick, who in his turn, asked J.H.Eastwood, superintendent, Reserve Force, to strengthen patrol in the area for stopping such outrage. So complaints against policing were heard from the European quarters also.⁶⁴ While the 'natives' emphasized the predatory character of the police, the Europeans stressed on the inadequate policing system which failed to protect them.

European fraudulent firms

Ezakiel Cohen and Co. was a fraudulent firm existing in Calcutta in the early twentieth Century. Ezakiel Cohen was sentenced to four years rigorous imprisonment at the Calcutta High Court in 1907.⁶⁵ One Charles Raphael, a Eurasian started a bogus firm in Calcutta under the name and style of 'Hardinge and Co'. His operations consisted of advertising in the United Provinces for agents, who were to deposit Rs 200 as security and in lieu thereof receive electric novelties and American goods for sale. He used to misappropriate the amounts so deposited. Specific instances of cheating having come to light, a joint enquiry was held by the Allahabad Police and the Calcutta C.I.D with the result that Raphael was arrested and placed on trial. He was found guilty and sentenced to one months rigorous imprisonment in two cases instituted at Allahabad and Meerut in 1910.⁶⁶ One Charles Swinton - D – Costa along with one Srish Chandra Sircar founded a bogus provident fund called 'The Chaleston Club Provident and Death Benefit Fund'. They were undergoing trial at Vizagapatnam and Madras at the close of 1910 and were eventually discharged by the Magistrate.⁶⁷

Swadesh Hitaishi (14 January, 1905) contains an article in which a person who was cheated by a fraudulent European firm narrates his experience. He writes- "The proprietor of the firm of W. Major and Co. was an European. It was under this belief that I successively bought and used four bottles of their Electro- Sarsaparilla. But, alas! I did not know then that in attempting to cure myself I was only buying so much poison, and

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *Annual Report on Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1907.*

⁶⁶ *Annual Report on Police Administration in the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta for the year 1911.*

⁶⁷ Ibid.

hastening the day of my death. Many friends had advised me to take another medicine but the long and attractive advertisement in the papers induced in me the idea that in the Electro- Sarsaparilla I had found the medicine of Medical Science. But in practice the effect has turned out to be just the reverse of what I expected. The four bottles of Sarsaparilla that I had already consumed broke down my constitution and laid me up with gout. Besides it brought out numerous other complaints.⁶⁸

The above cases revealed a definite pattern. The penal system was dominated by racism within the colonial framework. If the accused happened to be an Indian then the punishment was a severe one. But in case of an accused was an European, his crime mostly went unpunished or punished only marginally. In cases of the Indians the loopholes of the British laws were exposed. Calcutta at the turn of the twentieth century had become a hotbed of crime. Criminals of all types- thieves, gamblers, dacoits all could thrive well in the urban fabric that Calcutta had provided them. They were skilled enough and many of them were successful to such an extent that they could make out mega profits by dishonest means. Women too occupied a prominent place in the Calcutta underworld. Colonial capitalism in early twentieth century had opened up many artificial avenues of money making. Many of the city dwellers responded to this call. Acquisitive morality bred by colonial capitalism was very much prevalent in most of the criminal acts of the twentieth century. The colonial policing system has also been delved into. The city based news-papers complained again and again about the corruption within the colonial police force. In fact intentional negligence of duties onpart of the police accommodated the criminals to thrive well in the city. In other words criminals were well accommodated under the imperial umbrella. At many instances trans- regional links were also seen to be operative in commission of crimes in the city.

⁶⁸Swadesh Hitaishi, 14 January, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

Chapter – Two

Radicalism, Politics and Daily life

The first decade of the twentieth century was marked by several transformations in the history of Bengal, especially in the history of Calcutta. In 1905, the infamous decision of partitioning Bengal by the colonial authorities into East and West Bengal, a brain child of Lord Curzon, was completed. As a result of this, a huge storm of protest swept over Bengal in which of course the pivotal role was played by the educated Calcutta middle class from a Hindu upper caste background. The year 1907, saw the Indian nationalist movement to take a violent turn, that ultimately culminated in the rise of extremism. Calcutta, once again played a major role in the spread of the extremist movement.

The anti-partition agitation met with a limited success. In 1911, the partition of Bengal was annulled which marked the rejoining of Eastern and Western halves of Bengal. Needless to say that annulment of partition in 1911, definitely signaled a victory for the Bengali nationalists. But unfortunately, this success was not long lasting. The British government also announced to transfer the Imperial capital from Calcutta to New Delhi and accordingly the capital was shifted in 1912. This was something of a bolt from the blue to the Bengali nationalists. Although this drastic move was taken by the British government for administrative purposes, the real motive lay elsewhere. To take the wind out of the sails of Bengali extremist nationalist politics, that this planned, cunning move to transfer the capital was initiated by the colonial government. The aim of this chapter shall be to analyse the background of the rise of radicalism in Calcutta and in what ways the currents of radicalism affected the daily life of the city. In the chapter how the colonial authorities responded to the emerging tide of radicalism in the city shall also be addressed.

Thus, the first leg of the twentieth century saw Calcutta emerge as the epicenter of political movements and protests. The Calcutta intelligentsia responded in these nationalist upsurge. But the question that rises here, is that, what made the situation in Calcutta conducive for such massive protests? Further, the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi, did not invoke such a massive protest from the Bengalis, as the Partition had done. Only those class whose interests were somehow hampered by the shift of capital, voiced their protest against this move of the

colonial authority. So why did Calcutta emerge as the epicenter of Indian nationalist movement in the first decade of the twentieth century?

Popular discontent in Bengal was wider and deeper than in the rest of India, and it was both economic and political in character. The economic condition of the common people had been going from bad to worse. Diseases like plague, small pox, repeatedly ravaged the city during this time, taking a heavy toll on human life. The free trade policy, enforced by the orders of the Secretary of State for India adversely effected the industrial and commercial classes, who of course had their major concentration in Calcutta. In 1896, the government of India, was compelled to reduce duty on Lancashire – woven cotton goods from 5% to 3.5% on woven cotton fabrics manufactured in the Indian mills. The rise in the general level of prices was resented by the educated classes, most of whom lived on fixed salaries. The number of educated unemployed was on the increase. The government services in Bengal could not absorb a large proportion of the educated classes. As English education had nearly doubled its adherents during twenty years preceding 1905, situation became worse. Quite naturally, the city based educated middle class became frustrated along with the policies of the British government. The liberal political ideas of the West – ideas of representative political institutions, civil rights and equality of all citizens in the eye of law – all contributed to open the eyes of the educated middle class in Bengal. Racial discrimination practiced by the members of the ruling race, further added fuel to their irritation. Even the judicial machinery had been perverted in the interest of the ruling class.¹

In spite of the Queen's Proclamation of 1858, career had not been open to talent. The British government's decision to lower the maximum age for competing in the Civil Service Examination from 21 to 19 was evidently intended to limit further the access of qualified Indians to higher appointments (1877). Lord Lytton's regime was marked by such repressive measures as the Arms Act (1878) which prohibited the keeping of various types of arms by the Indians and the Vernacular Press Act (1878) which sought to suppress nationalist newspapers published in Indian languages. Earlier the Dramatic Performances Control Act (1876) had sought to prohibit the staging of political plays which might expose the tyranny of the British rule in this country. The Civil Service Agitation, organized by the Indian Association under the leadership of

¹Dodwell, Henry, *A Sketch of the History of India from 1858-1918*, Green and Company, India, 1925, pp.274-275.

Surendranath Bannerjee was successful in modifying the Civil Service regulations to some extent, and the Vernacular Press Act was later struck down by Lord Ripon's government (1882). But Ripon's failure to get the Ilbert Bill passed in its original form on account of the defiant opposition of the European community in Bengal, bent upon special judicial privileges (1883) left behind a rankling sense of defeat, disgrace and humiliation in the hearts of the Indians. It taught them at the same time the value of "combination and organization in political struggle."²

The Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon only added fuel to the fire. Curzon's attempt to check the spread of higher education among the Indians and to bring it under government control, as manifested by the University's Act of 1904, his slandering of the Bengali national character in Calcutta University Convocation address of February, 1905, and lastly, his decision to partition the province of Bengal (1905) ostensibly for administrative reasons but really to weaken the nationalist movement in the province, completely alienated a large section of the educated Bengalis from the British government in this country. Curzon also attacked the cherished ideal of local self government in this country by curtailing the number of Indian members in the Calcutta Corporation, and tried to protect oppressive officials from public criticism through his Indian Official Secret's Act. He refused to reduce the land tax, and spent Indian money lavishly on foreign missions, the Delhi Durbar and the Tibetan expedition. The seeds of hostility to British rule which Curzon sowed, sprouted into a big tree during the rule of his successors, Minto and Hardinge (1905-1916).³

Although Calcutta was one of the leading commercial and industrial centers in the east, the local Bengalis had very little share in this economic activity. Calcutta's business, industry and commerce were dominated by British capital. The respectable Bengalis of the city, who earned a living either in the profession or in the service of the government and mercantile firms controlled neither the capital nor labour in the great industrial city. From 1875 onwards the educated Bengali citizens of Calcutta began to demand, with increasing insistence, positions at the top levels of business and administration in the city. Inflow of capital in the mid nineteenth century, had created in Calcutta a large private sector, in which role of Indians was strictly

² Mukherjee, Amitabha, *Militant Nationalism In India*, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1995, pp.59-61.

³ *Ibid.*

confined to subordinate positions.⁴ So these accumulated grudges together prepared the historical background of Calcutta to emerge as the epicenter of militant nationalist upsurges at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It was much influenced by the ideas of contemporary writers and ideologues such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rangalal Bandopadhyay, Hem Chandra Bandopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda that by the turn of the twentieth century there emerged a well defined public sphere in Bengal within which politics was conducted. The leadership in the public sphere was assumed by the intelligentsia which was mainly drawn from the city based middle classes comprising lawyers, teachers, doctors and students collectively designated as the 'bhadraloks'. It was from the far end of the nineteenth century, that political issues such as the political future of the colonized nation were taken up and debated in newspapers.⁵ Newspapers thus served as the medium through which an informed public began to participate in a collective political life. In the aftermath of the Partition, the newspapers raised a cry for revocation of the measure which was uniformly portrayed as unfair and unconstitutional. Public opinion was thus highlighted as a kind of watchdog of governmental activities whose function was to keep arbitrary acts in check.⁶

The period of our research, saw the Bengali newspapers change their tone. While the moderate newspapers limited themselves to just warnings of bloodshed, the extremist newspapers were more direct. The call to take up arms in self defense, the threats of retaliatory violence, the emphasis on strengthened manhood introduced a new political language in Bengal and added a new dimension to the political culture of the province. This language centered round the ideology of violence and concerned itself with a host of issues regarding the ethical, legal and practical implications of the use of violence as a technique for the fulfillment of the political goals. For time being, these questions found expressions in the columns of newspapers like *Jugantar*, *Bande Mataram*, *Sandhya* and *Navashakti*. The newspaper that became the most closely

⁴ Ray, Rajat Kanta, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 3-4.

⁵Sanyal, Sukla, *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p.24.

⁶ *ibid*

identified was the *Jugantar*, based in Calcutta, described by the Government of Bengal as “perhaps the most violent, bitter and seditious of the vernacular papers.”⁷

The British colonial government that was usually habituated with prayers and petitions from the Indian subjects, needless to say was discomforted by the new tone in Bengal politics that found expression in the columns of revolutionary newspapers. The British authorities knew that “a pen was mightier than a sword” and hence enacted the “Newspaper Act” (incitement to offences) in June 1908. The *Jugantar* suffered a series of prosecutions in the course of 1907-08. Bepin Chandra Pal was imprisoned for six months on charges of contempt of court. Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay, editor of *Sandhya* was charged with sedition and died in course during his trial in 1907. In February 1910, the Press Act was passed with greater control on press. But repression and oppression from the British rulers could not really suppress the nationalist voice, that found expression through native news-papers. Immediately after the passage of the new Press Act a seditious pamphlet titled *Om Bande Mataram* appeared in 1910. Copies of this leaflet were delivered through post, all of which bore the postmark of Bow Bazar post office, Calcutta.⁸ The pamphlet *Swadhin Bharat*, originating in Calcutta also appeared during the same time in 1910. Strict vigilance from the colonial authorities could not really check the circulation of these pamphlets. From the first months of the Swadeshi upsurge, Barindra Kumar Ghose’s group had started bringing out illegal revolutionary leaflets - “*No Compromise*”, “*Raja Ke*” and “*Sonar Bangla Series*”.⁹

Thus, the situation in Bengal from the turn of the twentieth century was becoming uncomfortable for the British rulers. Calcutta, once envisaged as “the second city of the empire” by the colonizers, by this time had become the hotbed of the anti colonial militant activities. . Not only in newspapers and pamphlets, that the discontent of the Indians were reflected. There were other emerging trends that fomented the sheer disgust and distrust of the Indians towards the foreign rule. This phase also saw the birth of revolutionary secret societies in Calcutta. The formation of these underground societies implied that the Indians were preparing themselves for a bigger battle against the British. The Indians had long been subjected to racial insults and humiliation and this became an everyday experience under the colonial rule. This

⁷ *Annual Report on Native owned Newspapers published in Bengal during the year 1907*, Government of Bengal.

⁸ Sanyal, Sukla, p.41.

⁹ *Ibid.*

accumulated grudge sow the seeds of revolution in the minds of the Indian youths, first among them being the Bengalis.

The Anushilan Samity was founded in Calcutta in 1902.¹⁰ Another revolutionary organization at 108 Upper Circular Road, Calcutta, was set up, during the same period. Camouflaged as a riding club, this organization tried to provide military training to an inner circle of senior members within the Anushilan as well as to establish similar revolutionary centers in the districts.¹¹ In 1902 Sarala Ghosal (Sarala Devi Chowdhurani) started a gymnasium at 26 Ballygunge Circular Road, Calcutta. Gymnastic displays formed an important part of the Birastami and Pratapaditya festivals organized by this remarkable young lady in October 1902, and April 1903. In this organization training with sword and lathi play was imparted by Prof Murtaza¹². The Atmonyati Samity also sprang up during the same phase. Although these societies initially started as secret revolutionary societies, nothing revolutionary in character could be found in them till 1906. Their activities remained limited to physical culture and preparatory work alone. It was from the early months of 1906, that a distinct group emerged, within the Calcutta Anusilan. This was the group centering around Barindra Kumar Ghose, Bhupendranath Dutta, Abinash Bhattacharya, Debendranath Basu and Upendranath Bannerjee. It received guidance from behind the scenes of Abinash Chandra Chakrabatti, Sakham Ganesh Deuskar, Subodh Chandra Mallick, Charuchandra Mallick, and above all Aurobindo Ghose. To this circle belongs the credit for having been the first to take the leap from revolutionary theory to action. By 1908, Barindra Kumar had been successful in establishing a combined religious school and a bomb factory at a garden house in Muraripukur (Manicktala). Ullaskar Dutta, a Presidency College chemistry student was in charge of bomb manufacture, while Upendranath Bannerjee supervised the religious exercises.¹³ But the life span of this secret establishment was short. It was within 36 hours after the Muzaffarpore bomb case and the subsequent arrest of Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki that police raided the Muraripukur garden house and explosives were discovered. Betrayal on part of Barindra Kumar exposed the nature of this garden house and further

¹⁰ Sarkar, Sumit, *Swadeshi Movement In Bengal, 1903-1908*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, p.405.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.407.

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Sarkar, Sumit, p.407.

helped the colonial police force to arrest all those who had been attached to this group.¹⁴

Thus revolutionary tendency was rapidly increasing itself in the city environment and the situation rapidly changed. It was definitely a phase of transition. Since the Bengalese were the first ranking among the colonized intelligentsia, it was somewhat a nightmare to the British that they could take up arms against them. Indeed it was a hard reality for the British colonial authority to accept. Needless to say that ruthless oppression constituted the major trend of the British surveillance on the city of Calcutta and outside.

The following table gives an account of the quantity of arms and ammunition imported through the port of Calcutta in the first decade of the twentieth century

1	2	3	4	5	6
Years	Rifles No	Guns No	Revolutionary and Pistols No	Gun Powder IBS	Percussion Caps No
1904	1073	2355	875	77,870	80,22000
1905	1557	2223	970	73,900	11,836500
1906	1508	2406	1105	74,665	1165,1200
1907	1746	3137	1986	10,0060	14,063500
1908	1578	3384	2518	78,804	14,435000
1909	1530	2916	1824	74,700	11,308800
1910	1561	3035	1122	70,811	13,155500
1911	1395	2842	972	37,535	48,23400

Source: *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its suburbs for the Years 1904,1905,1906,1907,1908,1909,1910,1910,1911.*

The dealers attached to the trade of arms and ammunitions who had their establishments in Calcutta during this period were Messers Manton and Co, Messers R.B.Rodda and Co, Messers Lyon and Lyon Co. Manager, Army and Navy Cooperative Society Ltd, Messers N.C.Dey and Co., Messers D.N. Biswas and Co., Messers K.C. Biswas and Co., Messers A.T. Daw and Co., Messers A.C. Coondoo and Co., Mrs. N.C. Dutt and Co, Messers S.D. Dutt and Co, Messers Martin and Co.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the years 1912.*

Although this was the official statistics of importation of arms into the port of Calcutta, there were illegal imports of arms and ammunitions too. Records reveal that a Hanza line steamer named 'Stonzenfels' arrived in Calcutta on the 26 November, 1908, with a consignment of explosives for Messers Gillanders Arbuthnot and Co. and Messers Shaw Wallace and Co. On her arrival at Sagar, the captain informed the pilot in charge that he had dangerous cargo on board, but the latter said that it would be discharged at the Garden Reach and accordingly brought the vessel into the port. A charge was entered against the Captain Sehmidt under section 6 clause (3) Act IV of 1884 (the Indian Explosives Act) and he was summoned before the chief Presidency Magistrate, Calcutta on the 5 December, 1908. The Magistrate fined him only Rs 5 on the ground that the infringement of the rules was an innocent mistake on the captain's part. The explosives that were being carried by the steamer S.S. Stonzenfels included 2000 cases of dynamites, 56 cases of detonators, 110 cases of fuses, 100 cases of blasting gelatin and 2 electric batteries, in contravention of Section 2, Marine Department notification No 100 of 14 August, 1903.¹⁶

There was a definite relationship between such huge influx of arms and the contemporary militant nationalist upsurges in Calcutta. Such importations definitely paved the way of political violence in the city. This phase also saw crimes like political murders, of course the target being the British official class and their Indian counterparts. Plots whether successful or unsuccessful were hatched against the colonizers.

Political Murders of the Period

Nandalal Bannerjee who came into prominence with the attempted arrest of Prafulla Chaki (accused in the Muzaffarpore bomb case) at Mokamah Ghat station on 1 May, 1908 was shot dead on 9 November, 1908 in Serpentine Lane, Calcutta. He received four bullets which passed through the head, the centre of the back, the right side of the back and through the left shoulder. No arrests were made and the assailants were able to escape. Nandalal Bannerjee's death marked a great loss to the British government - loss of a loyal servant, who never hesitated to betray the sentiment of his fellow countrymen in helping to catch up Prafulla Chaki. These type

¹⁶*Home Political (confidential), Part B, April, Proceedings No 68- 70.*

of loyal servants of the British colonial authorities were the chief targets of the revolutionaries. They were the 'enemy within' in the psyche of the revolutionaries.¹⁷

The second murder was that of Asutosh Biswas, the public prosecutor of the Alipore Bar. He had made himself ferocious to the revolutionaries by prosecuting them with unusual zeal and sometimes with means which to all conscience was neither fair to the accused persons nor decent to the legal profession.¹⁸ He was killed on 10 February, 1909 at the Suburban Police Court premises. The shooter was Charu Chandra Basu. The revolver with which Asutosh Biswas was murdered, was found to be a little defective, was of Belgian make, a six chambered one and contained three loaded cartridges and three empty cases¹⁹. The police applied utmost pressure, perhaps resorting to third degree measures to extract confessions from Charu but all that could be learnt from him was the name of Panchcowrie Sanyal of Dacca, (apparently a fictitious name) who had instigated him to murder Asutosh Biswas. According to Charu, Panchcowrie had been living at Beniatollah Lane, Calcutta but no such person could be discovered at Calcutta or elsewhere and the government failed in its attempt to discover a big conspiracy behind the murder of the great public prosecutor. The District Magistrate, 24 Parganas started a judicial enquiry on 13 February, 1909. The sessions trial started on 22 February, 1909 and closed on the following day. Charu was condemned to death. The High Court confirmed the sentence on 2 March, 1909. The accused expressed his firm resolve against any appeal for mitigation of his sentence. Charu Chandra Bose was hanged in the Alipore Central Jail on 19 March, 1909. He met his death with utmost unconcern as if nothing uncommon was going to happen to him.²⁰

On 25 January 1910, Birendranath Dutta Gupta shot and killed Police Inspector, Khan Bhadur Samsul Alam, in the Calcutta High Court. He was commissioned by Jatindranath Mukhopadhyay for this task. Birendranath mentioned, Satish Chandra Sarkar, "a dangerous anarchist of Rajsahi", as the man who had provided him with a revolver and had pointed out his victim to him. Samsul as a faithful servant of the Imperial government, had distinguished himself by his zeal and intelligence in the

¹⁷Roy, Asok Kumar, *Revolutionary Outrages in Bengal, Swadeshi Dacoities and Political Murders, 1906-1918* Papyrus, Kolkata, 2014, pp.180-182.

¹⁸Ghosh, Kalicharan, *The Roll of Honour*, vol.1, National Council of Education, Calcutta, 2000, p.221-224.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ghosh, Kalichran, pp.221-224.

investigation of Manicktola conspiracy case.²¹ A six chambered revolver containing two unfired cartridges and two spent ones were found with Birendra. Three ball cartridges and a dagger were also recovered. Birendra admitted that he was instigated to commit the crime by one Jyotindranath Mukhopadhyay, a stenotypist, in the office of the Financial Secretary to the government of Bengal. The weapons used in the murder belonged to a Deputy Magistrate of the Cuttack district. A youth named Suresh Majumdar who had stolen it made it over to Jatin. It is known from confidential records that Birendra took some training under Satish Basu of the Anusilan Samity. The training was imparted at the Gosaba Agricultural Settlement at the Sunderbans. Birendra did not defend himself in the court and was hanged in the Presidency Jail on 21 February 1910.²²

The fourth murder was that of Head Constable Srish Chandra Chakrobarty on 21 February, 1911 in Sikdarbagan Street, Calcutta, at about 7pm. Srish had been a member of the revolutionary party but who, out of his own accord, had gone to the police and turned into an informer. Srish had given the first clue which led to the detection of the Baighati dacoity case. He had furnished the police with a large amount of valuable information and had eventually been taken into the Calcutta establishment as a Head Constable.²³ His assailant belonged to the Anusilan Samity of Calcutta. Official records point out that Jatindra Mohan Rakshit, a member of the Sikdar Bagan branch of the Calcutta Anusilan Samity, was suspected in connection with the murder²⁴.

These murders had some common features. The loyal servants of the British governments, who with unusual zeal, used to prosecute the nationalists were made victims. The revolutionaries looked down upon them with utmost hatred and they were murdered brutally. Another feature of these murders was the use of fire arms and this was an outcome of the huge influx of illegal fire arms in the city, during this period. However, other attempts to disrupt and challenge the European authority in the city were also made.

²¹Roy, Asok Kumar, pp.186-187.

²²*ibid.*

²³ Roy, Asok Kumar, p.192.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Unsuccessful Plots

Governmental records reveal that there was an unsuccessful plot hatched to destroy the Europeans attending May races in Calcutta in 1909. The Secretary of the State H.A. Stuart in a telegram to the Viceroy dated 22 April 1909, at 9.30am mentioned about this secret plot. The Commissioner of Calcutta Police, informed him from an intercepted letter to H.M. Gandhi in prison, that a plot had been constructed to destroy the Europeans attending May races at Calcutta by bombs. All the natives were warned not to be seen with the Europeans that day. It was further informed that eighty special recruits had joined the anarchists for the purpose of carrying out the plot.²⁵

An unsuccessful plot to murder Mr. G. C. Denham of the Criminal Investigation Department was made on 2 March, 1911, at Dalhousie Square, Calcutta. The revolutionaries of Chandernagore took a leading part in this attempt. The bomb, however, was thrown mistakenly on Mr. C. F. Cawley, Superintendent Engineer, Public Works Department. While Cawley was coming out of Writer's Buildings in a motor car, he was struck by a bomb which did not explode. Nani Gopal Mukherjee, a boy of about 16 or 17, a resident of Chinsura, threw the bomb on Cawley. Nani Gopal made the confession that Jyotish Chandra Ghosh of Chinsura, an ex professor of Hooghly College, had trained him and the other conspirator was Srish Ghosh. Naren Bannerjee, a student of the Government Art School, Calcutta, also played a leading part in the bomb outrage. Another name which came to be implicated was of Basanta Kumar Banerjee. He was one of the conspirators who was intimately associated with the notorious revolutionaries at Chandernagore and in Calcutta.²⁶ The bomb thrown at Dalhousie Square contained Picric acid with a slight mixture of Potash and a small paper tube of mercury intended to act as a detonator. It was cylindrical in shape with a handle.²⁷

On 26 August, 1907 Sushil Sen hit a police sergeant at the police court during the hearing of the Bande Mataram case. On 2 October, 1907 the police were stoned at Beadon Square and Chitpore Road. On 3 October, 1907 there was further stone throwing at Chitpore Road at the police and at tram cars. Forty arrests were made. On

²⁵ *Home Political, 1909, Part B, October, 1909, Proceedings No 71/83.*

²⁶ *Home Political (confidential), 1911. Part B, July, 1911, Proceedings No 31/40.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

4 October, 1907 a police sergeant attempting to arrest Indians on the previous day, had his hand almost severed by a blow from a kukri. On 15 December, 1907 stones were thrown at the police at a meeting of extremists at Beadon Square. In January, 1908 with a view to killing D.H. Kingsford, a book bomb was sent to his house. The bomb was manufactured by Hem Chandra Das. On 15 May, 1908 a bomb exploded on a tram line in Grey Street. Three persons were injured. The bomb was intended for Mr. Hume, a government pleader. On 7 November, 1908 an attempt was made by Jitendra Nath Roy Chaudhuri to assassinate Sir Andrew Fraser, by shooting him with a revolver at the Overtoun Hall. On 12 March, 1909 a tin box filled with gun powder and bullets, and having a pistol cartridge fitted in the bottom, was found in the office of *The Englishman* news paper. On 6 January 1910, a railway train was fired on between Sealdah and Dumdum stations. The bullet passed through a 2nd class compartment in which two Europeans were travelling.²⁸ That revolutionary violence was rapidly increasing in Calcutta was quite evident, therefore. The main targets were the official colonial class and their Indian servants. These instances of violence speaks of the fact that how distrust and disgust against the British rulers were accumulating in the minds of the Bengali youths. They never cared for their personal lives and personal gains. Influenced by the Bengali intellectuals they never hesitated to lay their lives at the altar of their motherland. At any cost, the revolutionaries wanted to remove the enemies of the motherland.

The British government definitely felt highly alarmed with these developments in Calcutta at the turn of the twentieth century. Murder of Asutosh Biswas and that of Khan Bahadur Samsul Alam in the court premises itself exposed the weakness of colonial policing system. The colonial government by now could understand that they had underestimated the strength of the Indians till now and that if this zeal of the young revolutionaries could be channelized and motivated through proper way, it could surely result in the overthrow of the British rule. Thus they were not ready now to take any sort of a chance. At any and every pretext, in the life of the Calcutta dwellers, they intercepted and never hesitated to use and misuse the power that resided in their hands. So humiliation, brutal repression, from the British authorities became an everyday experience for the city dwellers whose victims varied from

²⁸ Ghosh, Nityapria and Ghosh Krityapriya (compiled) *Transfer of Capital to Delhi (Documents and Reports)*, Dey's, Calcutta, 2011, pp.21-25,27.

notable Calcutta bhadraloks to ordinary citizens. Nobody was spared by the colonial rulers.

In May 1907, the government of Eastern Bengal and Assam suggested prosecution of Bepin Chandra Pal for his extremist speeches in East Bengal as well as against six Muslim Swadeshi agitators. Though these proposals were ultimately dropped, the Regulation of Meetings Ordinance of 11 May 1907, banned meetings without official permission in wide areas of East Bengal and Punjab for six months. On 1 November 1907, the Ordinance was replaced by Seditious Meetings Act.²⁹ *Eastern Bengal and Assam Era* of 31 July 1907, reported that Bepin Chandra Pal preached at a meeting in Calcutta that white goats were to be sacrificed to Kali, and in order to make his message perfectly clear, one of his Lieutenants explained that such goats were the symbolical of Englishmen. The sentiment was enthusiastically received.³⁰

It was from the beginning of the twentieth century that Calcutta's streets were emerging as sites of political contests. Ramakanta Roy, probably started the practice of propagating the Swadeshi cause and raising funds through street singing in August, 1905, and a few months later the great Muslim patriot Liakat Hossain organized the anti partition and Swadeshi procession party, which by this time, had become very famous, and it used to move every evening through the streets of Calcutta starting from College Square. The elderly Muslim leader, Liakat Hossain was a "lion amongst men", as once the news paper Sandhya described him. He was fairly well known for his charitable work. He had started a "Society for the support of widows and the helpless in India" with support of Syed Amir Hussain and Syed Hussain Bilgrami. Writing a letter to Surendranath Bannerjee on 4 August 1905, he expressed his sympathy towards the calamity, the Partition had brought and suggested boycott to be the only weapon that could be adopted at such a situation. In the next months he became an active member of the Anti Circular Society, arranging the procession parties and trying to organize a swadeshi volunteer corps for physical training. After 1906 - 07, he sharply broke off from the moderates and was now found to address meetings jointly with Bepin Chandra Pal and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. What alarmed the government most of all was Liakat Hossain's Urdu pamphlet, "*Mussalman dunya ke waste mustad aur kafir mat ho*", published in on 3 June, 1907. Through this Urdu

²⁹ Sarkar, Sumit, p.239.

³⁰ *Eastern Bengal and Assam Era*, 31 July, 1907, *Report on Native Press*.

pamphlet, he tried to rouse Muslim religious sentiment against the British. Within a few days, he was arrested at Barisal as apparently it appeared to the British government that he had come here for distribution of his pamphlet. He was given a heavy jail sentence of 3 years. He was also prosecuted in the Autumn of 1907, in Calcutta for delivering for some fiery speeches.³¹ Protests were made against prosecution of Maulavi Liakat Hossain in Calcutta. *Basumati* of 11 April, 1908, gave an account of the demonstration in honour of Liakat Hossain, at the grounds in front of Brahmo Samaj, in Cornwallis Street, Calcutta. At this meeting, Maulavi Abul Kasem, one of the speakers announced the formation of one Koran translating society to publish authoritative translations in Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, and English of the Koran. He threw an open challenge to the government to come forward and prosecute the translators.³² *Daily Hitavadi* (5 March, 1906) gives details of fifteen swadeshi meetings held respectively at Kalighat, Baghbazaar, Narendranath Sen's Square, at the grounds of the Federation Hall, Peary Charan Sarkar's Park, Ahiritolla, Kambulitola, Beadon Square, Bhukoylas, Shankharitola, Mallick Bazaar, Simla, Kansaripara, Entally, Howrah and Kumartolly.

With reference to a meeting held at College Square to accord a welcome to Lala Lajpat Rai, *Bengalee* of 15 January 1908, writes, that the meeting was fully representative in its character and was attended by the most prominent leaders, who mustered in strong force to show their respect for Lala Lajpat Rai and their strong disapproval of his unmerited persecution. Babu Surendra Nath Bannerjee, who presided the meeting, observed that the deportation of the Lala was felt as a deliberate insult offered to the educated classes throughout India, and that Regulation III hanging over their heads like the sword of Democles, their liberties were not safe. He pointed out that the national cause had not suffered by Lajpat Rai's deportation but that, on the contrary it had been strengthened by it, for repression acts as a wholesome stimulant. Once again he affirmed that Bengal had pledged the anti-partition agitation, to swaraj as laid down by the Congress of 1906, to national education and Swadeshi, boycott and he appealed to Lala Lajpat Rai and the Punjabis to help them in carrying out their programme. Lala Lajpat Rai gave an eloquent reply, in the course of which he observed that the Bengalis were leaders of political thought in India and that they had shown great courage and self sacrifice in the political field. He earnestly pleaded

³¹ Sarkar, Sumit, p.239.

³² *Basumati*, 11 April, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

for unity among all sections in the present critical state of the country. He urged them to forget their differences and, remembering only their points of agreement, to work for the welfare of the country. Altogether it was a unique demonstration, and Bengal had duly honored one who had so richly deserved to be honored.³³

After the clashes of October 1907, meetings at 14 specified public places within the city were banned for some three months. To enable easy police identification of speakers and participants, a rather peculiar magisterial order of 22 August 1908, prescribed that meetings had to end half an hour before sunset; this order was renewed several times down to April.³⁴ Humiliation, severe repression and insults, as said earlier, had become a regular feature of everyday life in Calcutta and elsewhere under the colonial rule. But its intensity increased by the end of this decade.

In 1908, the printer and publisher of *Sandhya* and *Jugantar* were prosecuted.³⁵ Reports indicate how Babu Krishna Kumar Mitra's house in Calcutta was raided in 1910. Krishna Kumar Mitra was the the editor of the *Sanjivani* newspaper, published from Calcutta. In a telegram dated 29 August, 1910, at 4.45pm, the Viceroy is said to have informed the Secretary of State that the government had reliable information about a scheme of importation of rifles, in which Krishna Kumar Mitra's son, Sukumar Mitra was to take a leading part. But when searched, nothing incriminating was found and only some papers were taken for examination by the police.³⁶ However, a wide range of men from the bhadraloks to the downtrodden within the city, could not escape from the gaze of the British surveillance. *Sri Sri Vishnu Priya O Ananda Bazaar Patrika* of 9 January, 1908, reported that a sentence of a week rigorous imprisonment was awarded by Mr. Kingsford for begging, to a blind Mussalman named Abdul Rahaman. Such injustices in name of justice became a regular feature of the city's daily life.³⁷ *Weekly Chronicle* of 17 July, 1907, reported that a fine was imposed upon the proprietor of the Keshab Printing Works for printing certain copies of *Sonar Bangla*. The editors of *Sonar Bangla* and *Navashakti* were prosecuted under the Press License Act.³⁸ In 1910 there were two cases in which the printer and publishers of vernacular papers were called on to furnish security under

³³ *Bengalee*, 15 January, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁴ Sarkar, Sumit, p.239.

³⁵ *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the year 1909*.

³⁶ *Home Political (B)*, September, 1910, *Proceedings No(2,3)*

³⁷ *Sri Sri Visnupriya –o- Ananada Bazaar Patrika*, 9 January, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁸ *Weekly Chronicle*, 17 July, 1907, *Report on Native Press*.

section 8, subsection 2 of Act I, 1910. Those were the cases of *Dharma* in April 1910 and the case of *Daily Hitavadi*, in December 1910. In both cases the printers failed to furnish security and the publications ceased to issue.

Kunja Bihari Ganguli, the author of a seditious drama called 'Matripuja', who was absconding, had to surrender to a warrant on 10 June, 1910 and on 12 July was sentenced to one years rigorous imprisonment under section 12 A of the Indian Penal Code.³⁹ In connection with the Khulna Jessore gang case, a house, No 11 Kambulitola Lane, was searched on 20 July, 1910 and a tin trunk containing arms and ammunitions were found in the possession of two students, Bhola Nath Chakroborty and Pramotho Bhattacharjee. They were prosecuted as being member of a criminal gang in the High Court.⁴⁰ On 8 September 1910, Debi Prosonno Roy Choudhury, the printer of a seditious book called 'Anal Probah' was fined Rs 750 under section 124 A. The publisher of the same book, Haridas Chatterjee, was convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of Rs 100 on the 29 August 1910. The author Mohammad Ismail Hossain Seraji, was sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment on 14 September 1910.⁴¹ Probhash Chandra Deb, Jnanendra Kumar Bose, Asutosh Sircar and Mohendra Nath Chatterjee were prosecuted for printing and publishing a seditious leaflet called the 'Yugantar'. Probhash Chandra Deb was sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment on 25 September 1910, Gnanendra Kumar Bose was sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment on 25 September, 1910. Gonesh Chandra Mukherjee was prosecuted and sentenced to six months imprisonment and fined Rs 50 or in default three months rigorous imprisonment on 13 September, 1910, on being suspected of having some connections with Rajnagar Dacoity Case in Dacca on 10 November, 1909.⁴² Nayak (9 July, 1911) published a letter written by Maulavi Liakat Hossain in which the writer said he was 'intensely harassed' by the detective police on charge of holding Swadeshi meetings and leading Swadeshi processions. He mentioned a case in koomartuli, where two detectives greatly disturbed him by joining his processions. One of them, he narrated, mixed with the company of singers on the pretext of singing with them and made some of the singers leave the party by whispering something into their ears. The writer was told by one of the singers that the man had been threatening him with danger if the singers continued to be in the procession. The

³⁹ *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the year 1911.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the year 1911.*

writer asserted that it was the duty of the detectives to watch everything but their role of interference in Swadeshi meetings was questionable. According to him, it was the detectives and others like them who sometimes created disturbance⁴³.

Thus, it appears from all these reports that the colonial authorities main task by now had become “sedition hunting”. They viewed Calcutta as the heart of sedition and each and every act of its citizens were given a microscopic focus by the government, in fear of being seditious. The British government by now had been clearly able to understand that the misconception of the Indians regarding the alien rule, had gone by this time. The Indians had learnt the concept of self government and by now, had made themselves prepared to achieve it by any means. So the colonial authorities also retaliated in this way by prosecuting various individuals on slightest pretexts. The student community was always under strict surveillance. *Daily Hitavadi* (7 April, 1906) narrates how two young former students of Noakhali Zilla School were arrested by the police at the house of Babu Subodh Chandra Mallick under Sections 147 and 148 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The paper also reported about the kind of sensation, that the news of this arrest created within the city.⁴⁴ This kind of oppressions on the student community from the ruling class made them bolder and politically more militant.

The year 1910 also witnessed a communal riot in Calcutta. The Bakr-Id festival in December 1910 occurred with unfortunate serious rioting and loss of life. It was 13 years after the outbreak of Talla Riot in 1897 that the city streets once again saw serious Hindu- Muslim tensions. The trouble originated in connection with a demand by the Marwari community that animal sacrifice that had taken place for many years within a Mosque in Armenian Street, should be stopped by Government as the quarter had become largely Marwari in character. The original residents, rich Momins and Sarties of Bombay, had left the locality. But because the Government did not respond to this demand, the Marwaris thereupon closed their shops and places of business and on the evening of 9 December 1910, a number of Mohammadans were pelted with bricks and beaten with sticks in Harrison Road by the Hindu servants of the Marwaris. Several of these assaults led to fatal results. As the situation went worse, military assistance was sought by the Police Department. The arrival of two hundred men of the Rifle Brigade and a squadron of Sikh cavalry, however was able

⁴³ *Nayak*, 9 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁴ *Daily Hitavadi*, 7 April, 1906, *Report on Native Press*.

to handle the matter. There were two cases on the morning of the 10 December 1910, in which the outlying houses of rich Hindus situated in Muhammadan quarters were looted by Mohammadans. Six persons, two Mohammadans and four Hindus were killed as a result of injuries. Seventy six persons were removed to hospitals suffering from injuries, forty two were not admitted but treated and discharged.⁴⁵ After the Bakr - Id riots many of the rich Marwaris had dismissed their Muslim syces, coachmen, etc. as a result of which many of these poor Muslim workers were deprived of their livelihood.⁴⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century there were Hindu-Muslim polarizations both at the elite and popular levels of Calcutta's society. Certain long and short term developments in the world of organized politics contributed to a link between the two. The vertical integration of both Hindus and Muslims that followed, created and sustained the potentials for future communal outbreaks. Changes at various levels of Bengal politics, after 1907, specially contributed to the situation.⁴⁷ So issues like cow sacrifice that had hardly worried Hindus in the past, now emerged as an important symbol around which communal solidarities and religious sentiments developed.⁴⁸

From the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century fear of the British Raj was reflected in the elaborate policing arrangement in the city, on occasions of public meetings and the coercive measures to deal with the terrorists. In 1908 under S.A. Alridge, a separate and independent cell in the police department was created as Special Branch, to collect and collate political intelligence and deal with the revolutionary nationalists. Another aim of the Special Branch was to give protection to government officials and political personages. Classes on unarmed combat was started in August 1908 at No 2 Kyd Street on every Wednesday and Friday at 7A.M. and fifteen constables were chosen for the course, four of whom were Muslims, ten upcountry men and one was a Bengali Hindu.⁴⁹ Stress was also laid on revolver shooting classes. In August 1911 a surveillance scheme was prepared in accordance with the instructions of the government conveyed in letter No 5151 P dated

⁴⁵ *Annual Report on the Police Administration of the Town of Calcutta and its Suburbs for the year 1912.*

⁴⁶ Das, Suranjan, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Das, Suranjan, p.25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.28.

⁴⁹ C.O. No. 1962 dated 30 July, 1908. (Intelligence Branch)

23 August 1911 and a staff consisting of four inspectors, fifty eight head constables and fifty eight constables were sanctioned.⁵⁰

The political developments from the beginning of the twentieth century had kept the city police force on their toes and this was evidenced at many instances. In fact false rumors also were circulated often within the city with a view of making fun of the city police force. *Daily Hitavadi* (27 April,1908) reported regarding a recent placard that appeared on some of the telegraph and telephone posts in Kalighat in which the people were urged to rise against the English, for, it was said that a hundred Mauser rifles had been secured. Although it was found to be the work of some mischievous men yet the colonial police moved heaven and earth on the matter.⁵¹ The *Englishman* (30March,1908) also reported about a rumor that had gained wide momentum within the city , about some cartridges that had been found at the Meerbohur Ghat although no real evidence was found. So rumors too formed an important part of everyday life in the city, specially in keeping the British police alarmed.

It was since the time of Partition that the streets of Calcutta witnessed huge storm of protest in opposition of Partition. *Daily Hitavadi* of 7 August,1905, gives the reference of a protest meeting that was to be held on that very day, at the Calcutta Town Hall. The paper urged its brethren to leave aside all work and to join the monster meeting of the day irrespective of the communities, to which they belong.⁵² Series of meetings, processions, strikes characterized the daily life of Calcutta dwellers after 1905. *Daily Hitavadi* of 4 September, 1905, gives an account of a mass meeting held on 2 September 1905 , at College Square , Calcutta. Of course expression of dissatisfaction and grief at the Partition proclamation formed the chief theme of these meetings. According to the said paper , no less than 10,000 people attended the meeting of College Square, where national songs were sung and resolutions of boycott were passed. At 7.30 pm, the meeting dispersed and the large audience defiled through all the streets of the town carrying black flags and loudly uttering the words “Bande Mataram”.⁵³ *Tripura Hitaishi* of 11 June, 1907, gives an account of a meeting at College Square which was presided by Babu Krishna Kumar Mitra. Here Krishna Kumar Mitra gave a clarion call to his countrymen to go on steadily with the

⁵⁰ Letter No. 6992 E dated 30.10.1911.(Intelligence Branch)

⁵¹ *Daily Hitavadi* , 27 April, 1908, *Report on Native Papers*.

⁵² *Daily Hitavadi*, 7 August, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵³ *Daily Hitavadi*, 4 September,1905, *Report on Native Press*.

boycott, Swadeshi and the anti partition movements even if the government might adopt all sorts of repressive measures.⁵⁴ The oath to boycott foreign articles was adopted by the Bengalis on 15 August, 1905. On its second anniversary *Rangpur Vartavaha*, on 15 August, 1907, commented that the resolution of boycott had yielded positive results. It reported that to co-memorate the sacred day, the patriots in many places were seen to offer prayers to God and deliver speeches to stir up people to work for the good of the country. According to its estimate, almost 50,000 volunteers of Calcutta joined this celebration, and this second anniversary of boycott was celebrated with great eclat.⁵⁵

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed an increase in number of strikes in European concerns and this was evident within the city also. The increasing racial bitterness in the factories between Indian workers and European supervisors created a potential support base for the nationalists. *Hitavadi* of 6 March 1908, refers to the strike of the telegraph peons of the Central Telegraph Office. Although it mentioned about the sort of public inconvenience that was created by these strikes but it supported the cause of the peons. The paper claimed that it was to cope up with the contemporary situation that the peons had no other alternatives but to go on strike, for increase of their wages. There had been a steady price rise during this phase and the British government persistently denied justice to its Indian workers.⁵⁶ It must be mentioned in this context that the poorly paid employees of the Calcutta Central Telegraph Office had gone on strike on 27 February 1908, when a new officer named Newland reduced the rate for delivery of urgent messages from 3 to 2 pice. The authorities promptly dismissed the peons. The labour leader from Barisal, Aswini Kumar Bannerjee's attempt to negotiate on behalf of the poor strikers failed.⁵⁷ The reverberation of the nationalist upsurge could be felt in service sector also for the first time during this phase. The weapon of strike came to be widely applied from this time onwards.

On 11 March 1908, strike started at Kidderpore Dock involving about 2000 coolies, of a more organized character. It had been preceded by three petitions which demanded a grain compensation allowance in view of the prevailing market rate of food stuffs being exceptionally high, pension benefit to those enjoyed by other

⁵⁴ *Tripura Hitaishi*, 11 June, 1907, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵⁵ *Rangpur Vartavaha*, 15 August, 1907, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵⁶ *Hitavadi*, 6 March, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵⁷ Sarkar, Sumit, p.205.

government employees and paid holidays. The strikers only wanted a promise for a sympathetic consideration of their grievances. But the authorities were indifferent in their attitude. Aswini Kumar Bannerjee started holding night meetings of the strikers near Bhukaylas Raj Palace. In April, he led a fund raising procession of the dock laborers through the streets of south Calcutta. It marched with about 700 – 800 men, through Russa Road, Bhowanipore, Kalighat, Hajra Road and other neighbouring important streets till at about 3pm they reached the home of Asutosh Chowdhury at Ballygunje. Police reports reveal the involvement of Premotosh Bose and Dr Sarat Mitter in this strike, apart from Aswini Kumar Bannerjee. The men eventually resumed work on the promise of a consideration of their grievances.⁵⁸ The repeated confrontation between European factory officials and industrial workers created an anti- government attitude among various sections of the workers in Calcutta and provided bhadralok nationalist politicians with a crucial opportunity to build up an alliance with the labor movement against the colonial state. In this way the outside negotiators acted as mediators during labour disputes.⁵⁹ *Anusilan* of 30 March, 1908, supporting the cause of the dock laborers wrote that the authorities should have taken pity on the poor laborers who had gone on strike. Since their demands were reasonable, the paper claimed that the authorities could pay heed to it.⁶⁰ *Navashakti* of 9 April, 1908, reported the occurrence of a monster meeting held at Kidderpore under the presidency of A. K. Bannerjee in which the grievances of the strikers of the Kidderpore docks were discussed and a fund was also reported to be opened for the relief of the workers in this meeting.⁶¹

Calcutta witnessed the strike of sweepers of the Calcutta Corporation, as the *Mihir- O – Sudhakar* of 8 September 1905 reported. The chief cause of their strike was illegal deduction of their wages by their Supervisor Babu or the senior supervisor. In spite of their repeated appeal to the authorities, no steps were taken. But no nationalist leader did come up to take up their cause. The strike of this group of servicemen of the Calcutta Corporation was vital too, as far as daily life in the city was concerned.⁶² Strikes were an important part of the city's daily life during the

⁵⁸Sarkar, Sumit, p.204.

⁵⁹ Basu, Subho, *Does Class Matter? Colonial Capital and Workers' Resistance in Bengal (1890-1937)*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p.138.

⁶⁰ *Anusilan*, 30 March, 1908, *Report on Native News Press*.

⁶¹*Navashakti*, 9 April, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶²*Mihir –o- Sudhakar*, 8 September, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

period of our research and it shall by no means correct to undermine the importance of these strikes. Apart from the above mentioned strikes, Calcutta also witnessed strike at Ralli Brothers Jute Works in Chitpore (1905), strike at Bengal Secretariat press(1905), strike at Hooghly Jute Mill (1905) etc. Whether successful or unsuccessful in getting their demands fulfilled, strikes could demonstrate the solidarity of the workers that definitely posed a challenge to the authorities.⁶³ From 1905 onwards the bhadralok nationalists tried to challenge the supremacy of European capital in Bengal by setting up Swadeshi business enterprises. Labour unrest in British dominated commercial concerns of Calcutta provided the nationalists with an opportunity to challenge British capital more effectively. The Swadeshi leaders only utilized the opportunity and their support for strikes in European mills was usually more of an accident than the result of a well thought out strategy.⁶⁴

In the closing years of the Swadeshi movement and with the emergence of revolutionary terrorism, Swadeshimism increasingly merged with Hindu revivalism.⁶⁵ In 1908, Calcutta witnessed the celebration of Ardhoday Yog. *Sanjivani* (6February,1908) published an account of how Mohunt Damodar Chandra Brajbasi with his officers and with Babu Sachindra Prosad Basu of Calcutta induced the Ardhoday Yog pilgrims to purchase only Swadeshi articles at the Calcutta bathing ghats between Howrah and Nimtolla and at those at Kalighat. A considerable number of women were reported to have broken their foreign made glass churries.⁶⁶ *Howrah Hitaishi* (8 february,1908) publishes a poem in which it describes how a Brahmin women, who came to bath in the Ganges at the Ardhodaya Yoga related just before she expired on the banks of the sacred river, a dream which she had in which the Godess Ganga appeared and exhorted her to publish the mandate of the Godess that whoever would bathe in the Ganges with belati clothes on, or eat the unclean foreign salt or sugar or offer these articles to the Gods would be guilty of the gravest sin and would incur the severest displeasure of the diety who would inflict upon such people the highest penalties.⁶⁷ However, there were certain limitations for which neither the Swadeshi movement nor the extremist upsurge could leave a permanent imprint on the ordinary citizens of Calcutta. Although a galaxy of distinguished leaders spearheaded these movements, yet

⁶³Sarkar, Sumit, pp.195,197,183.

⁶⁴Basu,Subho, p.134.

⁶⁵Sarkar, Sumit, p.xvi.

⁶⁶ *Sanjivani*, 6 February,1908, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶⁷*Howrah Hitaishi*, 8 February,1908, *Report on Native Press*.

the Calcutta leaders could never become as formidable as their counterparts in the districts. The movement in Calcutta almost entirely remained confined to students and other bhadralok young men. The city bred youths preferred to keep away from radical politics. Most of the recruits in these movements were from mufassil towns and were temporary residents of the city. The possibilities of a link up with the trade union movement which had started developing in and around Calcutta were never seriously explored.⁶⁸ The strike was an explosion of anti-imperialist hatred, not the awakening of a class conscious proletariat. So as a weapon it could be applied to disrupt the colonial authority in the city but psychologically could not spread deep roots among masses. Further, although some top level nationalist leaders tried to achieve Muslim co-operation for the Swadeshi cause, in Calcutta this attempt could not effectively work. Although some Muslim leaders like Maulavi Liakat Hossain, Dedur Bux, Syed Hussain Bilgrami were dedicated to the movement and paid frequent visits to Calcutta, but in number they were very small, when compared to the bigger section of the Muslim leaders. The bigger section of the Muslims remained neutral to the Swadeshi cause. As a probable reason for the isolation of the Muslims from these movements, it could be stated that neither the Swadeshi movement nor the extremist movement could really shake off its Hindu Revivalist character. In Calcutta the celebrations of Hindu festivals like Birashtami and Shivaji Utsav speaks of this fact. The celebrations of these Hindu festivals acted as a morale booster for the activists and as the primary communication medium to reach the Hindu masses.⁶⁹ The Bengal extremist themselves also failed to reach the masses, as they thought through terror it would be easy to bring the ideas of revolution to the common people.⁷⁰

In fact, Calcutta's political movements at the beginning of the twentieth century had been an elite phenomenon. The Swadeshi leaders mostly came from an upper class and caste Hindu background, most of them were from landed aristocracy or gentry. So a real contact with the masses could never be established by them, on a regular basis. Although radical politics in the first decade of the twentieth century could infiltrate among the middle classes of Calcutta, the lower orders of the city remained indifferent to the contemporary political developments. Absence of able leadership which could have induced the laboring masses of the city to join the

⁶⁸ Sarkar, Sumit, pp. 313-314.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p.358.

⁷⁰ Tripathi, Amales, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 and 1910*, Orient Longmans, India, 1967, p.117.

contemporary political protests virtually excluded the working classes to play a definite role in the ongoing anti-colonial struggle. In proper Calcutta only a few strikes were registered, where working class participation was seen. Daily life in this decade was moved to a certain extent by the emerging political currents but to a an extent remained unmoved by such developments. Rather, it was disturbed by such developments but largely continued as before.

In this chapter, we have thus discussed how the city of Calcutta became a hotbed of political violence, at the turn of the twentieth century. Growth of secret societies, large scale influx of arms and ammunitions, political murders, all these characterized the political history of Calcutta during this period. Enlightened with the ideas of the nineteenth century writers, the western educated Bengali intelligentsia were the first to raise an ideological protest against colonial rule through the print media. Extensive propaganda, to free India was carried on in newspapers. When the Bengalis raised arms against their colonial masters, the British government also retaliated through severe repression. Thus violence and counter violence became a regular feature of daily life of Calcutta, during the period of our research. The city also witnessed the outbreak of strikes during the anti-partition movement. Under the leadership of Bengali labour leaders, knowingly or unknowingly, without the element of class consciousness the workers protested against factory authorities to get their immediate demands fulfilled, which were purely economic in character. The nationalist leaders tried to relate those strikes with mainstream nationalist movements.

How far the labour leaders could reach the illiterate strikers is a debatable issue, for class difference between these strikers and their leaders was a fundamental factor behind this. The labour leaders never could become a real part of the laboring masses and their attempt to interpret the problems of the masses seemed to be a superficial one. Their attempt to organize the labour protests was spontaneous but how spontaneous were the labourers to accept the leadership of these leaders is questionable. This was a peculiar transitional phase. The city of Calcutta, once envisaged as the “second city of the Empire” in the imagination of the British, suddenly turned into a hotbed of sedition and political violence. Smell of gunpowder, loud gun shots, slogan of Bande Mataram pervaded the city environment during this time. The city also became a site of communal violence. Such violence strengthened the hand of the colonial rulers.

Chapter – Three

A Disease Ridden City

This chapter delves into the condition of daily life in disease stricken Calcutta. It also critically examines the policies of the British government in dealing with these diseases, their initiatives and inactiveness, and also the role of the *bhadralok* middleclass in extending the health care facilities among the urban poor of the city. By the term ‘urban poor’, I mainly try to mean that group of people who were engaged in waged or salaried labour especially in manual labour occupations and industrial work. The focus, in this chapter, is on diseases that took a heavy toll on human lives during this period.

Plague

Unlike all other diseases, the advent of plague in Calcutta took place in 1898. It was imported from Bombay by ship and not by railways, where it arrived in September, 1896. Wherefrom it arrived in Bombay, whether Hongkong or Afghanistan is a debatable issue, which has not been solved till date. For the colonial city of Calcutta, plague in its intense form swept over the city in the first decade of twentieth century. Definitely it took a heavy toll on human lives. Towards the end of this decade, its virulence decreased, as we shall see in the chapter later.¹

The date of the first arrival of plague in Calcutta, by which ship the infection came, whether it was conveyed by a sick man or by merchandise, or rats are some questions which have not been answered till date. No primary data has arrived in our hands, whereby we could formulate answers to these questions. Plague was primarily a disease that caused deaths among rats and then was transmitted to human beings through infected fleas, who had come in touch with those rats in any way. Human beings, in anyway were bound to get affected by the danger of rat flea.²

When plague first came to Calcutta, it acquired a virulent character and a widespread dimension within a short span of time. The obvious reason behind this was that Calcutta by twentieth century had become a overcrowded city, a major portion of which was formed by migrant workers. These workers might have come from the areas where plague had already taken place. So these men acted as agents in spread of the disease within the city. It was either by themselves, or by clothes or by

¹*Report on Plague in Calcutta (1909-1910)*, by H.M.Crake, Special Health Officer.(Calcutta Corporation).

²*Ibid.*

merchandise that the germs of the disease spread. Merchant men were another class who could be traced out as carriers of the germs of plague. Because of their mobility from one place to another, their body could easily catch germs and it was again their body through which plague germs were transmitted among the greater masses. There were thus, numerous agents through which plague virus spread rapidly among the greater city populace. As said earlier, plague had taken a heavy toll of human lives in the first decade of the twentieth century in Calcutta. Below is a statistics from which we can gather some knowledge regarding the mortality rate.³

Year : Mortality rate

1900 : 7373persons

1901 : 7398 persons

1902 : 6925persons

1903 : 7819persons

1904 : 4506persons

1905 : 7011persons

1906 : 2339persons

1907 : 3278persons

1908 : 1495 persons

1909 : 1838persons⁴

There were usually three kinds of plague prevalent in Calcutta, Bubonic, Pneumonic and Septicaemic. Daily life in the city was thus constantly being threatened by this plague demon, throughout the decade.⁵

The student community and the plague

A sorry picture of panic stricken Calcutta, was reflected in *Hitavadi* of 22 March 1901,⁶ which urged for the closing of all the schools and colleges on account of plague. It was reported that a servant of the Hindu hostel was removed to the Medical College hospital, on the suspicion that he was suffering from plague, because a women had died of plague in a hut in front of the hostel. *Bengalee*, 21 March

³Report on Plague in Calcutta, (1909-1910), by H.M.Crake.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶*Hitavadi*, 22 March, 1901, Report on Native Press.

1901,⁷ testifies the above mentioned facts, while speaking about the prevalence of plague in the neighborhood of the Hindu hostel. From the columns of *Basumati* of 11 April, 1901,⁸ it is known that three students of the Campbell Medical school had died of plague. It was after this incident that the students of the same institution had applied to the Superintendent that they might be exempted from the liability to attend plague cases in the school hospital.

The above reports points out to the fact, how the fear of plague was alienating the students' community from doing their habitual tasks. This fear had struck deep roots in the minds of the city dwellers and was also responsible for depopulating the students' hostels. A good section of the students from the mufassil towns had become temporary residents of Calcutta. They had migrated to the city for the purpose of studying in various institutions and so they had to reside in hostels. But fear of plague had led many of them to vacate their rooms and migrate back to their own homes. All these reflected the sheer anxiety that had made its headway among the city populace because of the plague menace. The worries of the students' community reflected only a portion of the plague story, which travelled throughout the city during this time.

Navayug, 5 April, 1902,⁹ reported that on 2 April, 1902, at 10 a.m. a woman, who used to sell pulses in Simla Bazaar in Calcutta, was found dead in her shop. It was discovered that she had died of plague but no one knew when she had died. All the pulses in her shop was reported to be carried to the roof of a goodown, on the eastern side of the bazaar. It was assumed that those pulses would be sold afterwards. The paper wondered that none of the municipal employees, whose duty it was to find out plague cases in the town, were found at the place during the day. It reported that these officers shortened their duties by taking the number of plague cases at the burning ghats and the beat constable also took no notice of the woman's death. These newspaper reports reveals before us a clear picture of plague within the city. The negligence of the municipal plague officers in dealing with plague victims is seen. Further the question of the treatment of women suffering from plague also comes to the forefront. The two instances of death that appears from the mentioned news reports, are those of women. One died in a hut and the other, a vegetable seller, died in her shop. Both of them came from the poorer section of the city, of

⁷ *Bengalee*, 21 March, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

⁸ *Basumati*, 11 April, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

⁹ *Navayug*, 5 April, 1902, *Report on Native Press*.

course being the worst victims. The ill ventilated and unhealthy environment of the slums prepared the plague bacillus to thrive well in such an atmosphere. Of course danger prone was the mud walled, earthen floored tiled hut, owing to the facilities it afforded for rat infestation. But equal responsibility lay on the careless habits of the people with regard to the disposal of household refuse. As a result, rat infestation was so universal in the city, that it would be a mistake on our part, if we try to label a particular kind of holdings to be rat infested. All kinds of holdings were liable to be infected.

It can be argued, further, that even a model dwelling constructed in accordance with the contemporary sanitary principles was also seen to be attacked by plague, as was in case of Bombay, because of being infected by rats.¹⁰ This actually made one to realize the truth of Ashburton Thomson's¹¹ dictum that the only real effective method of preventing plague was to habitually exclude rats from human dwellings. But owing to the negligence of the city corporation, in formulating effective conservancy policies for the native part of the town, exclusion of rats from human dwellings was an absurd premise. As said earlier, the ignorant attitude of the city dwellers regarding waste disposal was another factor for abundance of dead rats in the city.

From plague report of 1909-1910 it appears

Total cases in kutcha houses, 881 ie 68.4% of total cases.

Total cases in pucca houses, 407 ie 31.5% of total cases.

Total cases in kutcha and pucca houses was 1,288 combined.¹²

The population living in 68,929 kutcha dwellings, was estimated in the census report at 445,370 and the population in 28,195 pucca houses at 294,559.¹³

Since there were three varieties of plague that occurred in Calcutta, the following statistics shows the percentage of each variety:-

Bubonic 40.8% of all cases.

Septicemic 57.0% of all cases.

Pneumonic 2.02% of all cases.¹⁴

¹⁰*Report on Plague in Calcutta*, by H.M.Crake. (1909-1910).

¹¹Ashburton Thomson was a Austro- English physician, who was an authority on plague and leprosy.

¹²*Report on Plague in Calcutta*. (1909-1910).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

In Calcutta, there was relatively heavy incidence of plague amongst old people. The largest proportion of bubonic cases occurred between the ages of 5 and 20 years. It was seen that the Muslim women showed a slightly larger percentage of bubonic cases. Whether Hindu women or Muslim women, the issue of women health care, thus, comes to the forefront. It is seen from the newspaper reports that the women were more prone to get affected by the plague virus. It may be assumed that women, being the home maker in the context of Indian society, were constricted within the home front only. Her role as a home maker, demanded her physical labour, of course making her time bound in a family structure. She was expected to perform her duties as a mother, as a wife, as a daughter in law, as a sister in law in a perfect way. In performing all these duties, she herself was neglected. It was of course her health, both physical and mental that had to bear the brunt of this. Women, were always subject of the machinery of patriarchal control and even among the bhadraloks too, this was a tendency.

The inn house premise or 'andarmahal' unless vigorously disinfected, was a suitable breeding ground for germs of all kinds and the female body, being the chief actor within the household, was quite prone to catch infection. So it was her confinement that made her infection prone. As far as the working women were concerned, like the vegetable seller, it was once again the need of the family for which she had to come out and engage herself in selling vegetable. While analyzing her background, it could be ascertained that this lady had a poor background which prompted her to sell vegetables in the open market. Market was an excellent place, where all kinds of buyers and sellers with all kinds of goods met. It was an equally great platform for infections of all kinds to assemble. As far as the issue of plague was concerned, rats could be found in abundance in market places, in goodowns, wherever stacks of vegetables or grains were supposed to be. So it was a natural incidence that the lady selling vegetable caught plague virus from the market place. Otherwise from the locality, where her living room was situated, obviously in a densely packed, ill-ventilated unhealthy surroundings.

In the above section, I have tried to analyze why women were more prone to contract plague bacilli. It was seen that the rate of Bubonic plague among Muslim women were slightly higher.

It was actually a sense of social insecurity, not only within the Muslim society, but also within the Hindu society, that had prevented the female body to be properly

medically treated. Calcutta, in the first decade of the twentieth century, as such witnessed no effective measures for women healthcare from the colonial rulers. Dearth of female doctors and lack of medical facilities for females, at many instances resulted in higher mortality rates among women. As far as plague amongst men, in the colonial city of Calcutta was concerned, it was seen that plague was very rare a phenomenon among a few class of professionals. Bhari or the class of water carriers and the fishermen or jeles and the fish sellers, throughout this decade were seen to remain mostly unaffected by plague virus.¹⁵

Thus it is seen how plague had become a source of anxiety, as far as everyday life at the beginning of the twentieth century was concerned. It is now time to examine the policies of the colonial government in regard to deal with the plague menace in the city and how effective these policies were for the daily life of the city dwellers. Under the Plague Regulation of Calcutta Corporation (1898), there were demolition of many houses, which were found to be rat infested and hence prone to the outbreak of plague. This in the other way had created a disruption in the urban layout of the city. A provision was made by which the Engineering Department of the Calcutta Corporation was to submit the weekly returns of the number of dead rats found in the streets of Calcutta. Rat depots were also constructed at many places within the city. It was seen that a very large proportion of the dead rats found in the streets, during the outbreak period, died of plague. An attempt was also made by the corporation to trace out the houses in which unusual rat mortality was occurring.¹⁶ Dr. Neild Crook, in his report on plague in Calcutta (1899) gave a vivid account of the plague stricken city. He wrote that difficulty was experienced in moving patients to hospitals. When they desired it, the gariwallahs refused to take such patients because of the fear of being infected from the patients and loss of their custom. To obviate this, two vehicles were hired and stationed at plague office at 65, Beadon Street and the other at the Town Hall. After use, arrangements were being made for immediately disinfecting these vehicles either at the District Offices or at the hospitals. Patients objected to be moved in hand ambulances, as it drew a crowd of spectators, when such an ambulance was seen on the road, and to disperse this crowd, no less than a police guard was required.¹⁷

¹⁵Kar, R. G, *Plague*, Harihar Press, Calcutta, 1916, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶*Report on Plague in Calcutta* (1909-1910).

¹⁷*Report on Plague in Calcutta*. (1899) by Dr Neild Crook. (Health Officer to the Corporation of Calcutta).

But all the above mentioned attempts on part of the corporation had failed. There was no separate laboratory in the Health Department of the corporation in which plague amongst rats in Calcutta could have been minutely studied.¹⁸ The only rational method of combating plague, thus left with the corporation, was to keep a close watch on the rat population, and to keep a close vigilance on those quarters in which rats were found to be infected and thereby to concentrate all available resources on that section of the town. The Health officers, were instructed to proceed with the members of the vigilance or medical committee, in case they found out any house or any person suffering from plague. They were to enquire into the case and were to examine all or any inmate of the house, to destroy the bedding, clothing and articles of a similar nature and to improve the sanitary condition of the premises. The Health officers in consultation with a competent engineer, was given power to remove all partitions, erections or portions of house walls if it had happened to obstruct light and ventilation in any way.¹⁹ In keeping a close vigilance on the native part of the town owing to fear of plague, we shall now see how the Health officers, of the Calcutta Corporation neglected the responsibilities which lay on their shoulder, but became over active in some cases in which they were expected to be more considerate. Since it was a practice to burn the bedding and clothes of the plague stricken persons, the plague officers of the Calcutta Corporation, often did this in a careless manner. It is being reported by *Basumati* (15 March, 1900)²⁰ that the bedding and clothes were usually collected on the middle of the road, mostly in front of the plague stricken house and set fire to it. But the Plague officers had no time to wait till the whole were burnt to ashes. They used to go away only after setting fire to them. The result was that those things were not fully burnt and the un-burnt filthy rags were strewn all over the road by the wind. The dead rats in plague stricken houses, were reported to be often thrown on the road, where they were seen to remain for two or three days together. This newspaper also reported that the disinfecting process was very defective. It was often done in a haphazard way.

Although the municipality had made some arrangements for disinfecting the plague stricken houses and localities, it was the question of effective supervision and control on the municipal Health officers, which ultimately turned the system upside down. This in turn, spread the virulence of plague rather than eradicating it or

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *The Bengal Plague Manual*, 1903.

²⁰ *Basumati* , 15 March, 1900, *Report on Native Press*.

lessening it within the city. When plague became so virulent within the city, the colonial authorities instituted some check measures at the entry points of the city like the railway stations and the river port. Scholars like Mark Harrison has conducted a detailed study on the measures adopted by the Calcutta Port authorities, in case a ship entering the port was found to carry plague virus.²¹ Arrangements were also made to examine passengers in the two railway stations of Sealdah and Howrah. In doing so, at many instances passengers who arrived from outside or who were about to depart from Calcutta, were often harassed. *Sanjivani* (15 March,1900)²² reported that the manner in which the medical examination of the passengers were conducted, only caused their inconvenience. It was said by this paper, that it was only ten or fifteen minutes before departure of a train, that the plague doctors came. They examined the passengers travelling by third class for eight to ten minutes. Majority of the passengers remained unexamined. Many of them missed the train as a result. But for the passengers travelling by first class or second class, separate arrangements were made for their medical examination in their respective compartments. Class distinction was thus seen in case of medical examination also. The urban poor who were very likely to travel by the third class compartments, were mostly neglected from being examined in a proper way. When plague had become a disease, so widespread in twentieth century Calcutta, such attitude of the doctors, who formed a part of the official colonial class, has to be questioned. *Indian Mirror* (3 April,1903) reported about a large scale immigration of the Marwaris from Calcutta, owing to fear of plague. According to the paper, it was Chandernagore where these people had taken shelter temporarily.²³

Innocations or Vaccinations in the city

It has been already pointed out, that there was no laboratory in the Health Department of the Corporation, and so no systematic medical research on plague could be conducted during the time. Innocations although were performed, but it was on a very small scale. From a report, it appears that 3000 persons were inoculated in 1907 and 2000 in 1908.²⁴ In performing these innocations, it was found that most of those, who were being inoculated were actually the miserable outcasts of the city, who were

²¹ Harrison, Mark, *Public Health in British India: Anglo Indian Preventive Medicine 1859-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp.147-148.

²²*Sanjivani*, 15 March,1900, *Report on Native Press*.

²³*Indian Mirror*, 3 April,1902, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁴*Report on Plague in Calcutta* (1909-1910).

attracted by the compensation offered.²⁵ But the city dwellers of Calcutta, as it was seen, could never rely on the colonial health policies as a whole and hence inoculation procedure was seen with indifference by them.

Plague Charity Fund

A charity fund was instituted by the colonial government in order to provide a sort of compensation for the family of those who had died of plague. In Calcutta, there were three plague charity funds - The Special Plague Subscription Fund, The Phool Chand Fund and The Plague Charity Fund. But in reality the amount of these funds were so meager, that it was hardly possible for a poor family who had lost an earning member, to thrive on that. In 1910, it was reported that only Rs 25 was expended during the year, under the Special Plague Charity Fund. The widow of one Shiekh Bhurtoo received five monthly payments of Rs 5 each. Rewards were also given for rats.²⁶

But inspite of all the above measures, the British authorities failed to achieve the confidence of the urban masses residing in Calcutta, as far as the Health policies were concerned. While concluding this section of the chapter, we can say that sanitary measures of a simpler nature could have been adopted by the corporation such as regular lime washing of the houses, the effective cleaning of latrines and the regular removal of filth or rubbish. But in taking up bigger steps, these preliminary steps were neglected by the corporation, which could have formed the first step of eradicating the plague menace.

Pthysis or Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis, popularly called Pthysis in the first leg of the twentieth century, was also a fearsome disease as far as daily life in Calcutta was concerned. It can be claimed, that in 1907, Von Pirquett first discovered the method of Tuberculin test, from which pthysis acquired the name of Tuberculosis. It was an infectious disease that primarily affected lungs, and also somehow or other, affected intestine, meninges, bones, joints, lymphs, glands and other tissues of the body.²⁷ Although unlike plague, pthysis had its beginning in Calcutta in the earlier century, but any attempt to study daily life in Calcutta in twentieth century would not become complete without

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Report on Plague in Calcutta(1909-1910).*

²⁷ Park, K, *Text Book of Preventive and Social Medicine*, Banarasidas Bhanot, Jabalpure, 1998, P.141.

studying this disease. It can be argued that this specific disease was a social disease that had medical aspects. The social factors included many non-medical factors like poor quality of life, poor housing and over-crowding, population explosion, under nutrition, lack of education, large families, early marriages, lack of awareness of the causes of illness etc. All these factors are interlinked with each other and in their variable form, formed indispensable attributes of everyday life of a city.

On the basis of primary reports, in this section, I have tried to formulate a detailed survey of the pthysis epidemic in different wards of Calcutta Corporation, ofcourse examining the variations in them. In ward 1, ie in Shyampukur, in 1901, the density of population per acre of land was 115 that had become 130 in 1911. It had an open area with a large Hindu population. In this area the death rate from Pthysis among Hindu men was higher than the women. In Kumartulli area, ie ward 2, the population in 1901 was 139, that had become 152 in 1911, per acre of land. It was seen that in this area the prevalence of pthysis was slightly low. Ward no 3, corresponded to Bartala area, where the population density in 1901 was 125 per acre of land, that had become 136 by 1911. In this area, $\frac{1}{4}$ th of the population were Muslims. Here the death rate among women was slightly higher than that of the men. Death rate was very low among Muslim men. Ward no 4 corresponded to Sukea Street, where population density per acre of land, was 131 in 1901, that had become 150 by 1911. Here less than $\frac{1}{3}^{\text{rd}}$ of the population were Muslims. The mortality rate in this ward, due to pthysis was very high. It was excessive amongst Muslims specially amongst Muslim women. Ward no 5, denoted Jorabagan area where the population per acre of land in 1901, was 202, which had become 214 in 1911. This ward had a very dense population almost entirely of Hindus. The death rate was very high and excessive among females. The death rate even among the limited Muslim population was extraordinarily high. In this ward the death rate among males were a slightly higher than the average death rate of all the wards. Ward 6 comprised of the Jorasanko area, where the population in 1901 was 202, per acre of land, that had become 227 in 1911. In this ward the death rate was not so high. Among the Muslim women the death rate was slightly higher than that of Hindu women. Ward 7, comprised of the Barabazaar area. Its population in 1901 was 146 persons per acre of land, which decreased to 141 in 1911. This ward had a moderately dense population. It had a low death rate from Pthysis. Kalutala corresponded to ward no 8. This ward had the most dense population, if compared with any other ward in the city, during

the first decade of the twentieth century. The population density per acre of land, here, in 1901 was 282 which had increased to 255 in 1911. The death rate among men, in this ward from Pthysis was about the average but the female mortality rate was very high. In this ward, Hindu women suffered more than their Muslim sisters. Ward 9, comprised of Muchipara area. Here the population density per acre of land in 1901, was 139, that decreased to 138 in 1911. Since it was a densely populated ward, the death rate was more than average. Here, the death rate of males was higher than in any other ward. Mortality rate among women was high specially among Muslim women, being twice than that of the Hindu women. Ward no - 10 comprised of the Bowbazaar area. This ward too, had a high mortality rate. As in ward 9, this ward too, had a high mortality rate among Muslim women when compared to Hindu women. Ward-no 11, comprised of the Padmapukur area. This area had a less crowded population that was 184 in 1901, which reduced to 170 in 1911, the Muslim population being comparatively small. The death rate from pthysis in this ward was considerably below the average. Ward 12 corresponded to Waterloo Street. The population here, in 1901 was 169 per acre of land that became 181 in 1911. This ward too had a very low death rate. Ward 13, comprised of Fenwick Bazaar and the population was not very dense, being 30 persons per acre of land in 1901 and remaining unaltered in 1911 also. Hindu men in this ward suffered slightly from pthysis. But Hindu women died at a higher rate than the average of Calcutta and among the Muslim women death rate was very high. Ward no 14 comprised of Taltalla, whose population density per acre of land in 1901 was 163 that reduced to 148 in 1911. Death rate from pthysis in this ward was very high. This ward was essentially a Muslim ward. This ward had a high mortality rate due to pthysis. Among Muslim women the proportion of death was enormous. Among the male Hindus of this ward, the mortality rate was very low, being only half of the Muslim men. Ward no 15 comprised of Kalinga. This ward showed a scattered population. The population density in 1901 was 94 per acre of land that turned 64 in 1911. The death rate from Pthysis, in this ward was very low especially among males. Women died double the rate of men. In this ward Hindus, both men and women suffered more than the Muslims. Ward 16 comprised of the Park Street area. The population density here was 40 persons per acre of land in 1901, that became 35 in 1911. The cases of death from pthysis in this area was too few. Victoria Terrace comprised of ward no 17. The density of population here, in 1901, was 43 persons per acre of land that had

become 24 in 1911. The cases of pthysis in this area was also too few in number to be recorded. Ward 18 comprised of Hastings area, whose density of population per acre of land in 1901 was 55 that had reduced to 51 in 1911. This ward was a small ward with a comparatively small population. In this ward there was both a military population and a civil population. The death rate from pthysis was very low, below than the average in other wards. Ward no 19 corresponded to Entally area. In 1901, its population density was 35 per acre of land, which had become 41 in 1911. Though it was a sparsely populated area, yet there was severe congestion in many parts. The death rate from pthysis was high in both men and women. The death rate among Muslim women was very high. Ward no 20 comprised of the Beniapukur area, where the population in 1901 was 34 per acre of land that had become 46 in 1911. This area had the highest mortality rate due to pthysis than any other area in Calcutta.²⁸ The death rate was very high among the Muslim population, especially among the Muslim females.²⁹

The area between Ballygunge to Tollygunge constituted ward no 21. In 1901, the population in this ward, per acre of land was 14 that increased to 19 in 1911. Since it was a large ward and some areas were very congested, deaths from pthysis in the first decade of twentieth century was high. The peculiarity of this ward was that the females suffered less than the men of this ward. Amongst Muslim men, the mortality rate was 50% higher than the Hindus of the ward. Ward 22, comprised of the Bhowanipore area. The population density in this area was 61 in 1901, which had become 67 in 1911. The population mostly comprised of the Hindus. This ward also showed a lower death rate due to pthysis. It was, like the previous ward, exceptionally low among the women. Ward no 23 constituted the Alipore area, where the population density per acre of land in 1901 was 14 which increased to 16 in 1911. The mortality rate in this ward, due to pthysis was extraordinarily low especially among men. Among men of this ward, death due to pthysis may be called to be phenomenal. Among Muslim females of this ward, death due to pthysis was 3 ½% of Hindu women of the ward. Ward no 24 comprised of Ekbalpore area. The population here, per acre of land in 1901 was 23 that had become 24 in 1911. This area had a huge Muslim population. Here the death rate, from pthysis was very high among the Muslim population. It was below the average amongst the Hindus. Ward no

²⁸*Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta, 1901, 1911.*

²⁹*Report on Pthysis in Calcutta. (1903)*

25 comprised of Watgunge area. The population in this area in 1901 was 54 persons per acre of land that became 60 in 1911. This ward had a very low mortality rate due to pthysis, and it was very low among the men of this ward.³⁰ There was no particular season for outbreak of this tubercular disease. It could be transmitted to others by means of the effected persons cough or spitted out materials.

While examining these records closely, it can be seen, that the prevalence of pthysis was mostly found in the native portion of the town. Park Street and Victoria Terrace, that corresponded to ward no 16 and 17 respectively were areas mostly inhabited by Europeans. These quarters of the town recorded the lowest mortality rate from Pthysis. If compared with the native part of the city, these portions were privileged with all the amenities of a city life- sufficient water supply, good housing facilities, healthy environment and regular garbage disposal facilities. All these ensured a good health for those residents who lived in this area. If the living conditions in the native part of the city, often called the Black Town under the colonial regime, is summarized, one would notice what a type of sorry picture prevailed in these areas. Housing conditions were very poor in many of the areas, often very much congested and ill ventilated. The standard of living among the urban poor of Calcutta, at the turn of the twentieth century was miserable, which in its turn allowed diseases of various kinds to make their headway within the city. Pthysis was a disease that usually occurred as a result of malnutrition, poor condition of living, unhealthy surroundings etc and all these conditions in fact matched with the Indian quarters of Calcutta. Living in crowded rooms especially at night with closed windows and doors was a common way of contracting the disease. So abundance of fresh air provided some chances to prevent the spread of this disease. Pthysis was very much prevalent in the native part of the city, taking a huge toll on human lives.

Another striking area, that emerges out of these primary records, was the prevalence of pthysis among the Muslim population of the city particularly among the Muslim women. In contemporary Calcutta, when compared with the Hindu population, the Muslims were more involved in manual labor intensive jobs like that of Baburchis, daftrees, syces, ostagars etc³¹. In these kinds of jobs they were paid a very low wage which in its turn once again could not ensure a comfortable living for an average Muslim family. The Muslims of Calcutta, whether Bengali Muslims or those

³⁰*Report on Pthysis in Calcutta.*(1903)

³¹*Census Report, 1901.*

from outside Bengal, actually fared badly as industrialists or traders. They constituted a much smaller proportion of factory owners than of the population. There were some rich Nakhuda merchants who traded mainly with West Asia, but most others operated on a small scale. There were practically no bankers of importance among them.³² Thus the condition of living, among the Muslim population of Calcutta remained extraordinarily poor, specially among those Muslims who were slum dwellers, as those in Ekbalpore and Taltalla. Manual work demanded bodily strength, which was to be substituted by good and healthy food. But the economic condition prevalent among these poor Muslim population of Calcutta could not enable them to afford a full square meal a day. Healthy food habit was a distant dream to them. The worst sufferers were of course the women. Early marriage, early motherhood, all contributed to make them the worst sufferers and the most neglected ones in the society. As the majority of women in those days were purdinishin, they were more constantly subjected to the influence of their environment. The heavy incidence of tubercle among those residing in insanitary and congested areas, indicates very clearly the powerful influence of these conditions on the prevalence of tuberculosis. Apartments for women were usually shut in and hidden away at the back of the house and so were particularly ill ventilated. The mobility of women within these limited zones, left a large number of them as Pthisis patients.³³

Such a wretched living condition among the urban poor of the city, thus invited Tuberculin M virus to thrive well, which in its turn, swept away a huge number of human lives from the city. This wretched living condition and endemic poverty of the laboring poor of the city was an outcome of the authoritarian colonial rule. Dr T. Pearse, in 1911, recommended for establishment of a separate Tuberculin Dispensary but even in 1912 also, it could not be established.³⁴

Cholera

Cholera was a water borne, intestinal disease, causing acute diarrhoea. Impure drinking water, adulterated food stuffs were some of the chief reasons behind the outbreak of Cholera. Life in a big city like Calcutta, was obviously bound to be hit

³² Bagchi, A.K, 'Wealth and Work in Calcutta, 1880-1920' in Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed). *Calcutta: The Living City*, vol : 1, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1990, p.212.

³³ *Report of the Health Officer of Calcutta*, 1911, 1912. (Dr T. Pearse)

³⁴ *Ibid.*

by intestinal disorders like cholera.³⁵In this section we will examine the everyday issues that actually combined to make twentieth century Calcutta prone to endemics like Cholera. *Navayug* (11 January, 1900)³⁶ reported that from the beginning of the winter season large quantities of fish were imported into the Calcutta bazaars, every day, and that the whole of the day's import were not sold off during the day. The fish sellers kept the surplus fish steeped in ice and sold them as fresh fish. This paper questioned whether the municipal Food Inspectors had any sort of knowledge regarding these mal practices of the fish sellers. This paper also informs us that most of the fish imported in the Calcutta market came by rail in a state of decomposition and that the fish sellers sold them as fresh fish by coloring them red. The same newspaper in its edition of 22 March, 1900³⁷ informed that a large quantity of Hilsa fish were being imported to the Calcutta bazaar and those were kept for two or even three days before they were sold off. It reported that many persons had died of cholera by eating this rotten fish. It demanded immediate attention of the Food Inspectors, whose duty it was to see these matters.

These reports thus, could identify the catalysts which acted behind spread of cholera. Fish formed one of the staple food item of Bengal, and so had great demand in Bengali household. For this reason, even adulterated fish could bring profits for the fish sellers of the Calcutta market. But consuming these food items, in its turn brought the wrath of Cholera to fell on the city dwellers. On the other hand the negligence of the municipal Food Inspectors, comes to the fore front. The rate payers, while were subjected to pay a good amount of taxes to the municipality, often at higher rates, were ignored by the colonial authorities in many ways. Daily life in the colonial city of Calcutta, seems to be threatened by the negligence of the municipal officers in various capacities. Paying a healthy tax did not ensure them, a healthy life as a whole.

Cholera, in epidemic form was most prevalent in the months of March, April and May. It could be seen that deaths due to cholera, had decreased in Calcutta towards the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1910 it was 1901, and in 1911, being 1860. The number of cholera cases treated in hospitals and dispensaries increased from 634 in 1910 to 836 in 1911. Out of the total 606 indoor patients admitted for this disease, 232 were treated in Campbell Hospital. Major Roger's

³⁵Park, K, p.163.

³⁶ *Navayug*, 11 January, 1900, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁷ *Navayug*, 22 March, 1900, *Report on Native Press*.

method of treatment was used in a large number of cases, and no fewer than 141 (60.77%) recovered. Of the 136 in patients treated at the Medical College Hospital, 96 (70.59%) recovered. Same type of treatment, as was seen in Campbell Hospital, was adopted here, as the cholera ward in the Medical College Hospital was in charge of Major Rogers.³⁸

It was seen that Wards No- 2 (Kumartolli), No-5 (Jorabagan), No -7 (Barabazaar), No-20 (Beniapukur) , No- 22 (Bhowanipore), No 23 (Alipore), No- 25 (Watgunge / Garden Reach), were worst sufferers from cholera in 1909. It was a matter of fact that all these wards, except Ward No- 20, were located on the border of Tolly's Nullah (a canal). Women suffered less in proportion to men, from this disease. It was during monsoon that the number of cholera outbreaks decreased. Reports reveal that every now and then small outbreaks of cholera occurred in bustees and invariably round or near to a tank.³⁹ It was the bustee dwellers once again who were the worst victims of cholera. As the summer season set in, water crisis in the city posed a serious challenge to the inhabitants of Calcutta. With decreasing amount of water supply, the city dwellers had to take recourse to various other sources of water supply, among which there were tanks of impure water, ponds etc. Those sections of the Calcutta citizens who could afford to buy water from the bhistiwalas, could manage the problem somehow. But the bustee dwellers, were the ones who were hardest hit by this problem of scanty water supply and invariably the greatest number of cholera patients, in the city were from them.

Further, it was the Hindu section of the population, who had suffered due to cholera more than any other community, in the city during this time. Many Hindu festivals were being celebrated in the city, in which bathing in the Ganges formed a part of the celebration. Even if the Hindus could not get access to the Ganges, they dived in local water tanks. These sort of ceremonies, among the Hindus only, aggravated the water borne diseases like cholera on a massive scale.⁴⁰

Beri- Beri

This section of the chapter, has mainly been formed on the basis of available governmental reports, and no newspaper report regarding the outbreak of this disease has been found, whereby we could have examined how this disease had made an

³⁸*Notes on Annual Returns of the Hospitals and Dispensaries in Bengal for the year 1911.*

³⁹*Report of the Health Officer of Calcutta (1909).*

⁴⁰*Report of the Health Officer of Calcutta, (1911-1912).*

impact on the daily life of the people of Calcutta. In absence of such records, we have to rely, on municipal health officers' report, to make a critical study of this disease in the city.

In his report of 1907, Dr Pearse, had made a reference to the re-appearance of Beri- beri in the city, after an apparent absence since 1901. During 1907, a considerable number of cases occurred which may be roughly estimated from 300-400, but only 15 deaths were recorded. In 1907, the disease was first reported at the Alipore Reformatory, and subsequently cases were seen in widely scattered parts of the city. Since the most essential symptom of this disease was dropsy, this disease was also known by the name Epidemic Dropsy. A dry cough with shortness of breath, and cardiac troubles in the form of palpitation, irregularity of beat, rapidity of pulse and murmurs associated with swelling of limbs, were some of the common attributes of this disease. A striking feature of this disease, that became visible at the second phase of its outbreak (from 1907) was anaesthesia. This outbreak continued until the spring of 1908, 33 deaths being reported. No conclusion regarding its causation or the means by which it was spread, could be reached. According to reports, the disease had been prevalent in nearly every ward but more specially in the northern part of the city. The rich and poor and persons of all ages became a victim of this disease with the exception of very young children. Another striking feature of this disease was that this disease chiefly occurred among the Bengalis and among those in a fairly well to do circumstance. In 1910-1911 there resulted 20 deaths from Beri-beri or Epidemic Dropsy.⁴¹

Since this disease was prevalent among the Bengalis only, it was supposed that the defect lay in the imperfect dietary- a dietary in which rice formed the principle part and this rice, as a result of being polished, lost its valuable constituents. Thus Beri-beri towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century seems to have threatened the everyday life of the city, though in a smaller scale. No much medical investigation was done from the ruling authorities, as an initiative to combat the repeated occurrence of this disease. They were not concerned at all with the health of their colonized subjects. However, because of the paucity of sources, nothing much about the condition of patients suffering from this disease could be ascertained. We give a little focus on the outbreak of this disease, from all the available sources in

⁴¹*Report of the Health Officer of Calcutta (1909).*

our hand, as this disease too, was a source of anxiety, that had actually kept the city dwellers at their toes.

While we have talked about various kinds of diseases prevalent in Calcutta, during the period of our research, some factors have come to the surface repeatedly as the basic underlying causes at making Calcutta a disease ridden city. Filthy and insanitary environment, insanitary occupations, neglect to appreciate the early symptoms and lastly poor physique and diminished power of resistance to disease form some of the chief factors among them. Now the question at this stage may rise, that what was the condition that lay at the root of the above mentioned factors which once again in its turn, made the city prone to diseases? While answering these questions one has to give a micro level focus to the spatial arrangements of twentieth century Calcutta. In doing this, I have tried to analyze the architectural layout of the native quarters of the town of Calcutta. A close examination will unravel before us the ways in which this contributed in turning colonial Calcutta into a necropolis.

An architectural review of Calcutta at the turn of the twentieth century (responsible for producing diseases)

No survey of a colonial city can possibly ignore the potent influence of the 'purdah system' on its domestic architecture. Obviously the courtyard house, was a necessity. The necessity was of securing absolute privacy for the ladies of the household. To effectually seclude the inner apartments from the vulgar gaze actually meant little or no space for air and light which in its turn rendered the rooms most unfit for human habitation. It was a common picture in contemporary Calcutta, to find the whole of the lower storey of the zenanamahal, even in large and valuable houses, given up to godowns and kitchens. The kitchens, in most of the houses, was a gloomy and stuffy den with full of acid smoke and the ladies of the house had to spend most part of the day in such an unpleasant surroundings. The entire absence of chimneys, in those days made the situation worst and unbearable in such ill ventilated kitchens. It was of course once again the females, who were worst sufferers in such a situation.⁴²

While taking a deeper look into the inn-house pattern of Calcutta, now, will make the picture more clear. The system of dividing a single dwelling house among several co- heirs, was a very potent factor in production of insanitary property. It was

⁴²Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Northern Portion of the City of Calcutta, 1912.

quite a common experience in early twentieth century Calcutta, to come across, what was originally a single dwelling, to be split up amongst three or four relatives. It was because of the inevitable litigation that the partition involved, each co sharer used to erect a lofty masonry wall, so as to completely shut of his portion from the rest. Though carried out with wonderful ingenuity, the result too frequently was that, a noble mansion with spacious courtyards was converted into a number of mean little houses with totally inadequate open spaces, and most of the rooms imperfectly lighted and ventilated. An unfortunate heir could only reach his portion through a long tortuous passage for the partition resulted in the formation of an insanitary “back house”. Under such unhealthy conditions, germs of diseases were bound to thrive well.⁴³

While these were some in house factors responsible for rendering the city as a site of disease, now we shall examine some factors of the external layout that, as a whole contributed in producing various kinds of diseases. The irregular manner in which the northern part of the city was built upon, indicates to the faulty town planning system that was undertaken by the colonial rulers. In their attempt to create a new urban order, in the colonial metropolis, our colonial masters actually initiated large scale demolition of huts and replaced them with masonry buildings. But in doing so, the narrow, irregular, tortuous interspaces between the huts, were carefully preserved. The result of this sort of negligence from the city authorities, could be found all over the old town area, in the shape of great masses of masonry buildings, intersected by narrow lanes, that turned and twisted in the most bewildering manner. Blind alleys, very narrow and tortuous, branched out at irregular intervals and gave access to the interior of the blocks. These blocks, actually, were veritable ‘masonry bustees’. With the exception of the fringe of houses abutting on main streets, the buildings in such a block had no proper frontages, and were hemmed in at the back by similarly located houses, abutting on the neighbouring gully. Those areas, where lofty buildings were in majority, the gullies were deprived of light and air to a marked degree and particularly in some instances, where overhanging verandahs, almost met overhead. In fact, in congested parts of the city, the real bustee (groups of one storeyed huts), actually made a welcome break in the great masses of masonry

⁴³*Ibid.*

buildings as it permitted air and light to gain access to many houses which would otherwise had remained helpless.⁴⁴

Thus while taking a general view of the native part of the early twentieth century Calcutta a striking feature would be seen in the extra ordinary manner in which sanitary and insanitary houses were huddled together, all over the city. Here, the classical description of slums, sinking behind a fringe of palaces, did not fit in. Early twentieth century Calcutta, rather represented a case of palace and hovel, mansion and mud hut being cheek by jowl.

In the above paragraphs I have tried to somewhat point out the loopholes of Calcutta's architectural planning related to the production of various kinds of diseases. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the city witnessed large scale demolitions of old, existing houses, the urban order underwent some basic changes. But the new urban order that sprang up, was so faulty that it could act as a catalyst in outspread of various diseases. It can be said, in this context that from the beginning of the twentieth century, our city fathers had been experimenting with Calcutta's structural layout and this ultimately culminated in the establishment of the Calcutta Improvement Trust in 1911. The colonial spatial pattern reproduced the inequality of human condition. Any attempt to study daily life in a big city in context of disease cannot neglect the above mentioned factors from consideration. The city dwellers of early twentieth century Calcutta once again, were not aware of these facts, regarding the defective inn house architectural arrangements that paved the way for germs of various kinds to thrive well. Rather they perceived the diseases from a religious view point.⁴⁵ Daily life in the colonial metropolis of Calcutta, at many instances, moved along religious lines particularly when the city was gripped by diseases of various kinds. In the column of *Power and Guardian*, (24 March, 1901),⁴⁶ reference of *Sankirtan* parties, moving through the streets of the city, on daily evening is seen. It writes that it was a honest confession of the Hindu community to confess that the salvation of the city lay in *sankirtan* parties singing religious songs. Absence of scientific knowledge among the common people of the city, led them to interpret the occurrence of diseases from a religious angle. There was also no initiative on part of

⁴⁴*Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Northern Portion of the City of Calcutta*, 1912.

⁴⁵ For an analysis of perception of diseases as divine curse, see Arnold, David, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India*, University of California Press Ltd, London, 1993, p.163.

⁴⁶*Power and Guardian*, 24 March, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

the colonial city authorities to make the ignorant masses aware of the various kinds of diseases that was widely raging within the city.

Further the population expansion within the city, during this time, was also a factor that accounted for making the city environment an inhospitable one. This in turn inevitably led to overcrowding in some parts of the city. A very large portion of the population in the city, lived in houses which were overcrowded. Such kinds of overcrowded tenement houses were seen plenty in Barabazaar area of the city. Here, actually one could find a big house being partitioned, the whole family occupying the resulting tiny dens. Since production of insanitary property was an inevitable outcome of such partitions, the situation with the passage of time became so horrible, that the inmates of such houses were bound to abandon the lower storey and usually crowded into two or three upper rooms. Barabazaar was not only an example of this type. There were innumerable other areas, within the city, where the same insanitary conditions like Barabazaar prevailed, of course all being located in the native part of the town. Baghbazaar, Grey Street, Cornwallis Street, Chitpore Road, Beadon Street, Harrison Road, Halliday Street- all were marked as insanitary areas.⁴⁷ But while labeling them as “insanitary areas”, we must keep it in mind that the inn- house architectural defects or structural architectural defects of certain congested areas, did not contribute alone to render any area, an insanitary one. There were other criterias like irregular waste disposal, scanty water supply, defective drainage system that together acted to make a particular area, an insanitary one. These were as a result of the negligence on part of the city corporation and everyday life of the city had no other alternative but to bear the brunt of this in many ways. *Hitavadi* (March, 8, 1901)⁴⁸ reported that in Mohanlal Mitra’s Street and the places near it in ward no 1, a large number of deaths were taking place everyday. On enquiry it was found that the street and its vicinity were in a very filthy condition and there was also a night soil depot located near it. This locality was known as a hot bed of disease in ward no 1.

This same tone of complain, regarding the condition of the native quarters was found in *Mihir – o – Sudhakar* (22 March, 1901).⁴⁹ It questioned the role of the municipality in keeping the native quarters clean. It reported that the refuse matter in the streets were not removed daily and that the most filthy and unhealthy condition

⁴⁷Report on the Sanitary condition of the Northern Portion of the City of Calcutta, 1912.

⁴⁸*Hitavadi*, 8 March, 1901, Report on Native Press.

⁴⁹*Mihir –o- Sudhakar*, 22 March, 1901, Report on Native Press.

prevailed in Chitpore Road and its adjoining *bastis*. Thus the rate payers, who formed the backbone of the Calcutta Municipality, were the neglected lot under the colonial regime. *Bharat Mitra* (27 April, 1901)⁵⁰ published an article, where reference of one Lala Ajodhya Proshad's letter to the Calcutta Municipality has been made, where he complained about certain bustee in Singhi Bagan area to be full of dirt. The paper reported that as an inevitable result of ignorance on part of the colonial municipal authorities regarding this letter of Ajodhya Proshad, plague broke out in that bustee and then it spread to Hari Sarkar's Lane. There had been a large number of deaths from plague within a few days, after this, in the vicinity of Singhi Bagan. The same paper made reference of another application submitted to the Health Officer of the Calcutta Municipality by one Lakshmi Chand Agarwalla about the same type of condition prevailing in Singhi Bagan area.

Indifference was also seen on part of the corporation, in removal of certain trades from the city, which in its turn affected the daily life of the city, rendering it insanitary. It is known from certain sources that there were existence of a good number of hide godowns in ward no 8. The removal of the godowns would have produced positive results on public health if the corporation had paid attention to them, but this was never the case. There were existence of filthy, kutcha dal godowns also during this period, in the city. Being honey combed with rat holes and largely swarming with rats, located in residential areas, the existence of these godowns caused a serious menace to the public health. Lack of a sensible town planning regulation, actually allowed any enterprise to be located anywhere. There was no separation of residential and industrial zones.⁵¹ A very few of these godowns, were demolished as a part of the process of combating plague menace, but most of them existed enhancing the dimension of plague outbreak. Thus, partly because of the inefficiency of the municipal corporation and partly because of the ignorance and indifference of the residents of twentieth century Calcutta, that the city became a hotbed of diseases. The City Corporation, in spite of exacting a good amount of taxes from the rate payers, could not ensure them a good standard of living.

On the other hand, there was a little chance of self improvement for the city dwellers. Poverty was a hard reality that the urban middle class, the lower middle class and the slum dwellers had to cope up with. Many Calcuttans, during this time

⁵⁰*Bharat Mitra*, 27 April, 1901, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵¹*Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Northern Portion of the City of Calcutta*, 1912.

made a living from work in trade, industry, transport and other services. But, once again not all workers had work. From the late nineteenth century technical and organizational changes were continually threatening the livelihood of workers, who had little job security. In this connection as example, it can be said, that the advent of motor cars threw carriage making firms out of business and along with them, the thousands of workers, engaged in trade. Improvements in the port took away the jobs of thousands of porters, whose place was taken by hydraulic cranes and their few operators. Porters had been engaged earlier on to carry dignitaries from their boats to dry land, since there were no jetties at many places. The advent of Portland cement took away the business of surki (brick dust) works. The growth of Calcutta's population and the construction of palatial buildings partly compensated for these dislocations, but immigrants were steadily adding to the supply of workers while the demand grew sluggishly. Workless people satisfied the desire for vicarious acquisition of virtue (punya) of rich Jains who hired them to feed bedbugs on their own blood at the rate of two annas for two hours work in the factories was also affected by trade cycles, workers thrown out by trade depressions hanged around in a half starved condition in the hope of getting a job in some other establishment. This picture of poverty prevailed in the colonial city of Calcutta, at the turn of the twentieth century. Poverty in its turn paved the way for other factors like malnutrition, poor living conditions etc. that once again acted as catalyst in spreading of diseases and rendering this city as a disease ridden city.⁵²

The role of the urban middle class in dealing with these diseases

A deeper look into this section of the chapter will show us that Calcutta could never become a real home for the British businessmen or bureaucrats, civil or military. It was for this reason that they were not willing to spend more money on it than they could help, be it for its urban development or for the health of its colonized subjects. This fact could be testified by the amount of subscriptions made by the Europeans as expenditure on dispensaries. At the end of 1911, it was seen that the contributions of the Europeans during the decade, for the health of the colonial city of Calcutta was Rs 13,321. The contributions of the Indians amounted to Rs 43,786, which of course was provided by the urban middle class of Calcutta. To what degree they had given a thoughtful insight into the problems of public health of the

⁵²Bagchi, A.K, 'Wealth and Work in Calcutta 1860-1820', P.212.

city is a debatable issue. But definitely under their generous patronage, dispensaries were established, at many places within the city, at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Some of these dispensaries running under state public and local funds in 1911, included Chuni Lal Seal's dispensary attached to Medical College Hospital, Eden Hospital dispensary, Ezra Hospital dispensary, Presidency General Hospital dispensary, Campbell dispensary, Sambhunath Pundit Hospital dispensary, Kidderpore Municipal dispensary, Mayo Native Hospital dispensary, Chandni Hospital dispensary, Ripon Street dispensary, Chitpore dispensary, Sookea Street dispensary, Dufferin Victoria Hospital dispensary.⁵³

It was a rare instance to find dispensaries only meant for women. This in its turn produced lack of medical treatment for women and thereby resulted in higher mortality rates among women. But least initiative was taken by the Calcutta middle class, at least during the period of our research, to establish female dispensaries, so that the female health care question could be solved. It was at a later period that under the generous patronage of some of the Vicerines like Lady Reading, and Lady Chelmsford that the issue of female health care found an expression.⁵⁴ Added to these, was the issue of racism that often hindered the treatment of Indian subjects especially that of women. *Bangaratna* (4March, 1908) published a report in which a forty year old female Muhammadan patient presented herself to the Calcutta Medical College Hospital for treatment but was refused admittance and no medicine was given to her. In consequence, the poor woman died. The paper highly criticized this and demanded an enquiry into the matter. The medical sphere even, was not free from the issue of racism.⁵⁵

Some of the Bengali doctors also made remarkable contributions, in this period in order to extend the health care facilities among the urban poor. Among them, Radha Govinda Kar or R.G. Kar's untiring efforts towards eradication of plague in the city, deserves special mention. When the disease of plague ravaged the daily life of the city to a great extent, at the beginning of the twentieth century R.G. Kar ignoring his personal gains, transformed a portion of his own house at Calcutta, into a plague treatment center. Absolutely running at his own expense, at this center, patients used to be affectionately treated. Dr R.G. Kar's wife used to cook herself for the poor

⁵³ *Notes on Annual Returns of the Hospitals and Dispensaries in Bengal for the year 1911.*

⁵⁴ Mukherjee, Sujata, 'Disciplining the body? Healthcare for Women and Children in Early Twentieth Century Bengal', in Deepak Kumar (ed). *Disease and Medicine in India.*, Tulika, New Delhi, 2001, p.205.

⁵⁵ *Bangaratna*, 4 March, 1908, *Report on Native Press.*

patients who used to stay there for treatment.⁵⁶ To make people aware of this disease, he composed a book himself named “Plague” where he had written elaborately on the treatment of this disease. Among the contemporary Bengali doctors like Mahendralal Sirkar, Dr Nilratan Sirkar, thus, Dr R.G. Kar’s name too remains immortal. Apart from the contributions made by the contemporary Bengali doctors, some of the educated Bengali families also contributed with a generous sum of money, to facilitate the medical treatment of the city dwellers. In this context, mention may be made of K. Shelly Bonnerjee, ESQ Barrister –at- law and other members of his family and Mrs Hemangini Bonnerjee for contributing Rs 35,000 for the purpose of endowing a ward of six beds at the Mayo Hospital to commemorate the memory of their parent Mr W.C. Bonnerjee.⁵⁷ But even then the role of the Bengalee bhadralok middle class was not above question. Only a handful of them had a wider concern for establishment of charitable dispensaries within the city, where the urban poor could be treated absolutely at free of cost. But the major section of the Bengalee middle class remained unmoved by the contemporary health hazards, that had been ravaging the city and left most of its victims among the labouring masses.

Thus, I have attempted to draw a sketch of Calcutta as a disease ridden city, at the beginning of the twentieth century. I have tried to show how disease became a source of anxiety for the daily life of the city. I have also made a humble attempt to analyze the underlying factors that directly or indirectly contributed to render the city as a disease ridden one. But if the colonial state had paid some attention to the health care issues of their subjects, the picture would have been somewhat different. Rather the colonial rulers had given their best efforts to limit these diseases within the Indian quarters of the city only. Further very little amount of money was allocated by the state authorities for the purpose of health care of their subjects. The charitable and the reformist initiatives of the Indian doctors, although had a wider democratic concern but could not protect the urban poor from mass death during the outbreak of epidemics.

To them for whom misery and poverty was their daily companion, disease was an inevitable phenomenon. There were no other ways for them to combat this problem. It would be absolutely incorrect, if we ignore the contributions of the colonial doctors in advancement of Indian Medical Science. Searching remedies for

⁵⁶Chattopadhyay, Subir Kumar, ‘Chikitshok Radha Govinda Kar’, in Dhananjay Ghosal (ed.), *Bangalir Bigyan Charcha*, Ashadeep, Kolkata, 2018, pp. 261 – 271.

⁵⁷*Notes on Annual Returns of The Hospitals and Dispensaries in Bengal for the year 1911*

tropical diseases, had been a long term initiative on part of the British doctors. But limited resources, limited medical men and infrastructurally underdeveloped laboratories, had actually provided hindrance to this initiative of theirs. Overcoming all these difficulties, a landmark achievement was made, when this initiative ultimately culminated in establishment of the School of Tropical Medicine in Calcutta in 1911.

It would have been a better picture, if the colonial rulers had given some sort of attention to the health care issues of their colonized subjects. It was not that the remedy of these diseases was unknown to the colonial rulers. But lack of initiative on their part, actually had been the greatest barrier, for which their colonial subjects suffered. A slightly higher expenditure and a conscious intervention into the causes of the diseases, would have produced a good result for the greater masses. But in reality, we saw a tilted picture.

Additional number of Cholera by Wards, 1906 to 1911.

Ward.	1906.	1907.	1908.	1909.	1910.	1911.
1 ...	195	248	235	106	129	118
2 ...	143	187	234	117	93	108
3 ...	151	188	247	120	106	101
4 ...	92	161	167	85	87	72
5 ...	220	315	291	192	151	146
6 ...	140	249	254	156	135	120
7 ...	81	136	120	87	63	56
8 ...	158	199	212	113	116	81
9 ...	126	206	188	111	114	88
10 ...	33	58	73	38	37	34
11 ...	43	111	120	61	59	64
12 ...	16	26	17	11	12	11
13 ...	40	61	46	31	35	31
14 ...	57	68	69	43	36	34
15 ...	11	15	20	11	9	6
16 ...	3	3	6	4	3	5
17 ...	5	7	...	2	5	3
18 ...	1	9	7	4	4	7
19 ...	100	252	179	54	95	87
20 ...	45	100	40	68	48	33
21 ...	152	179	184	60	64	96
22 ...	198	365	286	172	143	197
23 ...	65	97	103	59	50	53
24 ...	87	65	89	36	43	45
25 ...	152	197	208	118	127	103
Medical College Hospital ...	20	34	13	12	2	9
Campbell " ...	73	145	106	68	50	52
S.N.P. " ...	10	8	11	4	10	31
General " ...	1	1	5	9	2	4
Fort William ...	1	88	2	...	2	...
Port of Calcutta ...	55	10	118	47	40	40
Mayo Hospital ...	18	22	32	16	24	23
Alipore Jail ...	3	...	...	...	1	...
" Police ...	1	...	...	1	...	...
" Police case ...	...	...	...	2	...	...
Canal ...	8	...	13	4	6	11
Calcutta Police Hospital ...	...	...	...	...	...	1
	2,504	3,803	3,694	2,022	1,901	1,860

Source: Report of the Health Officer of Calcutta Municipality (1911 – 1912)

Chapter - Four

Municipal Infrastructure and the Rate Payers

Any attempt to write a historical narrative on Calcutta, remains incomplete if Calcutta Municipality is not taken into account. In this chapter, I shall mainly address to what extent daily life in Calcutta became effected or remained uneffected by the reforms of the municipality, which were enacted during the period of our research. I have also made an attempt to show how the colonizers and the colonized were effected in different ways by the municipal infrastructures. While examining these issues, the rate payers and their problems, that had been thrust on them by the authoritarian colonial rule, will also be delved into.

The Municipal Reforms and Calcutta

In 1899, the new Calcutta Municipal Act came into force. Under this new act, reorganization of every department of the Municipality was to be done. The first and the most important reform undertaken was the reorganization of the three departments of the corporation viz the Engineering, Public Health and Conservancy. The Engineering Department and the conservancy department were amalgamated together. There was the formation of a separate Building Department under an officer. There was an attempt for decentralization of the municipal work by the division of Calcutta into four districts, each equipped with a complete establishment for the working of the Health Department under a District Health officer, the Building Department under a District Building Surveyor, the amalgamated Engineering and Conservancy Department under a District Engineer.¹

Actually this amalgamation of the conservancy and the Engineering Departments was due to the fact that their work had in practice been found to overlap. The engineer was in charge of the repairing and the watering of the roads and the cleaning of the surface drains, while the health officer was responsible for the scraping of the roads and for all other conservancy matters. The result that emerged out of this overlapping was that different gangs of coolies, under separate control worked at the same place, and moreover the 'gowkhanas' (cow sheds) which were in charge of the Health Officer had to supply cattle both for watering the roads and for

¹Report on the Administration of the Calcutta Municipality for 1902-1903, Home Dept, Municipality Part B, Proceedings No 12|13, 1904.

conservancy purposes. So long as this arrangement was in force, complaints were faced regarding that the conservancy coolies had been seen throwing rubbish into the ditches for engineering coolies to remove, and vice versa, and there was also friction in connection with the supply of cattle to the two departments. The amalgamation of the two departments was thought to be an effective remedy for this antagonism. The more effective arrangement, that could have been made, was to appoint a separate conservancy officer for each of the four districts, since the effectual supervision of the conservancy arrangements in one fourth part of Calcutta was a task, sufficient to occupy the whole time of one officer.²

The creation of the four districts, referred to, was thought to be the most far reaching of all the reforms carried out. The establishment necessary, for the working of the scheme, was reported to be appointed. It was reported that the practice of holding meetings in the separate district offices, by the ward commissioners was introduced that yielded good results. Useful improvements and schemes were suggested and discussed at these meetings and in this way, it was reported that the demands of the rate payers were thus brought directly to the notice of the executive staff. The parts of Calcutta, that was supposed to benefit most from the division of the town into four self contained districts, were those which were furthest from the centre of administration, in the north and in the south. In the north, District No I was formed out of wards 1 to 6, and in south, District No IV wards 18 and 20 to 25. These two districts were being equipped with new gowkhanas and new district offices and each district had also been provided with four steam rollers. Other works completed in District no I, were a new dhobikhana, a new cemetery, three new squares and several new roads. In District No IV, the construction work of Lansdowne Market was initiated and the construction of the Sterndale Road was also completed. In the Central Districts II and III, the most important works were the new municipal office building, the extension of the New Market, the model dwellings in Convent Road and the incinerator at Entally. At the beginning of the twentieth century the corporation had vigorously pursued the policy of ending obnoxious bustees. But no remedial measures for the poor inhabitants of these bustees was adopted by the corporation. As an inevitable result of these measures, abrupt overcrowding was witnessed in some

² *Report on the Administration of the Calcutta Municipality for 1902-1903.*

parts of the city. The following table compares the ten most overcrowded wards at the two periods ³

Ward No.	Name Of Thana	Total Population	
		In 1891	In 1901
3	Burtala, Maniktala	36,431	50,216
5	Jorabagan	39,180	49,069
6	Jorasanko	41,657	52,988
7	Barabazaar	20,646	31,574
8	Coolootala	50,781	63,170
9	Mucheapara	49,472	64,116
10	Bowbazar	22,668	27,052
11	Puddopukur	20,761	28,060
13	Fenwick Bazaar	28,366	31,242
14	Taltalla	29,207	32,237

Source: *Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta, 1891,1901.*

The reorganization of the Accounts Department was also done. The Collection Department was also remodeled. The amount of the contemporary collections in 1901-1902 amounted to 98.33% and in 1902-03 to 99.08%. In the latter years, there was a fall in this amount to 2%. At many times, the collections were realized by recourse to coercive measures and 32 cases were reported, where distrained properties were removed and in 16 cases such properties were sold. The License and Hackney Carriage Departments were also reorganized⁴. All these reorganization, although apparently aimed to provide better comfort and convenience to the rate payers of the city, but the underlying target of the city fathers was to extract as much as possible from their colonized subjects. So how far these reforms were at all useful to the city dwellers is a debatable issue. However, what appeared in reality, was far from these reforms. Although a massive change in the urban order was seen in the city, but its effects were not at all positive for the larger section of the city dwellers. Only those propertied classes, who could reap the benefit of this changed situation, either in form

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Report on the Administration of the Calcutta Municipality for 1902-1903.*

of investment in land or by means of speculation, could thrive well. But the condition of the urban poor was beyond description. Many of them, were evicted from their original homes, within the city and forced to migrate towards the suburbs, in name of the city improvement drive of the Municipal Corporation. No proper or rather no rehabilitation scheme was instituted for them by the corporation.

Water Supply

In this section of the chapter, I shall try to highlight the condition of water supply in the colonial city of Calcutta and the problems related to it, which ultimately effected the daily life of the Calcuttans. A committee was deputed by the Government of Bengal under Section 22 of the Calcutta Municipal Act, to examine the existing water supply system of Calcutta, under R. B. Buckley, Chief Engineer and A. E. Silk, Sanitary Engineer of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, in November 1901. The objective of this committee was to ascertain the best and the most economical method of introducing a continuous system of water supply.⁵

Report reveals before us that, at the turn of the twentieth century there were two independent systems of water supply to Calcutta, one which supplied filtered water and the other which supplied unfiltered water. Filtered water was drawn from the river at Pulta, some fifteen miles above the town, where it was settled and filtered. In case of unfiltered water, it was drawn at two different points, directly from the river, immediately, opposite to the town of Calcutta. The unfiltered water was used for street watering, for public and private water closets, for urinals, for flushing sewers etc. The filtered water supply was supposed to be confined to domestic use other than water closets.⁶ The population of the municipal area, as given by the Census of 1901 was: - Town + 'fringe area' 587,572. South 'added area' - 220,922, total : 808494.⁷

The quality of filtered water which was supplied to the town and added area in 1900-1901, including some small suburban areas, which were supplied from the town mains was rather more than 2.5 million gallons, a day. The quantity of unfiltered water was just over 13 million gallons. Filtered water was delivered for more than four hours in the morning and for more than three hours in the evening. In the middle of the day, for about five hours, some 800,000 gallons were given,

⁵*Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta*, by R.B. Buckley and A.E. Silk, Calcutta, November, 1901, Part I (xviii) 134.

⁶*Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta*(1901).

⁷*Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta*,1901.

there being no supply at night. Within the city, the water flowed by gravity, into the reservoir at Tallah, from where it was pumped through an independent main into the three reservoirs at Halliday Street, Wellington Square and Bhowanipore. During the day, the four pumping stations delivered water by direct pumping into the town. There was one clear water reservoir at each pumping station.⁸

Total reservoir capacity in the town was in Tallah -3 million gallons, Halliday Street – 4 million gallons, Wellington Square – 6 million gallons, Bhowanipore – 3million gallons. Under the Municipal Act of 1899, the corporation was bound to convert, this intermittent system into a continuous one, and this conversion was to be a gradual one, five years was the period, from April 1900, during which the change was to be effected in the town. Below lies an estimate of the demand, during the period of maximum draught on the mains, under a system of continuous supply:-⁹

<u>Ward Nos.</u>	<u>Gallons</u>
1.(Shyampukur)	937,000.
2.(Kumartulli)	608,600.
3.(Bartalla)	1,001,000.
4.(Sukea Street)	839,800.
5.(Jorabagan)	1081,800.
6. (Jorasanko)	1059,500.
7.(Barabazaar)	1268,000.
8. (Kalutala)	1262,800.
9.(Muchipara)	1278,500.
10.(Bow Bazaar)	541,000.
11.(Padmapukur)	561,200.
12. (Waterloo Street)	255,200.
13. (Fenwick Bazaar)	686,700.
14. (Taltalla)	644,800.
15.(Kalinga)	392,900.
16. (Park Street)	245,200.
17. (Victoria Terrace)	219,400.
18. (Hastings)	88,900.

⁸*Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta (1901).*

⁹*ibid.*

Canal	10,000.
Jail	20,000.
Fort	45,000.
Port	50,000.

<u>Ward Nos.</u>	<u>Gallons</u>
19. (Entally)	772,000.
20.(Beniapukur)	564,000.
21. (Tollygunge/ Ballygunge)	544,100.
22. (Bhowanipore)	992,800.
23. (Alipore)	354,400.
24. (Ekbalpore)	432,200.
25.(Watgunge)	758,400.

On the basis of the above mentioned table, it could be ascertained that the eighteen wards of the original town (including the fringe area) together with the Jail, Fort and the Port had claim to 13042000 gallons/day. The wards no.19- 25, lying to the south of the town were entitled to 4418400 gallons/day. Cossipore-Chitpore, Dumdum and Manicktalla could claim 792,400 gallons of water/day.¹⁰

Problems related to the over functioning of the machines

It was, however, not possible to run all the Worthingtons at a time, at the pumping stations. The result would have been excessive velocity and loss of heads at the town mains. Even if any of those engines was excluded then also, the maximum pumping capacity of the battery of the engines was considerably in excess of the probable maximum demand. If one engine at each station was put off work, the probable capacity of the remainder was in Tallah, either the big worthingtons or the two small ones working together could deliver atleast 930,000 gallons of water, an hour. In Halliday Street, one of the two pairs of Beam engine could deliver 342,000 gallons an hour. In Wellington Square, two of the three Beam Engines could deliver

¹⁰ *Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta(1901).*

481,440 gallons an hour. In Bhowanipore, one of the two Worthingtons could deliver 375,840 gallons an hour.

It was necessary (ascertained from the above table), then, if continuous supply at the maximum rate (according to the assumption) were given with the existing engines, to run all the engines simultaneously at the three southern stations, during about four hours of the day. During the other eight hours of the day time, one pair of engines at each station would have been more than equal to work, and, during the night hours, one engine running slowly at two out of the four stations, would have been more than enough. But this could have only been possible after the whole town was brought under continuous supply. The whole supply at the beginning of the twentieth century, was given by pumping directly into the town mains. But it was stated that some modifications were necessary, especially in the eastern and southern outlying tracts.¹¹

The proposal for raised reservoir

Mr Pierce and Mr Deverell (both engineers of the corporation), proposed to introduce continuous supply through the medium of raised reservoirs. Both engineers, actually proposed to abandon direct pumping into the town mains. It was ascertained by them that the maximum rate of delivery would become three times the average of the 24 hours. Mr Pierce proposed to abandon the three pumping stations at Halliday Street, Wellington Square and Bhowanipore, but Mr. Deverell proposed to retain the latter as a station for supplying four raised reservoirs and to abandon the two latter. It was found that, excluding the land, the cost to the Municipality of the reservoirs, buildings, chimneys and other permanent structures at these sites had been approximately in Halliday Street – Rs 590,000, Wellington Square – Rs 815,000, Bhowanipore – Rs 4,40,000. The cost of engines, boilers and other machinery had been approximately, Halliday Street – Rs 278,000. Wellington Square – Rs 220,000. Bhowanipore – Rs 155,000.

Inferring from the above expenses, a question will obviously raise in our mind, that whether it was desirable to abandon pumping stations, which had cost so much money? The engines and boilers might have been perhaps used elsewhere but the reservoirs, chimneys, buildings and similar fixtures would have been thrown away.

¹¹*Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta(1901).*

Further the capacity of the three reservoirs which Mr Pierce proposed to abandon was 13,000,000 gallons. The two which Mr Deverell proposed to give up, had the capacity of holding 10,000,000 gallons. The Suburban Municipalities of Cossipore – Chitpore and Maniktalla, as well as the cantonment of Dum –Dum, at the turn of the twentieth century were supplied with filtered water by meter from the Calcutta mains. Under Section 278 of the Act, the Garden Reach Municipality, the South Suburban Municipality and the Tollygunge Municipality had a certain claim to the supply from the Calcutta mains.

The introduction of the system of continuous water supply in Calcutta, actually did not necessitate any radical change in the existing system. No great project was necessary. The existing reservoirs, mains and pumping stations were generally suitable, and only required some modifications, and such modifications could have been introduced from time to time. Such modifications were further, mainly required in the tract lying to the east of the Lower Circular Road, and in the south ‘added’ area where the trunk mains needed some alterations. Modifications were required in pumping engines at Wellington Square and Bhowanipore. The tract lying north of Shobha Bazaar and Grey Street, was actually the first to be put under continuous water supply. The annual valuation of the area was about Rs 12,00,000, the water rate, being 6%, the amount of water to which the tract was entitled, under the law was 788,000 gallons, a day. But the population was about 62,000 and if the proposed minimum allowance of 20 gallons a day was to be given, the tract might be allowed 1,25,000 gallons a day. This tract was to be put under continuous supply from the Tallah engines, and it required 20 or 25 waste water meters for this area. This tract required a constant attention, especially at night, of two or three competent inspectors, who would work under Deasoon’s waste water meter system. For a large city like Calcutta, a single inspector was not enough. For training of such inspectors, it was proposed to give them an ‘under- study’, so that they could acquire expertise in water management system.¹²

The establishment of a continuous supply of filtered water to Calcutta involved a slow process. It was reported that the condition of the mains and the taps and fittings was such, that the draught on the mains was unsuitable. Each pumping station was assigned its particular sphere of influence. Every inhabitant of the town was

¹²*Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta(1901).*

allowed at least 20 gallons of filtered water, a day. According to the assessment, the occupants of a house was entitled to more than 20 gallons, a head. The existing municipal area was divided into five spheres. Wellington Square pumping station had two spheres of influence under it. Each of these spheres was to be divided into convenient tracts of moderate size, according to the arrangement of the mains. The tract in immediate contact with a pumping station was the first to be placed under continuous supply. This tract, once again was supposed to be divided into blocks, under Section 267 of the Act, and each block was to be provided with a waste water meter. It was decided, that when the waste water meter system was fully established, and the particular tract had been brought into a good condition, the zone of continuous supply was to be extended, and a new tract was to be brought under treatment. The zone of continuous supply from each pumping station was supposed to be enlarged, probably at intervals of eight months or a year, and accordingly, four or five years was required to complete the operation, within the sphere of influence of each station. It must be remembered, that the working of the waste water meter system, although aimed at producing the best result and an economic one, both in terms of water and in terms of money, but it was very labourious and needed constant attention, from a staff of inspectors.¹³

It was assumed that the population of the town proper was hardly very likely to increase largely, but there was possibility that the population in Wards No 19 – 25, lying to the east and south, would increase. These wards lied in the ‘added areas’ which under Section 241, sub section 2(a) of the Act, was not to be brought under continuous supply for seven years. It was proposed that Wards No 19 and 20 would constitute a separate sphere with an independent main, from Wellington Square. In Wards No 21- 25, if the population increased, it was necessary to add the engine power. This committee under Mr. Silk and Mr. Buckley, recommended an addition of a third engine at the Wellington Square station as both engines were at work everyday and there was no spare engine. The committee recommended that the mains in the sphere of influence in this station, was to be examined from the point of view of the discharges, they had to carry. This committee of the Water Works Department of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, also recommended to enlarge the reservoir at Tallah by five million gallons. This project was to be taken in hand at once. At the end of

¹³*Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta(1901).*

this decade, the task of establishment of a raised reservoir at Tallah was done. The Annual Report of The Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation (1909-1910) testifies the above fact. It reported that the most important engineering work of the year was the construction of the raised reservoir at Tallah, in connection with the scheme for improvement of the water supply. It was declared that this huge structure, claimed to be the largest of its kind in the world, was actually nearing its completion¹⁴. It was confidently expected, as stated by the chairman in this report, that it would be possible to bring it into use before the next hot weather. The first revet was fixed by His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal on 18 November, 1909. The contractor appointed was Mrs Clayton Son and Company. But unfortunately the laying of the large steel main, which was supposed to distribute water, did not keep pace with the progress of the reservoir. As for reasons of such delay, it was stated that difficulties were experienced owing to bad soil and that the contractor who had undertaken the work of digging the trench, Mrs P.C. Coomar and Co. had given considerable trouble and had materially delayed the progress of the work. Finally it was on 16 May, 1911, that the raised reservoir at the Tallah pumping station started its work¹⁵.

A deeper look into this report, will lead us to conclude once again the colonial ruler's perception of the work potential of the ruled. That was the reason why European company, Mrs. Clayton Son and Co. received praise from the colonial authorities. "The progress which has been made since the first revet was fixed by His Honour, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal on the 18 November, 1909, has been extraordinarily rapid and Messers Clayton Son and Co. deserve the highest praise for the excellence of their work."¹⁶ But when it was the Indian organization, Mrs. P.C. Coomar and Co. who were entrusted with the work of digging the trench, were reported to have given considerable trouble and to have materially delayed the progress of the work. The colonial authorities could actually never really rely on the working skill of the Indians. The Indian Co was thus, labeled by them to have paused the progress of the work. The delay although was owing to the bad soil condition of the area, which partly necessitated even a change in the site of the pumping station, yet the Indian Co. was blamed, because of being Indian. This was actually the way, how the colonized had always been perceived by the colonizers. In a tropical country,

¹⁴*Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the year 1909-1910*, (Report by the Chairman), Corporation of Calcutta.

¹⁵*Report on the Municipal Administration of Calcutta for the year 1909-1910*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

heat and sultriness took away much of the labour's capacity to work, and the way Indian labour functioned under these constraints did not satisfy their masters at the top.¹⁷

Colonial surveillance on use of water in Calcutta

Before introduction of a continuous system of water supply, this committee, recommended certain things to prevent wastage of water. Arrangements were to be made, at once, to put stop cocks with proper boxes on all house connections since they were generally supposed to be on the footpath and was in any case readily accessible from the street. A sufficient amount of house meters was to be obtained. Arrangements were also to be made to isolate, by stand pipes, convenient tracts near each pumping station and as soon as this was done, continuous supply was to be instituted in these tracts. It was decided, that the Calcutta Municipality would set up its own house in those tracts which were to be brought under continuous system of water supply, to check and to keep a continuous watch on leakages and also to enhance improvements in the internal fittings of the house.¹⁸

In keeping a close vigilance on the use of water in the city, the colonial authorities decided that it was absolutely essential that the law regarding wastage of water should be rigidly enforced and unless it was enforced, it was practically not possible to introduce continuous system of water supply in the city. Sir Alexander Binnie, in speaking of the waste meter system, said “ I must warn you again that there is no finality in the work, we have commenced, but that it will only be by the careful attention and constant supervision that the town can be kept in a proper state of efficiency.”¹⁹ Thus the use of water in the colonial city of Calcutta, also did not transcend the gaze of the colonial authorities. One could really view a clear picture of the kind of control, exerted on the daily life of their Indian subjects by the colonial rulers. Much before bringing the entire town under a system of continuous water supply, a sort of check was to be instituted on excessive use of water. The problem of water scarcity, in the daily life of the urban poor, in Calcutta, at the turn of the twentieth century could never really draw the attention of their colonial masters.

Everyday life and water scarcity in the city

¹⁷Sen, Ranjit, *Calcutta in Colonial Transition*, Routledge, Oxon, 2019, p.115.

¹⁸*Report on the introduction of a system of continuous supply of water in Calcutta(1901).*

¹⁹The *Calcutta Gazette*, 13 April, 1910.

Water scarcity through out the city, became an everyday issue in the native press reports. *Basumati* (18 April,1901)²⁰ regretted that complaints continued to reach its office from all parts of the Northern Division of the town, regarding insufficient supply of filtered water. It reported that the supply began a little before 7 A.M. in the morning and continued in homeopathic doses till 9 and from 9 to 10 there was a full supply. *Navayug* (20 April, 1901)²¹ also contained a similar complain. It pointed out that the great hardship and inconvenience of the rate payers, specially during hot season. *Sri Sri Vishnu Priya-O- Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, (2 April,1902)²² reported that during the previous summer although Calcutta suffered greatly from insufficiency of water supply, yet the municipal authorities became determined to diminish the supply of water, compared to other seasons. Since many of the street hydrants were reported to be closed, it caused immense suffering to the poor people who did not have separate water pipes at their home. Referring to the summer days as the ‘dog days’, *Bengalee* (13 April, 1906)²³ drew the attention of the Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation, regarding the complaints, which were being received as a result of insufficient filtered water supply. *Bangavasi* (15 April, 1905)²⁴ referred to the recent curtailment of filtered water supply in Calcutta for two days. As a result, it reported about the great inconvenience and loss that were caused to the residents of the town owing to the negligence on part of the municipal authorities to give a wide publication to the details of the curtailment beforehand. The paper reported that big earthen water pots were being purchased at four times their usual prices for the purpose of storing water. It was said that the supply was completely stopped in some parts of the southern division of the town but in that area many people suffered from not knowing anything of the matter beforehand. The paper condemned such irregularities that were so much improper in a populous city like Calcutta where all such sources of water supply as tanks and wells were filled up. *Soltan* (9 June, 1905)²⁵ depicted a picture of misery that prevailed among the citizens of Calcutta specially those living in its suburbs on account of the scarcity of the water supply. The difficulty was most felt, according to the paper, in the Karrya quarter of the town, where there were large

²⁰*Basumati*, 18 April ,1901, *Report on Native Press*.

²¹*Navayug*, 20 April ,1901, *Report on Native Press*.

²²*Sri Sri Vishnu Priya –o- Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, 2 April, 1902, *Report on Native Press*.

²³*Bengalee*, 13 April,1906, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁴*Bangavasi*, 15 April ,1905, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁵*Soltan*, 9 June,1905, *Report on Native Press*.

mahallahs of mud huts, without any public road intersecting them and consequently without any hydrants on them either. The inhabitants of such mahallahs were compelled to satisfy their wants with the one or two *mashaks* of water which the bhisti supplied them with. For the rest, they had to take to the use of the contaminated water of the nearest tank. It was suggested that the municipality should set up hydrants for the use of these *mahallahs*, even though there may be no public roads across them.

These type of condition prevailed throughout the Indian portion of the city, as far as the water supply in the first decade of the twentieth century was concerned. Although plans of reforms in the form of bringing the entire town under a system of continuous water supply was undertaken by the colonial municipal authorities, but it seemed a long drawn one. No immediate action was taken by the authorities to resolve the problem of water crisis, which seemed to be a grave one, for the city itself and its inhabitants. Water constituted the first important component, of daily life. Water was also a factor, on which many other things, related to daily life depended like cleaning of streets, public health and hygiene, prevention of outbreak of fire etc. Insufficient supply of water in the city, in a way hampered all these things. On the other hand, this shortage in the supply of filtered water within the city, paved the way for cholera and other enteric diseases to thrive well leaving of course, a great portion of the urban poor as victims. Even when the Tallah Overhead Reservoir Tank was brought into operation in 1911, several reservoirs in the city were closed, that ultimately rendered the city dwellers, the worst sufferers.²⁶

However, while the above picture prevailed in the native part of the city, plans were also undertaken to ensure a smooth flow of water at the fort area, which was essentially an European inhabited part of the city. In 1906, plans were chalked out for excavation of a tank on the Calcutta Maidan and schemes were proposed for improving the water supply of Fort William. There were already existence of two tanks, in the area and it was proposed to construct a small one between them, and to raise the 'bund' of one of the older ones by 3ft. The object behind the construction of this tank was to increase the storage capacity and to raise the level of the water. The proposed new tank was to act as a sump to catch the water from the surface drainage and to fill the two existing tanks from this one, by gravity as far as

²⁶ *Report on the Administration of the Calcutta Municipality for the year 1912.*

possible and after that by pumping. By this arrangement the water was to be stored to the highest level possible in the old tanks and the new tank was to be always available to catch the water from every shower of rain. To make this arrangement possible, the drains that ran into the old tanks from East and West was to be diverted into the Central tank, as otherwise when the old tanks were full, the water in these drains would bank up and make the adjoining land marshy. This new tank was named as the 'Havildar's Tank'. The Brigade Engineer, the Garrison Engineer of the Fort William, the Superintendent Engineer of the Central Circle and the Executive Engineer of 1st Calcutta Division, all agreed unanimously to the measures proposed and steps were immediately taken to materialize the plan.²⁷

Although water supply system became mechanized in Calcutta, at the turn of the twentieth century, yet it absolutely failed to address the problem of water crisis that by the time had become a trivial issue. Particularly the crisis acquired a gravest form in the city slums because of the huge concentration of the labouring masses there. The urban poor, not being classified as rate payers, had to thrive amidst of this water crisis. The picture was a bit different among the Indian rate payers. Although in their residential areas water crisis prevailed, but the same face of it was not seen, as in the slums. The fact was of course that they were the rate payers. Water crisis was a problem that remained constricted to the Indian quarters of the city. Thanks to the conscious effort of the colonizers. No effective plan to solve the water crisis problem in the city was undertaken, and those undertaken were hollow ones, without much effect. The European quarters, on the other hand had a smooth supply of water. Water supply in the city, at the turn of the twentieth century, was thus carried on along strict hierarchical lines.

Electric Supply

The Government of Bengal passed Calcutta Electric Lighting Act in 1895. The first license was given for a period of 21 years and covered an area of about 5.64 sq miles. On 7 January, 1897, Kilburn and Co. secured the Calcutta Electric Lighting license as agents of the Indian Electric Co. Ltd, which was registered in London on 15 January, 1897, with a capital of 1000 pounds. A month later the company changed its name to the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation Ltd(C. E. S. C). The first generating

²⁷ *Home Department (Police), 1906, Part B, Proceedings No 103-105. (June, 1906).*

station was erected at Emambagh Lane, near Princep Street, which was commissioned on 17 April, 1899, marking a new era with the beginning of thermal power generation in India. Calcutta, the second city of the Empire was electrified in 1899, eleven years after London where electricity reached in 1888. In Calcutta, the initial rate per unit of power was Re 1, the price being same in London. In November, 1900, it was reported, "the commissioners of the corporation have recommended that a concession for 42 years be granted to Messers Killick Nixon and Co, as agents of Messres Kilburn and Co, of Calcutta to provide the required electric power for the city on terms laid down in the Calcutta Electric License Act of 1896. The Kilburn and Co. on behalf of C.E.S.C, released an advertisement on 6 May, 1899, quoting Rs 18 for hiring an electric fan 'used day and night' and the supply of electricity. The government sanctioned Rs 15000 to replace punkhas at Fort William on 28 May, 1902. A month earlier, the government owned Army Clothing Factory at Alipore decided to bring electricity at a cost of Rs 19000. In 1902, tram car in Calcutta, got electrified.²⁸

The areas to be brought under supply of electricity, as stated by the first schedule of the Calcutta Electric License Act, were, on the north, a line drawn along the centers of Belliaghata Road (west portion), and of Shibtollah Road. On the east, a line drawn along Kamardanga Road, west of the Roman Catholic orphanage, to its crossing with the Eastern Bengal Bridge No 1; along the boundary of the Eastern Bengal State Railway (Diamond Harbour Branch) upto Teeljullah Road and then along the centres of the Teeljullah Road, Ballygunje Circular Road (south portion), Hajra Road (north portion), Beltollah Road and Russapugla Road (middle portion). On the south, a line drawn along the boundary of Eastern Bengal State Railway (Budge Budge branch). On the west, a line drawn along the boundary of the Eastern Bengal State Railway (Budge Budge branch) upto No 4 crossing and thence by the centre of Taratallah Lane, and the centre of the Western Boundary Road, to the centre of the Garden Reach Circular Road to the centre of Metapooker Lane, and then along the Port Trust land to the River Hooghly up to Tolly's Nullah and then along high water mark on the south bank of the Tolly's Nullah, and then along the centre of the Kidderpore Bridge to the centre of Lower Circular Road (south and west portions to Balliaghata Road). In the second schedule the areas to be brought under supply was, Lower Circular Road (from Chowringhee Road to Baddiagara Road), Baddiagara Road,

²⁸ *The Calcutta Gazette*, 12 September, 1900, Part I.

Peepulputtee Road (from Baddiapara Road to Bhowanipore Road), Bhowanipore Road (from Peepulputtee Road to southwards), Belvedere Road (from Bhowanipore Road to Gopalnagore Road and then westwards to Alipore Road (from Belvedere to Radhanagore), Alipore Lane (from Alipore Road to Diamond Harbour Road), Judge's Court Road (from Alipore Road to Gopalnagore Road), Ballygunje Circular Road (from Lower Circular Road to Puddopooker Road), Ballygunje store Road.²⁹ In 1904, tenders for lighting Harrison Road were received from the Oriental Gas Company and C. E. S.C.³⁰

At the beginning the price of the electricity in the city, was high so much that a man of ordinary means was unable to afford that. So use of electricity for domestic purposes in Indian households started later, than that of the European households. When the electric company first started their business, they too were apprehensive about acceptance of electricity by the Indians. Electricity proved to be quite successful not so much for lighting initially, but for electric driven fans. Electric driven fans acquired immense popularity in Calcutta, in first decade of 20th Century. The public demand for power increased gradually and upto such an extent that the generating station at Enambagh Lane proved to be inadequate and had to be enlarged from time to time. Additional stations were built at Alipore in March, 1902, with a capacity of 750 Kilowatts, Ultadanga in 1906 with 1200 Kilowatts. A plan to construct a large central station was also undertaken and in 1910, at Cossipur, the construction work started. Supply of current from the new central station started on 20 July, 1912. New substations were built at Jackson's Lane, in the business quarter, Wellesly Street, in the European quarter and Princep Street, opposite the Enambagh Lane station, while those stations at Ultadanga and Alipore were converted into substations. At the end of 1912, 230 miles of underground wires and 124 miles of overhead mains, a total of 354 miles were established. Connected to the mains were over 40,000 ceiling fans and 37,000 lamps of 8 candle power. The price of electricity charged was ascertained either by the actual amount of energy so supplied, or by the electrical amount contained in such supply or by the number of hours during which the supply of energy was actually used by consumers and the maximum power with which, the consumer for the time was entitled to be supplied. The value of electricity consumed was to be ascertained by meters and that meter was to be certified by an electric

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*

inspector, and this meter had to remain connected to the service lines.³¹ The street lights continued to remain gas lights in the Indian parts of the city, in the northern portion, whose responsibility remained vested in the hands of an European company, The Oriental Gas Company. But since Calcutta Corporation had granted license to both the European companies for lighting arrangements of the city, the Indian residents held the corporation only for the insufficient lighting.³²

Complaints were also seen in the native owned newspapers regarding insufficient lighting in the native quarter of the town. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (30 April, 1908),³³ complained about the contemporary unsatisfactory lighting arrangement of the Calcutta Corporation, pointing out to the innumerable complaints it received on the subject. *Sri Sri Vishnu Priya -O- Ananda Bazar Patrika* blamed the Chairman of the Calcutta Municipality, Sir Charles Allen, responsible for the irregularities in the lighting arrangement. It complained that the gas lights in the northern part of Calcutta were often not lighted till 8 at night which caused great inconvenience to the public. *Hitavadi* (1 May, 1908)³⁴ held the Chairman and the Secretary of the Calcutta Corporation responsible for the unsatisfactory settlement of the fresh contract with the Oriental Gas Company. It reported about the notoriously bad condition of lighting in the northern part of the city.

Complaints from customers were also heard against the C.E.S.C. According to a customer, in March, 1904, his bill was submitted at Rs 201.80. After some letter writing and examination of meters and etc, it was found that a meter had been wrongly read by 300 units, which brought his bill down to Rs 51.81. Another customer, in whose house two fans worked for two hours a day and three lights for four to five hours, a day, were on, complained of his bill being Rs 100/ month. There was an urge among the consumers to form a Consumers' Protection Association.³⁵

It was known that the Electric Supply Corporation was running its business with a very few staffs. So it was the consumers who had to suffer as a result. These were just examples from which, one could ascertain that a high tide of feeling was rising against the methods of the corporation, in dealing with the grievances of the

³¹ The *Calcutta Gazette*, 12 September, 1900, Part I.

³² From an unpublished MPhil thesis of Dr Sarmila Sarkar (Nee Mitter), entitled *The Urbanization of Calcutta in the Nineteenth Century: A Case Study of City Lighting* (submitted at Jadavpur University).

³³ *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, 30 April, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁴ *Hitavadi*, 1 May, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁵ *The Capital*, 14 July, 1904.

consumers. On 17 August, 1904, the Clive Street consumers of the C.E.S.C, were actually been stewed for the greater part of the day, because of the failure of the said corporation to supply power to move the fans.³⁶ So feelings of disgust was gradually accumulating among the European residents of the city too. Although the colonial corporation was more active in providing them a better standard of living than their Indian counterparts yet, there were some big loopholes, that earned them (the colonial corporation) a bad reputation, even among their own men. Grievances against the electric supply system, was just an example to cite. For Calcutta's people technology came at the bitter cost of rising tax burdens. Its streets were engulfed in darkness after sunset causing tremendous difficulties for pedestrians and traffic and encouraging crime. Oil lamps used in public spaces were either too few or regularly pilfered to be of any use.³⁷

Thus while the British dominated Calcutta Municipal Corporation extracted a great amount of money from the rate payers, in name of improvement of the city, the city dwellers were the worst sufferers. They had to bear the brunt of heavy burden of taxation but their daily existence was threatened, owing to the inactive role of the corporation. The urban poor were deprived off from using the civic amenities full fledgedly. Native newspapers became a platform, which voiced protest against the Municipal Corporation, representing the urban poor.

The oppression of the rate payers in the city

The crushing burden of municipal taxes was generally felt by a wide spectrum of city dwellers. Thus poets, composing street songs echoed the frustrations of the middle class groups in the city, mentioning a wide range of taxes that the urban populace were plagued by, from income tax to taxes for water, streets and police, in addition to those for lights. Inability to pay the taxes, they lamented, led to disproportionate fines and even seizure of property and eviction.³⁸

It was complained that the majority of the rate payers had no voice in the huge expenditure of the Calcutta Municipality in experimenting with such constructions like new markets, dhobikhanas, gowkhanas and model houses.³⁹ The rate payers

³⁶The *Capital*, 18 August, 1904.

³⁷Ghosh, Anindita, *Claiming the City: Protest, Crime and Scandals in Colonial Calcutta C. 1860-1920*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016., p.71.

³⁸*Ibid*, p.72.

³⁹*Indian Mirror*, February, 1908, *Report on Native Press*.

insisted on forming a Central Rate Payers' Association which was thought to exert a better and tighter control on the municipality. The Calcutta Municipality had served notice to the owners of some bustee huts, warning them to remove their huts together with the materials within one month, and of course, at the cost of the owner. Since it was quite impossible for a man of ordinary means to manage such a thing, within such a short period of time, it appeared quite astonishing that notices were served under the eyes of the Chairman like Mr Greer.⁴⁰ Complaints were also heard about the manner in which the Calcutta Municipality had carried out the reforms of the bustees in the metropolis, that caused great inconvenience to both the tenants, who were inhabiting them and their landlords. The Municipality, was opening out drains and thoroughfares, making way through the bustees. The poor people, whom these measures made necessarily homeless, were not allowed sufficient time to find out new homes and adequate compensation was also not paid to them. The paper complained that even the landlords were not paid the full price for the lands, which the municipality took for the purpose of constructing drains and thoroughfares.⁴¹

The underlying motive of the Calcutta Corporation was no doubt, to increase the land value and the land rent and this was probably the reason why, such reckless eviction was carried on by the authorities. To those who were evicted, these policies of the corporation not only displaced them from their homes, but also deprived them of the social bonding, they had been enjoying till then. They were detached from their long time neighbours, with whom they were bonded emotionally. But this emotional history remains unexplored. Thus the condition of the rate payers in Calcutta, under the British regime, was a miserable one. They actually could not cope up with the ever changing situation, that the colonial rule had forcibly thrust on them. At the turn of the twentieth century the oppression of the British dominated Calcutta Municipality reached its height. Repeatedly the native newspapers took up this issue, but in reality nothing could be done to relieve the rate payers from the burden of taxation. Even after paying a great amount of taxes, the city dwellers could never get advantage of utilizing the civic amenities, to the highest extent. Regular complaints regarding insanitary condition of different wards, insufficient water supply etc within the city were found in the native press reports, throughout the decade. The role of the Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation was questioned again and again. The city

⁴⁰*Bharat Mitra*, 4 January, 1902, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴¹*Navayug*, 28 January, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

dwellers on the other hand witnessed a high handed behavior on part of the Municipal officers, when the question of exacting taxes was concerned. *Hitavadi* (30 May, 1902)⁴² referred to a case in which the Calcutta Municipality was charged for having destrained movable property in No:- 23 Chakraberia Road, Bhowanipore, belonging to Babu Nagendranath Basu for unpaying municipal rates for No 1, Chetla Road, belonging to a wholly different person. This report reveals height of negligence on part of the baliffs (a particular category of employees) of the corporation and the innocent rate payers of the city always became a subject of their oppression. High handedness of the municipal officials in realizing arrears of rates was reported in the column of *Navayug* (2 March,1901) also. To the paper the manner in which this operation was carried on, appeared to be a loot. It was reported that in Ward No 6, some half a dozen houses faced such an experience. In one case, the municipal officers forced open the outer and all other doors of the locked up house, took away every piece of furniture that they found in the house and broke glassware furniture. Lastly, the men with their shoes on entered into the room, where the family God was kept, ate every edible that they found in the room and went away. After that, the idol was reported to be missing. The names of the municipal officers attached with this incident were Mr M. De-Cruz, Babu Haridas Maitra, Babu Bhagabati Charan Bhattacharyya who took away sixteen pieces of brass thalis, a cooper flower pot, one clock and one padmashan(lotus seat), of the diety.⁴³ The rate payers protested against this act of the municipal officers and this agitation was reflected in contemporary newspapers too. *Samay* (17 March,1905) too gives an account of the zulm of the municipal executives. It mentions the case of a gentleman who, having duly given notice to the municipal authorities of his discontinuing the use of a carriage, was compelled to pay license for the same. He managed to get a refund of the amount paid by him after great trouble, but a fresh notice had been issued for payment of license for the same carriage⁴⁴. All these incidents repeatedly points out faults regarding the working of the municipality.

While high handed behavior of the municipal officials was witnessed in exacting taxes, the rate payers of Ward No 19 had many grievances that required immediate redressal. There were more kutchha than pucca roads in that ward and the

⁴²*Hitavadi*, 30 May,1902, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴³*Navayug*, 2 March,1901, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁴*Samay*, 17 March,1905, *Report on Native Press*.

municipality paid no heed towards metalling those kutccha roads. As a result of the existence of such kutchha roads, the locality during the rainy season, turned into a impassable quagmire. There was as such no drainage system, worthy of the name and the lighting of the ward was also miserable. Lastly there was practically no supply of filtered water in the area. The rate payers of the area had to thrive with all these problems.⁴⁵ Although with huge expenditure the municipal authority constructed some new gowkhanas, the condition of the existing ones were miserable. A correspondent writing to *Telegraph* (27 January,1905) complained of the filthy and insanitary condition of the existing cowsheds in the town. He pointed out how licenses were freely granted by the inspectors of the corporation, regardless of the fact that kin and buffaloes were huddled together. Further the cowsheds were not examined properly before been given licenses. So the duty of the corporation officials in collection of taxes only seemed to be flawless. Otherwise negligence of their duty was widely visible.⁴⁶

Bengalee (5 September, 1908),⁴⁷ also complained that though the Calcutta Improvement Scheme was at the incubating stage, the Simla Improvement Scheme had made a gigantic progress. To the paper, it seemed that Simla was for the Gods and Calcutta was for experiments in assessment. The Simla Improvement Scheme was to be paid by the government, but Calcutta was to be bled for the purpose. The Calcutta Municipality was practically insolvent. It had committed itself to vast schemes of water supply and drainage and that its other sanitary requirements were numerous and urgent. The paper complained that though the building commission emphatically declared that the rate of assessment could not be raised, but during the last seven years (since 1901) the assessment had been raised to 43%.

The first decade of the twentieth century marked a peculiar phase in the history of the colonial city of Calcutta. It was indeed a phase of transition. The physical layout of the city was changing. The poorer sections, were increasingly, being displaced from their homes, thereby becoming homeless, in the name of the city improvement scheme. The city improvement scheme, actually was a hollow one since it had no depth. Although measures were taken to construct roads, improve the drainage system and maintain a continuous supply of water, it had no real impact of

⁴⁵*Bengalee* (25 January,1905), *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁶*Telegraph*, 27 January,1905, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁷*Bengalee*, 5 September,1908, *Report on Native Press*.

improvement on the citizens of Calcutta. In their daily struggle for survival, the city dwellers had to face crisis of water, had to thrive in insanitary localities heaped with filth, had to die in deadly epidemics. The colonial authorities remained mostly a silent spectator of all these events. Their super manly behavior was witnessed only when the question of extraction of municipal rate, from the rate payers was concerned. The poor rate payers of the city, were often subjected to much municipal harassment, which at many instances became inhumane.

When this was the kind of situation, with which the Bengali rate payers had to cope up, the Marwari rate payers concerned about their 'right to the city', adopted some different measures. It was at the initiative of some leading Marwaris that Mr Allan, the Chairman of the corporation in September 1904, had to go, himself, for inspecting the sanitary condition prevailing in the Burrabazaar quarters. Even the darkest and the filthiest lanes did not escape the eyes of the Chairman. He promised to improve the conservancy arrangements, to give better lighting and electric supply. It seemed to be a great amusement to the Marwaris to see the great alertness on part of the conservancy officers, on the day of the Chairman's visit. Usually the Marwari quarters being part of the native portion of the town, could rarely see a sweeper or a conservancy cart and as an inevitable result mounds of decomposing and filthy matter were usually seen. On the day of the chairman's visit these quarters appeared comparatively neat and clean.⁴⁸

However, there was a variation in demands of the rate payers for improvement in basic available amenities from the corporation. The European rate payers demanded something, very different from the Indians. They demanded to put name plates on great many roads, streets and lanes in Calcutta, that were without them. They also demanded for numbering of the houses in many of the streets that lacked in them.⁴⁹ Although the demands of the Europeans were quite different from their Indian counterparts, obviously because of the fact that they were themselves a part of the ruling class, but that they were not happy with the colonial corporation is quite evident. In *The Capital*, a weekly commercial journal, and a mouthpiece of the European capitalist class, expressions of disgust prevails against the Calcutta Corporation. It complained that the suburban drainage scheme, had been a long drawn one and nothing effective was done. With regard to the continuous water supply

⁴⁸*The Capital*, 22 September, 1904.

⁴⁹ *The Capital*, 1 August, 1904.

system, the paper claimed that there was no improvement in the supply of filtered and unfiltered water within the city, and this water scarcity was a menace for public health. It also expressed concern for cholera, which had been widely ravaging the city and blamed consumption of adulterated milk, for which once again the health officers were blamed, for not being able to check this issue. According to the government resolution on the Report of the Corporation for 1902-03, special attention was to be given to the conservancy of the town but to the paper no practical result was seen as an outcome. Complaints regarding insufficient lighting of the city, was also raised by the Europeans. Complaints from them regarding repairing of the roads, under the city improvement scheme, was also seen, specially in the northern quarters of the city. Although these complaints were made in a sectional tone, yet it seems beyond doubt that the European rate payers were also not happy with the Calcutta Corporation. They too expressed their anxiety regarding insufficient water supply, inadequate lighting, unrepaired roads etc.

In this chapter, thus, we have seen how the city infrastructure touched the rich and the poor, in different ways. We have also discussed about the kind of oppression that the rate payers of the city were subjected to, under the colonial regime. Though some plans were initially undertaken by the colonial government, but in reality they were hollow, in the sense, they were never really designed for solving the problems of the native quarters of the city. The Tallah tank, as an example although became a landmark of the city, executed between 1909- 1911, the wisdom of its construction does not lie above question. It exerted excessive pressure on a single installation and being located near the northern end of the municipal area, it posed problems in distribution in the southern parts. On the other hand, well planned move was initiated by the government to keep the European quarters of the city well. Kshitindra Nath Tagore while describing the European quarters in the first half of the twentieth century writes, "the Sahib tollah(area) in the city is neat and tidy. It has all things paved and nicely organized. The roads are comfortable to walk on. Peace reigns in this splendid kingdom. Electricity has been tied to the post there lighting up electric garlands."⁵⁰ The construction of the Havildar's Tank, in the Fort area testifies to this fact.⁵¹ Further, here lies an advertisement, published in *The Capital* (18 May, 1905) that too reflects the concern of the colonial government for supplying filtered water at the

⁵⁰ Tagore, Kshitindranath, p.5.

⁵¹ Home Dept (Police), 1906, Part B, Proceedings No 103-105, June, 1906.

European inhabited part of the city. The advertisement given by the Corporation of Calcutta read,

Notice to Contractors,

Tenders are invited in duplicate for cast iron pipes etc for laying filtered water pipes in Hastings Park Road , Ward 23, and will be received by the Vice Chairman upto 3P.M on Wednesday, the 24 May, 1905, when they will be opened in the presence of such tenders as may be present.

Fred Ganisford (Secretary to the Corporation) ⁵²

Calcutta, May 16, 1905.

This decade in the city also saw large scale demolition of the bastis and thereby a huge exodus of the poor basti dwellers towards the suburbs, all in the name of beautifying the city. Use of electricity in Calcutta in this decade, although became popular, yet the charges being high, the customers often complained of that. There was an urge among the rate payers of the city to form a rate payers' association so that their grievances against the city corporation, could be channelized through this platform. On a much wider scale, the city infrastructure often posed a problem to the poor and the rich in the city but in different ways .The colonized were always neglected by the colonizers. Signs of such negligence became prominent, in the daily life of the city dwellers. The ever growing authority of the colonial municipal administration acutely impacted on everyday lives and overtime provoked political and social action against it⁵³. The urban improvements that had taken place under the colonial rulers in the city were actually a product of pressure from the British personnels and the Indian rate payers of the city. They were a bit concerned about the well being of the Indian propertied class. But the bulk of the colonial subjects living in the city were poor. The urban poor were marginalized on the basis of class, caste and religion. It was on their labour that the well- being of the city rested. But they were evicted from the city at many instances without rehabilitation. The history of their sufferings remain mostly unwritten.

⁵²The *Capital*, 18 May, 1905.

⁵³Ghosh, Anindita, *Claiming the City*, p.30.

Chapter 5

European Life

While the different classes of the Indian society were struggling for survival in the urban landscape of Calcutta during the first decade of the twentieth century, a contrasting picture could be found among the European official and the semi official classes among whom the business men were the chief actors. Although the European community in the city was divided into official and non- official sections, they led a common social life at clubs and house parties. Calcutta had clubs for every purpose- for football, cricket, swimming, rowing, turf etc. The clubs formed an essential part of thousands of Europeans living in the city. The Saturday Club existed for social events, and dances in particular. Dinner parties were frequent. A young business executive coming from Britain would be introduced to the amenities of a club where of course Indians were not admitted, and it was here that he would meet important people in government and business. This exclusive and active social life cemented the ties between non- official and official sections of the European community and promoted the feeling of racial antagonism.¹ The beginning of the twentieth century saw increasing participation of European women in public life. The Victorian Era had kept them away from public gaze. The Edwardian era witnessed the rise of feminist movements in the west, which in turn, made the women aware of their rights. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the city indeed saw increased participation of European women, independently, at many instances. For the Europeans also, this phase marked a phase of transition, as far as their history in the colonial metropolis of Calcutta was concerned. The social life of the Europeans in Calcutta in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was obviously moulded by the circumstances in which they found themselves. As these circumstances underwent remarkable and rapid changes over a few decades, their attitudes and way of life also saw significant changes.² These changes were obviously created by means of

¹ Ray, Rajat Kanta, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflict of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1979 p.6.

² Mukherjee, Rudrangshu, 'Forever England: British Life In Old Calcutta' in Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed). *Calcutta: The Living City*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1990, Vol:1, p.45.

force as they were the ruling race and the power to control everything lay in their hands. It is in the backdrop of these changes, that this chapter has been framed. It aims to enquire into the kind of life, the Europeans used to lead in the colonial metropolis of Calcutta, at the turn of the twentieth century. In this chapter, we shall also deal with advertisements of European firms, who had their offices in Calcutta, and the Europeans being the chief consumers of their products, it will be an aim of this chapter to enquire into the kind of material culture to which they were accustomed in Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century. Advertisement has been used for this purpose and how through the advertisements European racial arrogance was expressed and cultivated, has also been enquired into. In this chapter I have studied the advertisements of some select years from European owned newspapers. Some of these advertisements were reproduced year by year repeatedly throughout the decade.

European women in public life of Calcutta

From the late nineteenth century, British women constituted a vital part of the fabric of imperial social circles.³ It was from the turn of the twentieth century that the European women were increasingly participating in charity shows and other public gatherings in Calcutta. At the onset of every new year, the event of Fancy Fair at the Zoological Gardens was a most attractive gathering in which the European ladies were seen to be very active. The event was mainly organized by the Society of St Vincent De-Paul in aid of public charities. The fair usually was held under the patronage of the Viceroy and Lady Curzon, the Chief Justice and the Archbishop of Calcutta. The charities and institutions, those usually represented here, were Armenian Alms House, St Anthony's Union, Home for Incurables, Bitakkhana Relief Association, Male Orphanage, St Vincent's Home, St Teresa's Conference, Sacred Heart, Society of St Vincent De-Paul, St John's Conference, Ragged Sunday school, Mohammadan Orphanage and Howrah Conference. At each of the stalls, there was a large and varied selection of fancy articles, suitable for presentation to both young and old. Several stalls had lucky bags, where for a rupee, one could win a prize varying from a pin cushion to a silver

³ Procida, Mary. A, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002, p. 7.

watch. Scores of young ladies belonging to different stalls, besieged visitors to take chances in the raffles. These stalls were very well patronized. In addition, there were shooting galleries, weighing machines, wheels of fortune, and the merry go rounds, boat swing rings etc. All these amusements attracted large numbers of people, especially the wheels of fortune and the merry go rounds. The wheels of fortune were patronized by the adults and the merry go rounds chiefly by the children. One of the principal attractions was the graphophone, exhibited by Father Lafont, which reproduced the contemporary popular songs. There were other amusements for the young and the old. There was a bar for the gentlemen and also a refreshment tent where ice cakes, sandwiches, tea, coffee and aerated water were available. The fair, was usually used to be considered, very enjoyable.⁴

Although these charity shows were usually meant to show the benevolence of the European community, but the underlying motive of these type of gatherings was entertainment and fund raising for their own benefit only and nothing to do with the welfare of the Indians. How much the Europeans spent for the Indian poor or orphans, out of the funds raised is not known to us. But the active participation of the women in these type of gatherings, definitely speaks of the kind of freedom, that the city had granted them during the twentieth century. The most spectacular event in the city at the turn of the twentieth century, and a milestone in the path of achievement of women's liberty was the participation of European women in turf. The event was the Ladies Paper Chase Cup, organized at the beginning of every new year. The prize, usually was a handsome silver cup, given by the best contemporary sportsman Mr Prophit. Women were allowed to ride and borrow horses. The practice of borrowing horses was widely in vogue, as only two women, one Mrs Walker and the other Lady Jenkins had horses of their own. The race course was about 3 miles in area. Mrs Prophit was the most prominent equestrienne. In one such race, the starters were Mrs Walker on George Walker's Ice Cream, Mrs Barrow on Ceaser, the property of Mr Verschoyle, Lady Jenkins on Marco, Mrs Lawrie Johnstone on Mr Prophit's Alric, Mrs Forsyth on

⁴*The Statesman*, 3 January, 1900.

Cumbungo, Mrs Gregor on Mr Lamotto's big jumping horse Rocco and Mrs Sanders on Mr Bankier's Sailor Prince.⁵

Although these type of events were mainly meant for elite Europeans, the transition of women from home to the field and the enthusiasm that these sorts of gatherings invoked within the city, was noteworthy. European working women were also visible during this period in the city, chief among them being the European nurses. Their treatment towards an Indian patient varied from their behaviour towards an European. It was the sense of racial superiority which guided them often. At many instances their Indian colleagues became victims of their racial arrogance. Complaints of this kind were heard against the European lady superintendant of the Lady Dufferin Victoria Hospital. She made it a regular practice of dismissing the existing native nurses of that institution in favour of Eurasian nurses from Bombay.⁶ Merry making within the hospital premises of the city, where European nurses were found to participate were visible. One such event was the New Year's treat at the Medical College Hospital in 1901, for European patients only. The hospital premises was gaily decorated for the occasion with flags and plants. A concert by Dr Bird, assisted by the students was held in the male ward, where a miniature stage was put up at one end. A large gathering of ladies and gentlemen were present by invitation. The concert was preceded by a treat to the patients, of cakes and tea and gifts from a bran pie and their comfort was being carefully looked after by Sisters Edith Rachel and Sybil, assisted by Mrs Lay Blanc, the hospital metron and the nursing staff. Dr Bomford Harris and Dr Bird received the guests, who spent a 'very agreeable evening' together. This entertainment proved to be one of great success, which was brought to a close with the singing of the British national anthem. These were some of the events, taking place within the city which were solely meant for the Europeans, where active participation of European women were witnessed.⁷ So the city, at the turn of the twentieth century marked a sharp departure from the norms of Victorian morality, that had kept them confined within the private sphere only. These gatherings provided them with an opportunity to socialize in public with members of their own community. However their public conduct revealed a carefully cultivated racial awareness. However, it

⁵*The Statesman*, 4 January, 1901.

⁶*Tripura Hitaishi*, 21 March, 1905, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷*The Statesman*, 5 January, 1905.

also provided them with a good scope to socialize themselves with people of their own community only. Like their male counterparts, they too were guided by strict racial lines of segregation. For instance, one Mrs Hilton, on being asked for payment of a bill by Gopi Kahar, a bill collecting durwan, set her dog on him, after abusing him. Gopi fled and brought a case against Mrs Hilton in the Calcutta Police Court. Although the case was clearly proved, Mrs Hilton was let off with a fine of Rs 10 only and Gopi was denied off proper justice.⁸

These were indeed contrasting pictures when compared with leisure oriented life of European women in early nineteenth century Calcutta. Here lies an account that confirms how time hung heavy on an English lady during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

“A lady was normally woken before sunrise by her ayah, to go out for a morning drive in a carriage or an open palanquin after having put on a dress completely clean, fresh from the Dhoby(washerman). After the drive she returned to bed to sleep for a couple of hours. She was awake again before breakfast, which she attended after an elaborate toilet in which she went through every process of bathing, hair dressing and so on under the hands of one or two Indian women. Breakfast was a meal when many gentlemen dropped in and it continued for some time. After breakfast the lady retired to a room to read, to do a little fancy work or to receive lady visitor to gossip. She knew a good deal of gossip of the Europeans, but little of the ways and habits of the natives. Tiffin was the major meal, when much wine and pale ale was drunk; guests would be present, so the lady appeared thereafter a change of dress. She slept again in the afternoon, rising just before the sunset to prepare for the evening drive. On her return, she sat down to dinner with her husband, after which she most often went to ball or assembly, for which the last and more elaborate toilet was to be made.”⁹

So the European women in twentieth century Calcutta performed a social role that supplanted that of their European male counterparts. Their transition was a part and parcel of racial supremacy and a colonial segregation in society.

⁸Sri Sri Vishnu Priya- O- Ananda Bazar Patrika, 27 June,1900, Report on Native Press.

⁹Mukherjee, Rudrangshu, p.49.

Other events of the Europeans in the city

It was under the patronage of the Young Men's Christian Association that hockey matches were organized every year, in the city. The office bearers selected for the purpose in 1901, were F.A. Ratcliffe, Vice Captain, A. A. Brownie, who was the Honorary Secretary, A. E. Coopier. The team was supposed to be a strong one, having several new players including W. K. Brown. Every year this event was organized after the Presidency Sports was held.¹⁰ A Boxing Day was also arranged, every year for the Europeans in Calcutta. On one such occasion, inter community rivalry among the Europeans came to the forefront. It was at a 'glove contest', arranged on the boxing day in 1904, that an unfair and brutal fight between Mr Clair and Mr Smith was seen. This event, however, acted as an eye opener to the authorities, who adopted careful measures to prevent such unwanted incidents, in the boxing match of the next season, so arranged. The Commissioner of Calcutta Police, W.O.Rees, was made the referee there. The fight was allowed to begin, but before five minutes was over, seeing that Mr Clair was beaten, the referee stopped the fight and declared Smith to be the winner, and ended the show. He did the same kind of thing for the lesser fights of the evening too. The other part of the story, in such sort of prize fights, was that large sums of money were known to be staked on the result. So a good number of Europeans, on such occasions were seen to be betting, on the result of the fight. The Tollygunje Steeple Chase Cup was another event of this kind.¹¹

The Young Men's Christian Association also used to celebrate, their annual sports every year, with funds raised by public subscription. The people who took part, in these sports were well to do young men, who invited their lady friends to this occasion at the Maidan. Flat races(run), and other mild athletics were shown at such events followed by light refreshment of buns, tea and aerated water.¹² These sort of gatherings were actually joining points of gender mixing within the community.

There were other functions in the city, of a more weighty nature. On 18 January, 1905, Lord Curzon, as the Viceroy and the Trustees of the Victoria Memorial arranged a

¹⁰*The Statesman*, 20 February, 1901.

¹¹*The Capital*, 29 December, 1904.

¹²*The Capital*, 19 January, 1905.

gathering for European guests at the Indian Museum to see the collection of art and artifacts there. Lord Curzon received the guests, at the head of the stairs, and shook hands with each, as they passed into the rooms. These type of functions of Europeans, of a more formal and semi-official nature, were wide spread in the city.¹³ Annual Dinner at the Calcutta Turf Club was also being organized every year throughout the decade. These semi official social gathering of the Europeans, were also common in the city. Over a hundred members, including sportsmen from upcountry and other presidencies, used to attend these gatherings which were organized in the elegant surroundings of the Turf Club House. After dinner, there used to be many speeches, more or less, of a humorous character, and those who delivered speeches, were in some way or other, connected to the turf trade. The speakers, were usually, Mr A. A. Apcar, Mr Botler, Mr Galstann, Colonel Beaver, Dr Spooner Hart, Mr J. P. Hewett. The importance of the turf market was discussed in such occasions.¹⁴ The Port Defence Volunteers, also organized their annual prize distribution ceremony, usually at the Dalhousie Institute. On one such occasion Lady Fraser gave away the prizes, in presence of the Honorable Colonel of the Corps, the Lieutenant Governor, who usually presided the function.¹⁵ It was in these ways that the Europeans continued to maintain an exclusive sphere of their own, where admission of the Indians was not permitted, as usual. Their daily life in Calcutta, was not a monotonous one. It offered them a number of options of entertainments.

European business and commercial world in Calcutta

It was at the initiative of the colonial rulers, that Calcutta had emerged as the commercial hub of India, as early as the nineteenth century. Before the World War I the Indian economy was as open as any in the world had ever been. India's export consisted of raw materials and food grains, and simple manufactures such as jute goods, cotton yarn and coarse cotton piece goods and plantation products mainly tea. Her imports mainly consisted of manufactured commodities¹⁶. In this situation the colonial business class had enjoyed high profits, throwing the Indian merchants out of competition. At the

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *The Capital*, 9 February, 1905.

¹⁵ *The Capital*, 13 July, 1905.

¹⁶ Bagchi, Amiya Kumar, *Private Investment in India 1900-1939*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1972, p.5.

beginning of the twentieth century Calcutta registered a bit less hospitable climate for European business men. The Swadeshi movement at the beginning of the twentieth century had given some sort of impetus to the Swadeshi industries. But there were certain limitations too. The development of Swadeshi industries infact stimulated the import of foreign machinery and even of certain varieties of cotton yarn.¹⁷ Yet, the programme of boycotting manufactures of European origin from the Indian market, made the situation less conducive for the European business class. So it was at this altered situation in Calcutta, that the European entrepreneurs had to thrive. The business world, they were familiar with, underwent a bit change. Although this changed situation made smaller impacts, and no drastic impact on the world of European business in Calcutta, yet the alarm was felt for European business communities, who had been carrying out their business in an unchallenged way, till then. However, we are going to enquire into the kind of business activities in which the Europeans were engaged, amidst of this changed situation.

Bengal rice was an item of export that had a high demand in foreign lands. By twentieth century it had acquired a great market abroad. In 1902-03, the export of rice from Calcutta to Barbera in the Somaliland Protectorate, had reached the value of Rs 5,12,795. The direct trade in rice with Calcutta and also with Bombay was found to be increasing during this time. The supposed reason was the increase of population in Somaliland. Whatever be the cause, trade in Bengal rice, proved to be extremely profitable for European traders, throughout, even in the twentieth century.¹⁸

The imports of foreign coral into Calcutta declined from 241,292 lbs in 1902-03 to 177,998 lbs in 1903-04, the trade being the lowest recorded since 1892-93. The average price was however slightly higher in 1903-04. It was stated that the result of the past fishing season in the Sicilian Sea was very meager, and the generally bad quality of the coral forced the superior variety upto very high prices. These higher rates were, as it was said, naturally reflected in the inferior descriptions of which Calcutta imports chiefly consisted. The demands in Calcutta was generally low, while the absence of buyers from Nepal and Tibet, where the best descriptions generally went, affected the Calcutta market

¹⁷Sarkar, Sumit,, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2014, p.116.

¹⁸*The Capital*, 7 July, 1904.

adversely. Coral business was an exclusive European affair, with very meager demand among European and Indian elites in Calcutta.

It was also from this specific time, that everything related to the crops and commerce of the Argentine Republic became extremely important for European businessmen in Calcutta. The South American customers were becoming more and more demanding for gunnies from Calcutta and it was at this precise moment once again, that direct steam communication between Calcutta and Argentina had commenced. The trade between Calcutta and Argentina was expected to have a considerable expansion in future. The grain exports to Argentina for 1904 amounted to, wheat- 2,400,000 tons, maize- 2600,000 tons, linseed- 960,000 tons . It was because of the consecutive crop failures for several years, in Argentina, that the demand for Indian produce was seen to be rising.¹⁹

It was once again, at this particular time, that a proposal to implement a small tax on export of jute and jute manufactures, was put forward by the British Government of Bengal. This raised tax was thought to be utilized, for the purpose of Calcutta's improvement. Proposal was made to impose an export duty of Re 1 per 400 lbs of raw jute with an equivalent rate on the manufactured goods, and this was supposed to bring Rs 70,00,000 per annum.²⁰ But the Dundee merchants did not agree to this proposal. They criticized this idea in the following terms, "Our foreign customers who buy our jute and jute products would have the entire privilege of paying for an Indian metropolis, and they would pay the money without knowing it. Why would they?" They suggested that if the Calcutta jute magnates were desirous to adorn 'the Queen of the East', by means of compulsory contributions from the jute industry, they should place the whole of the proposed export duty on the finished products and should leave the raw material alone.²¹ Though the Dundee merchants, for whom Calcutta was the principal producer of their raw materials, the improvement of the city was of no concern. Even the fact that the improvement of the city, would have ensured a smooth running of their business, could not motivate them in any way. To them, the slightest investment of their profits for the city's improvement, which had acted as a hinge, around which their trade network moved, was worthless. It was precisely during this time, that the largest cargo carrier that

¹⁹*The Capital*, 23 March, 1905.

²⁰*The Capital*, 6 April, 1905.

²¹*The Dundee Advertiser*, 24 April, 1905.

had visited Calcutta till then, had harboured at the Calcutta Docks. The S. S. Mahronda (Brocklebanks Line) was expected to start with 50,000 bales of jute to Dundee, in October, 1905. It was the first of the four steamers of similar kind which Messers Harland and Wolff Ltd, were building for the Brocklebanks Line, all for the Calcutta trade.²²

Among the modern industries in which capital was employed on a large scale the most important was jute manufactures. All the mention worthy jute mills were situated in or near Calcutta. Jute industry was almost an exclusive sphere of European (mainly British) business men. India held a monopoly of raw jute production and so the supply of raw jute in India was a major factor in determining its price. Jute manufactures were mainly in the nature of capital or intermediate goods. It was till the World War I that more than 90% of the output of the jute goods was sold abroad. So the effects of any increase or decrease in the output of jute manufactures on incomes generated in India were generally swamped by movements in exports of raw jute. The pattern of investment in jute industry was thereby determined by the value of sales of jute goods in foreign markets. The Europeans dominated jute industry through the managing agency system. The desire of the British capital to supervise its Indian investments led to the formation of the managing agency system, which has been defined by B.B.Kling as 'the vesting of the management of a joint stock company in the hands of a firm of professional managers'. The British managing agents interested in jute industry in India were homogeneous enough in their social and business outlook and in their access to information, finance and markets for them to be able to regulate current output in accordance with change in demand in relation to the supply of jute goods in world markets. But no one managing agency house was in a position to dominate the industry, and several large managing agency houses were trying through a high rate of investment to capture as much of the growing market as possible. Furthermore some new managing agency also entered the field in twentieth century. Thus neither of the assumptions required to guarantee a close conformity of investment to desired capacity for the industry, as a whole was fulfilled. However, the jute industry in India was in a special position. It had a substantial lead over its nearest rival, the jute industry of Dundee, in

²²*The Capital*, 28 September, 1905

respect of production costs, and this lead was reflected in its growing share in the world market for jute goods. The industry was also formally organized in the Indian Jute Manufacturers' Association and informally organized through a dozen or so British managing agency houses controlling the whole industry. The actions of the jute mills of Calcutta had a substantial impact on the prices of jute goods in the world market.²³ Owing to concentration of power by the managing agencies, racial discrimination was systematically practiced. The staff was entirely Europeans and the agencies looked to European expertise and capital.²⁴

The turn of the twentieth century also saw the European tobacconists, stationed in Calcutta, to press the government to put a tax on this trade. Although it appeared very strange but this seemed to be the only way left to them to prevent illegal infiltration of smaller vendors into this trade. George Georgacoponlos, a European tobacco trader in Calcutta had sent a petition to the Viceroy that on manufacturers in India and wholesale dealers in tobacco, cigars and cigarettes of all descriptions, a license of Rs 10,000 should be imposed and general dealers (divided into three classes) should pay for licenses varying from Rs 1000 to Rs 2000. The petitioner emphasized that all the tobacconists in Calcutta wanted to be licensed in the same manner as wine and spirit merchants, and he predicted, that it would be beneficial to the tobacconists as well as their consumers.²⁵

Calcutta Port during this time was the major absorbent of the salt, that was imported from abroad. 90% of the total amount of the imported salt in India came to Calcutta. Salt was produced in India in the mines of Rajputana and Punjab and by the evaporation of the sea water on the coasts of Bombay and Madras. Bengal was incapable of supplying its own districts with this essential commodity. The obvious reasons behind this was the absence of salt mines in Bengal and the impracticability of manufacturing it by solar evaporation on the Bengal sea border on a sufficiently cheap rate. Bengal, therefore, had to depend largely on its supplies from such far off places like Liverpool, Hamburg, Spain, Port Said, Aden and Ports of the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The largest quantity of salt that was imported to Calcutta was the British salt from Liverpool. The next in importance was the German rock salt from mines near Hamburg. The English

²³Bagchi, Amiya Kumar, pp.5-8.

²⁴Kling, Blair. B, *Partners in Empire*

²⁵ *The Capital*, 19 January, 1905.

Panga salt was high in price. A new European salt came to the Calcutta market in 1905, the 'Spanish Karkach' salt, imported from the town of Terravieja, in the south of Spain. Port Said supplied a karkach salt, and because of its high moisture content, it was a dead loss to the merchants, when it was re-weighed in Calcutta. So it had no success in the Calcutta market. Aden had two kinds of salt, karkach and crushed salt which reached Calcutta in large quantities. It was in competition with English and German salts and had a lower price. The following imports of foreign salt were brought to Calcutta during 1904-1905,

English 5,878,774 maunds.

Germany 1,262,041 maunds.

Aden 1,279,153 maunds

Rawayah 793,085 maunds

Salif 1,738,466 maunds

Persian Gulf 84,470 maunds.

Spain 136,111 maunds.²⁶

The first decade of the twentieth century also saw a strong desire among a number of large European hide shipping firms in Calcutta to monopolise the hide business of the city concentrated at Tangra in the Entally district. It was stated that the hides could come into the Sealdah station, and a side line from the terminus station to Tangra would bring the hides to the vicinity of the various establishments, where they were to be prepared and packed for shipment. For export facility the canal had to be used. To the firms this appeared to be beneficial as it was better and cheaper to work at Tangra than in the heart of the city. The owners of the hide shipping firms also stated that the city itself would benefit greatly by the removal of these firms to a suburban quarter of a trade. The Port Commissioners gave a nodding to the hide godowns at the neighbourhood of the Docks. But the traders opposed this proposal as there was not enough space for all of them to get located. Tangra was a better choice for them.²⁷ This move of the European hide firms stood against the interest of the smaller Indian hide

²⁶Robertson, J. A, *Review of the trade of India in 1904-05*.

²⁷*The Capital*, 16 February, 1910.

traders. They were subordinate to and manipulated by European business interest. To shift their business to a suburban spot involved a good deal of expenditure which was not possible for all of them to bear. So this move was a ruinous one for them.

European colonial capitalists invested themselves over urban space in other ways also. The members of the Royal Exchange of Calcutta were also not lagging behind, although their demands were quite different in nature. They were seeking the assistance of the Commissioner of Police to clear the pavements round the door of their buildings during the exchange hours. According to them, the south entrance door was crowded with the members of a Marwari gambling ring in such a manner, that the members had to enter with much difficulty. The gamblers also crowded round the open windows. The whole pavement was blocked by them and the foot traffic obstructed. The Europeans alleged that 'Thieves Bazaar' would be a better place for these 'buzzing bees' to settle down. They sought a couple of resolute European constables with their 'native assistants', who would help in keeping the doors and windows clear and the pavements free from loitering obstructionists. Even as a measure to disperse the crowd adoption of the unfiltered street hose was also suggested by them.²⁸

The turn of the twentieth century also saw the Europeans becoming landlords or 'barriwallahs' in Calcutta. They started letting out their residential houses to tenants and to commercial establishments. This was thought to be a remedial measure for solving the problem of housing within the city, although the tenants were Europeans or foreign commercial establishments only. One W. Leslie of Messers W. Leslie, bought a plot of three bighas of land, having a frontage of 220 ft, at the south eastern corner of Wellington square, where a three storied building was constructed. The ground floor was to be occupied by Messers Leslie for the purpose of showing light machinery, railway tools and other goods in connection with their business. On the 2nd and 3rd floor were suites of apartments. There were three main staircases with their entrance doors from the street and in each landing there were two suites of apartments, each self contained, consisting of bed room and sitting room, south verandah and cook house. The rooms measured 20 ft by 15 ft each. These suites were let out on a monthly rental of from Rs 75- Rs 85 each. In words of Leslie, "I think buildings of this kind are very badly wanted

²⁸ *The Capital*, 20 July, 1905.

in Calcutta, and I believe I shall be able to find tenants. The only thing I regret is that I have not more lands to build on and not more money to build with.” Although a modest regret was expressed but it was clear that his firm had in view the construction of more buildings, on a palatial scale in future. These were to be hired to those who could afford to pay the highest rents.²⁹

That modern palatial buildings for commercial purposes were being constructed in Calcutta, in the first leg of the twentieth century in great numbers, was quite evident. The Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, during this time, had acquired on a long lease from the Burdwan Raj, with the option of renewal, a large block of land, extending along Clive Street from Messers Finlay Muir and Co’s office to the corner of New China Bazaar Street, both on the north and on the east. It was one of the most magnificent building sites in the commercial quarter of the city, both for its position and extent.³⁰

Thus land was becoming more and more important for European businessmen in Calcutta in the first decade of twentieth century. Being motivated by the idea that investment in land could produce a bigger slice of mega profit in future there was a drive among Europeans in the city to invest more in lands and construct palatial buildings on them, and to lease them out at highest rates. Twentieth century Calcutta thus saw a booming business in land, in which the Europeans were the chief beneficiaries. The European world of business and commerce in Calcutta, seemed apparently to go on as before at the onset of the twentieth century. Although challenges posed by the swadeshi movement became a smaller source of anxiety for the European traders and businessmen in Calcutta, yet their business did not suffer a great deal as a result. It crossed all the commercial barriers and went on in its own way.

Advertisements

The world of European commerce was accompanied with colonial advertisements. Advertisements were a bridge between the buyers and sellers. It was through the advertisements only that a buyer could form some sort of idea of a product, that was

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *The Capital*, 29 June, 1905.

otherwise unknown or less known to him. The language, label, graphics of the advertisements had an appeal to the consumers. The advertisements by the European firms in Calcutta gave publicity to their various products, which were often articles of daily use. These commodities had become an integral part of European life in the city at the turn of the twentieth century. They indicated emergence and generation of a consumerist taste and lifestyle in the colonial context. It is through these advertisements that we shall explore the kind of material culture to which the Europeans had become habituated in Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century. The European business personnels who were also connected to the production process, were also buyers of these consumer goods. So these advertisements were meant for them too.

Advertisement by Dwarkin and Son, whose offices were at 8/2 Dalhousie Square and 267 Bowbazar Street, Calcutta was specific in sporting character. It read, “High class violins by Mr Foucher of London, highly spoken of by Senor Sarasate, Polonaski and other violinists, price- Rs 100”.³¹ To meet the demands of stylish and fashionable dresses among European residents of the city, various western tailoring shops had emerged. In 1904, The Great Eastern Hotel and Co. had issued an illustrated booklet, in connection with their tailoring department, which could easily place them in the front rank of artistic advertisers. The booklet contained background illustrations on thick glazed paper in which men from civil, military, sporting and even clerical could see themselves, as well dressed. The ladies could also picturize to themselves, the appearance of their ‘outermen’ (as it was called) when they were costumed for either riding or walking. All other kinds of human furnishings were also found in the booklet.³² Ranken and Co. at Old Court House Street, Calcutta advertised in the following ways “Tailors by special Royal Appointment to His Majesty King Edward VII, Emperor of India”. Branches open at Lahore and Rawalpindi. Advertisements only meant for European gentlemen shaped the physical appearance of colonial masculine preserve in society. Morrison’s Clan Tartan Warehouse, 7 Dalhousie Square, Calcutta, advertised for their stocks of fancy and well selected vestings that had arrived. The price list advertised so was, “Duck washing vests in various colours, Rs 8-8, white washing vests, Rs 4-8 up, Fancy silk and wool vests, Rs

³¹*The Capital*, 12 January, 1905.

³²*The Capital*, 3 November, 1904.

12- 8 to Rs 24-8, some lovely pattern pure silk vests, Rs 28-8 to 35. Fit and workmanship of every garment guaranteed”.³³ Mason Hill and Rogers, another tailor, located at 19 Chowringhee and 19/1 Lindsay Street, also advertised for the sale of their designed costumes in the following way : The ‘Record’ Tunic Shirt made of reliable and cool Zephyr, beautifully soft and in a splendid assortment of patterns, Rs 2-4 each. The ‘Comfort’ shirt made of fine long cloth, very cool and comfortable, Rs 17-8 dozen. The ‘Cairo’ shirt made of white mercerized twill, soft, cool and hard wearing. Rs 28-8 dozen.³⁴ Another tailoring shop of the time, consisting of departments for both his and her fashion was Alex Brault, “ The fashionable tailor and outfitter”, located at first floor of 3 Waterloo Street, Calcutta. They advertised for themselves in the following manner: “For suitings and Gent’s general outfit, also for Ladies cycling and golfing skirts all cut on the American style. Madame Brault takes in Ladies materials for making and trimming gloves and corsets to order, the latter from the best Parisian corsetiers”.³⁵ Europeans in colonial Calcutta thus, were very much conscious about their fashion trends or were expected to be. It was to meet their needs that fashionable products were finding way onto a Calcutta market which catered to them. Wearing separate collars with shirt was a part of the contemporary fashion among European gentlemen. Phelps and Co. at 15 Old Court House Street, Calcutta, dealing with such collars, published the following advertisement: “The New Turnover Top Lock Front Stand Up Collar, Rs 8-8 dozen. Specially suitable for evening wear, when buttoned on the shirt, it has the same appearance as a single stand up collar.”³⁶ Hat was also very much a part of European life and was popular with both men and women. Moore and Co., Calcutta, published a detailed advertisement for their hats which read: “Men’s Double Brim Top Rustic Straw Hat with Black or Navy Silk Band, lined silk and leather inner band with sanitary pad for forehead – Rs 3.12. Men’s fine Canton Straw Hat, with 1 inch Black or Navy band, leather inner band with sanitary pad for forehead Rs 4.4. Boy’s Double Brim Strong Canton Straw Hats Rs 2.12. Boy’s Single Brim Straw Hats Rs 14”.³⁷

³³*The Capital*, 18 July, 1905.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵*The Statesman*, 5 January, 1900.

³⁶*The Capital*, 3 November, 1900.

³⁷*The Statesman*, 5 January, 1900.



18-Carat Gold Cases, Set
with Diamonds, Rubies,
Pearls, &c.



LADIES' GEM SET WATCHES.

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THE LARGEST
SELECTION

IN
INDIA.

WEST END WATCH CO.,

SHOWROOMS { 14, Dalhousie Sq., **CALCUTTA.**
 { 11, Hornby Road, **BOMBAY.**

Illustrated Price List sent free on application.

18, 1905.]

RANKEN & CO.,

Old Court House Street, Calcutta.

TAILORS,

BY

SPECIAL ROYAL APPOINTMENT TO HIS MAJESTY
KING EDWARD VII, EMPEROR OF INDIA.

Branches open at Lahore and Rawal Pindi.

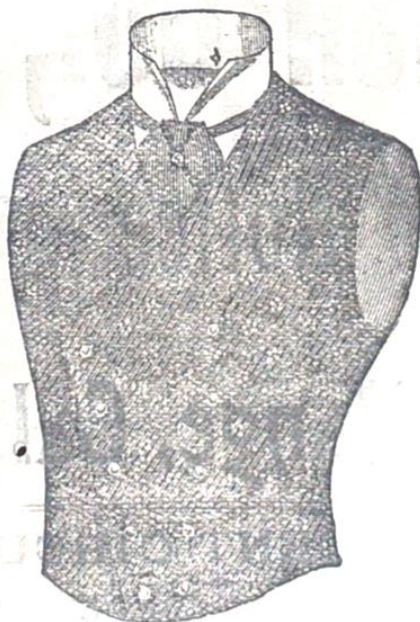
AT MORRISON'S

CLAN TARTAN WAREHOUSE.

Just arrived a large and well selected
Stock of Fancy Vestings.

DUCK
WASHING
VESTS,
in various
colours,
Rs. 8-8.

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WHITE
WASHING
VESTS,
Rs. 4-8 up.



FANCY
SILK AND
WOOL
VESTS,
Rs. 12-8 to
24-8.

—*—
Some
lovely
pattern
PURE
SILK
VESTS,
Rs. 28-8 to
35.

Fit & Workmanship of every Garment Guaranteed.

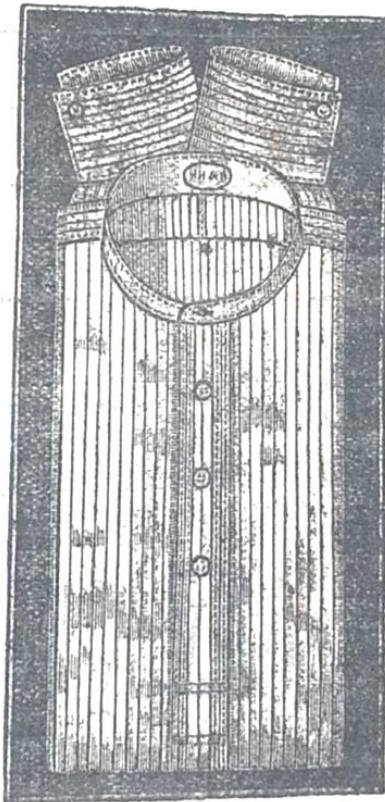
7, DALHOUSIE SQ., E., CALCUTTA.

Mason, Hill & Rogers.

The "RECORD" Tunic Shirt made of reliable and cool Zephyr, beautifully soft and in a splendid assortment of Patterns.

Rs. 2-4 each.

The
"Com-
fort"
Shirt,
made of
fine
Long-
cloth,
very
cool and
com-
fortable.



The
"Cairo"
Shirt,
made of
white
Mercer-
ized
Twill,
soft,
cool and
hard
wear-
ing.

Rs. 17-8 doz.

Rs. 28-8 doz.

WRITE FOR PATTERNS.

Our New Catalogue now ready.

MASON, HILL & ROGERS,

19 and 19/1, Chowringhee, and Lindsay St.,

CALCUTTA.

Fashion items of ladies were also increasingly finding a market in Calcutta, as it was from this time that the European ladies started participating in public life. So it was the question of presenting themselves before the public, that made them inclined towards buying such fashionable articles like broaches, watches and jewellery. It would be a mistake on our part if we think that the European women maintained a life of complete home confinement in nineteenth century Calcutta. Working European women like teachers, nurses etc were seen in the city, although on a marginal scale. But as far as the women of elite European society of the city was concerned, their movement was constricted within the house, at many occasions in the well lighted up halls, balls, at the dinner tables etc as hostess. They presented themselves before the guests but within the domain of home or at invitations outside, accompanied by their male counterparts. From the later half of the nineteenth century, there was a break in this trend. Elite European women started actively participating in public life outside their homes. Among these elite European women wearing Indian fabric or using Indian items of fashion were considered serious breaches of etiquette. Thus European fashionable items had great demand among them. Cooke and Kelvy, a jewelers, pearl and diamond merchants, advertised a wide range of their products for ladies mainly consisting of broach and hair pins (shown in photo).³⁸ Hamilton and Co, Calcutta also dealt in broaches and hairpins for ladies and published a detailed advertisement, exhibiting their products (picture given). West End Watches and Co and Cook and Kelvy and Co, were also dealers in watches. They also advertised clocks. (shown in photo). Arlington and Co., at 5 Dalhousie Square, jeweler and watchmaker, advertised their products³⁹ (shown in photo). There were advertisements of other products, in European owned news papers of Calcutta whose importance in European social life remains beyond doubt. One such product was foreign liquor. The business in foreign liquor was a well thriving one, specially in the changed urban context of twentieth century Calcutta, it remained so. It would be incorrect if we assume that foreign liquor found a ready market only among Europeans of Calcutta. Many Bengali men of eminence, succeeded in imitating the western style of living, too became

³⁸ *The Statesman*, 5 January, 1900.

³⁹ *The Capital*, 12 January, 1905.

SIMLA.

COOKE & KELVEY,

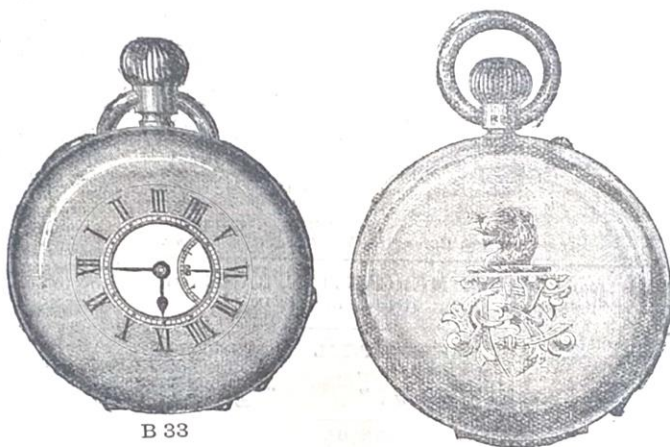
CALCUTTA,

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Clock and Watchmakers to H. E. the Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

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Address is
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guaranteed.



GOLD PRESENTATION WATCHES.

These Watches are specially manufactured for presentation purposes, with the best quality English $\frac{3}{4}$ plate Lever movements, jewelled throughout, with keyless mechanism. Engraved, Engine Turned and Plain Gold Cases. Fully Guaranteed.

In Gold Open Face, Hunting and $\frac{1}{2}$ Hunting Cases ...	...	Rs. 270	to	Rs. 1,000
With Kew Certificate ...	...	650	..	1,500
Massive Gold Albert Chains suitable for above ...	...	100	..	300

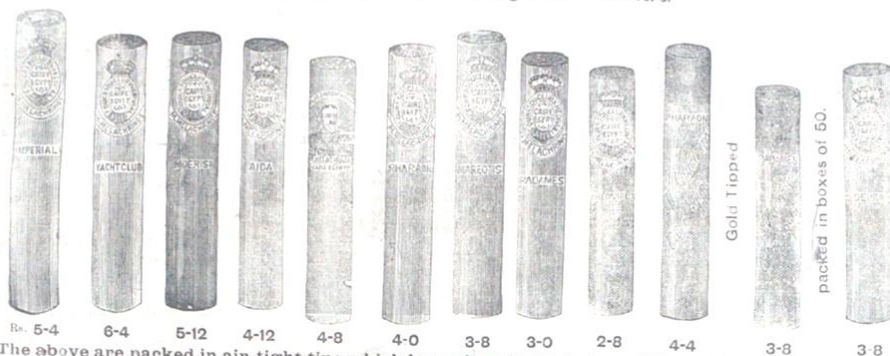
"THE ASIAN."

The Leading Sporting Paper in India.
4, Waterloo St., Calcutta.

THE ACME OF

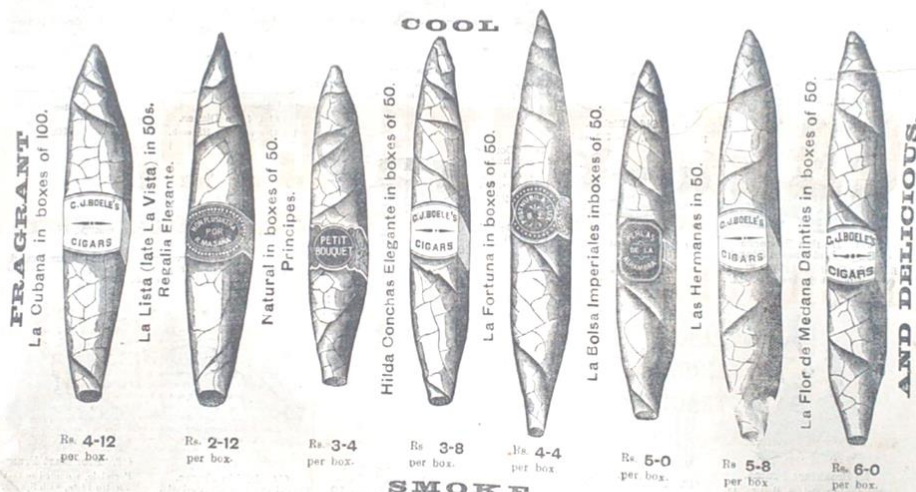
M. Melachrino & Co's Production known and smoked throughout the Globe as the celebrated Club Best Egyptian Cigarettes.

Famous Specialities for Distinguished Smokers.



GREAT DISPLAY OF DUTCH HAVANA CIGARS. By C. J. Boele.

Shapes and exact sizes of the different qualities.



GERMINAL MANILA CIGARS.

CIGARETTES						PENNY CIGARS.					
Cigarettes with Silverfoil		In boxes of 25	...	Per box	Rs As P.						
Fashionables		" 50	...	"	10 0 0	Conchas		boxes of 100	...	Per box	Rs As P.
Reina Victoria Nonplus Ultra		" 100	...	"	10 0 0	Nuevo Habano 1st		" 100	...	"	5 0 0
Perlas Germinal		" 25	...	"	10 0 0	Nuevo Cortado		" 100	...	"	4 0 0
Conchos Extra		" 50	...	"	10 0 0	Cortado Esmerado		" 100	...	"	4 0 0
Processas		" 50	...	"	10 0 0	Habano Extra		" 50	...	"	4 0 0
Culebras (twisted)		" 50	...	"	10 0 0	Cortado Extra		" 50	...	"	4 0 0
						Entreractos		" 50	...	"	4 0 0
								" 100	...	"	4 0 0

J. G. GEORGACHOPOULOS & CO.,

Cigarette and Cigar Wholesale and Retail Importers.

10, GOVERNMENT PLACE, CALCUTTA

SIMLA.

COOKE & KELVEY,

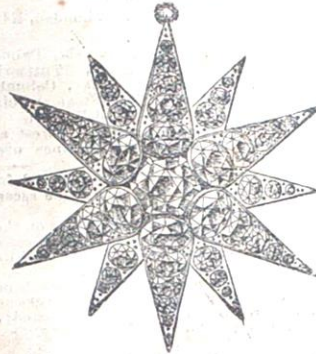
LAHORE.

CALCUTTA,

Manufacturing Jewellers, Pearl and Diamond Merchants to H. E. The Viceroy and Governor-General of India.



B. 602.
Very Pretty Pearl Brooch,
Rs. 60 to Rs. 120.



B. 426.
Diamond Star Pendant Brooch,
all sizes, ranging from
Rs. 300 to Rs. 5,000.



B. 603.
Pearl Flower Brooch,
Rs. 75, Rs. 80 to Rs. 180.

NOTE.

A Grand Selection of Pearl Brooches
always kept in Stock.

Jewellery sent on Inspection to all
parts of India to approved con-
stituents.

NOTE.

C. & K. undertake all kinds of
repairs or remounting of Jewellery,
Diamond, Pearls and other Gems
supplied from our specially select-
ed stock.

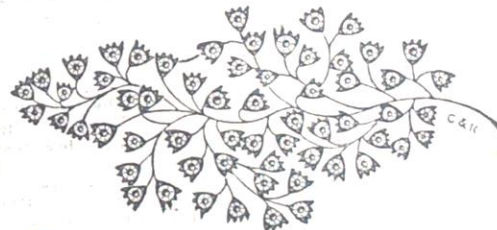
All Work is supervised by European
Experts and satisfaction
GUARANTEED.



B. 480.
Fine Diamond or Pearl Spray Brooch or
Hair Ornament, Rs. 300 to Rs. 1,000.



B. 255.
Pearl Pendants
in various designs
from
Rs. 150 to Rs. 300.



B. 383.—Fine Diamond Spray,
Rs. 180, Rs. 200 to Rs. 250.

Registered Telegraphic Address:
DIAMOND, CALCUTTA.

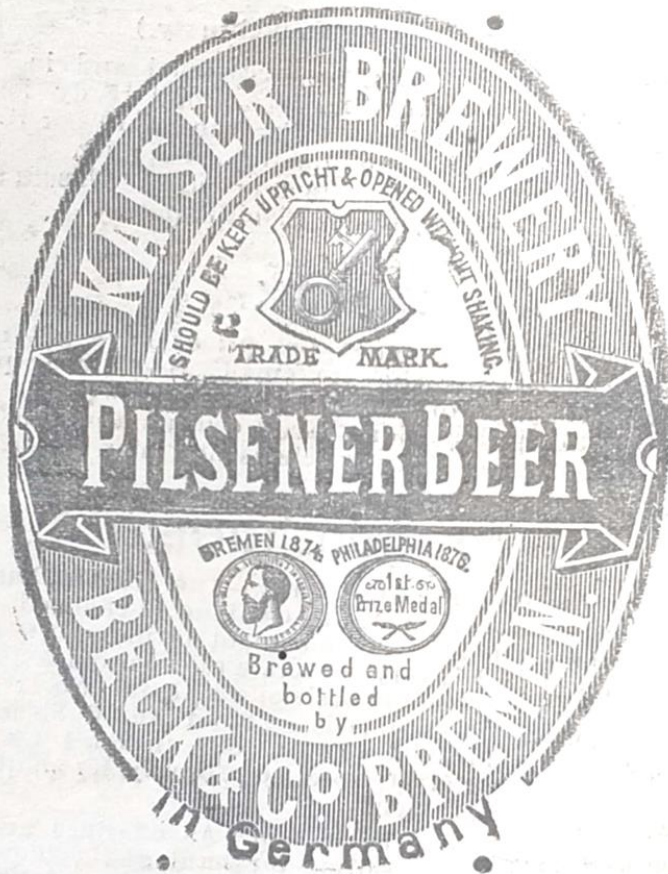
Catalogues of all departments free on
application.

"THE ASIAN."

The Leading Sporting Paper in India.

4, Waterloo St., Calcutta.

KAISER BREWERY BECK & CO.'S PILSENER BEER.



Rs. 22 per case of 4 doz. quarts.
 " 31 " " 8 " pints.
 " 24 " " 8 " magnums.

HADENFELDT & CO.,
CALCUTTA,
 SOLE AGENTS & SOLE IMPORTERS.

BY Co., LD., 3, Mission Row, CALCUTTA.

*, CAPITAL, LIMITED, at 98, Olive Street, Calcutta.

"AULD SCOTTIE."



As supplied
on the entire
system of
Pullman Cars,
some 1,800
Cars, through-
out America.

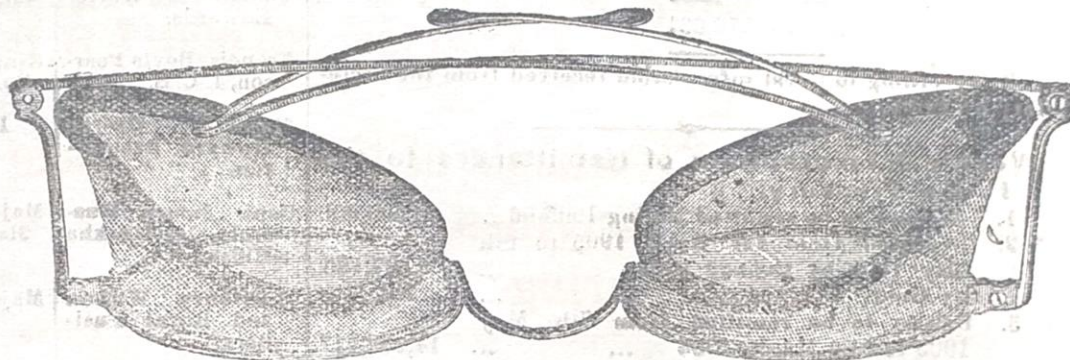
The St. Andrew's Day Dinner Whisky
for the past ten years.

Rs. 29-4 per doz nett.

GREAT EASTERN HOTEL CO
LIMITED.

Telegraphic Address:—"PURVEYOR," CALCUTTA.

JAS. MURRAY & CO., CALCUTTA.



EYE-PRESERVERS.

Close fitting, v. lvet edged or plain, full Gauge, with fine "optical" flat parallel glasses,					
Natural Green or Blue—					Rs. As.
Best Steel Frames	...	...	...	...	10 0
Best Nickel	...	...	...	...	12 "
High finish Silver	...	...	...	...	16 0
"D." Shape Preservers, fine "optical" parallel glasses, Neutral, Green, or Blue, and					
with Curl, Straight or double Arms—					
Strong Steel Frames, from	...	...	...	...	4 0
Light do., highest finish, from...	...	...	...	...	10 0
Highest finish, Nickel, from	...	...	...	...	Rs. 5-12 to 10 0
Do. Silver	...	...	...	...	16 0
Blue or Smoke Tinted Glasses with Power can be fitted in any Eye-reserver frame at a little extra cost.					

[MAY 25, 1905.]

CAPITAL.

970

— WHEN BUYING A TALKING MACHINE SEE THAT SAME IS —

THE GRAMOPHONE

As Manufactured by the Gramophone and Typewriter, Limited, of London.

All genuine Gramophones bear this Trade Mark.

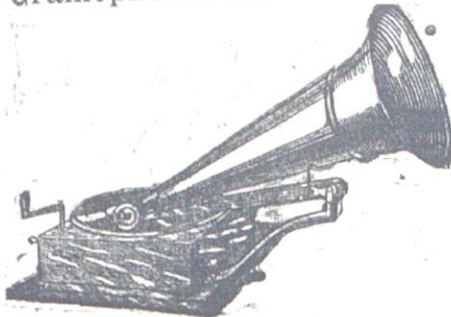


TRADE MARK.

NEEDLES.

Genuine Gramophone Needles in
Dog Picture Box :

Rs. 3-12 per 1,000, As. 12 per 200.





TRADE MARK

No. 4 Ordinary Gramophone,
Price, Rs. 50.

Ditto fitted with Sound Arm,
Rs. 65.

Gramophones from Rs. 22-8 to Rs. 225.

Liberal Allowances for old Gramophone Records.
Gramophone Records in every Language, including all Indian Dialects.
New Records arriving every week.

consumers of foreign liquor. They bought them for themselves and also for the purpose of entertainments of the Europeans. So foreign liquor had a wide range of buyers in colonial Calcutta, from Europeans to Indians. The firms dealing in foreign liquor also published their advertisements, with the sole aim of making them more attractive to the buyers, a common premise of all the advertisers. Kaiser Brewery Beck and Co's Pilsener Beer imported by Hadenfeldt and Co, Calcutta whose trade mark symbol was a 'key'. The image of the key implied that the bottle should be kept upright and that it should not be shaken. Hadenfeldt and Co. was the sole agent and importer of Pilsener Beer in Calcutta, located at 3 Mission Row. They also published a detailed price list of their advertisement (photo given). The Great Eastern Hotel and Co. Ltd were importers of 'Auld Scottie' Whisky, manufactured by James Menzies of Glasgow. The St Andrew's Day Dinner whisky was also imported by them. Kreig and Co. at 6 Hare Street, also imported Scotch whisky and Munich Beer. Their advertisements for Munich Beer was written in these lines, "Hacker Dark, an old Calcutta favourite and the driest of its kind, in champagne bottles. Spaten Dark and Yellow in full sized bottles". They advertised for

their Scotch whiskies in these lines: “Kreig’s * Star (one star) Rs 24/ dozen. “Kreig’s ** Star (two star) Rs 28/ dozen. Kreig’s *** Star (three star) Rs 36/ dozen.”⁴⁰

The Europeans in Calcutta, at the turn of the twentieth century were also addicted to smoking. So firms dealing with tobacco in Calcutta had a thriving business. D. Marcopolo at 11 Old Court House Street manufactured varieties of cigarettes. A particular variety had the largest sale in India, during this time. Their advertisements reflected their confidence in selling a luxury item. “Gold Tipped Cigarettes, Command, had the largest sales in India because they are the best.” “Gold Tipped Giant per tin of Rs 50- Rs 38.”, “Gold Tipped Dufferin per tin of Rs 40- Rs 30”. “Extra Flowers per tin of Rs 50- Rs 28.” “Delicate and Aromatique per tin of Rs 50- Rs 20.”. T. Kerode and Co, located at 2 Chowringhee, Calcutta was a dealer in Nestor Gianclis Cigarettes, the varieties being ‘Grand’, ‘Noyen’ and ‘Petit’ and varying in size. For their cigarettes, they advertised, “Smoked by Khedival Family, the Nobility and the Aristocracy at home and abroad.” The elite character of their cigarette was thus expressed through these lines. T. H. Vafiadis and Co., whose office was at 4 Dalhousie Square, Calcutta advertised for their gold tipped cigarettes as an exclusive product – “The admirable brand of cigarettes intended for people of high rank and position are finely made with all possible care from pure Turkish tobacco of best quality. They are easy to draw and have a nice fragrance. They stand much higher than others of the kind and are freely used by people of high circles. To meet, and in response to the requirements of regimental messes and clubs in India, we have imported the two new brands, Cairo Egypt Admiral Cigarettes and Cairo Egypt Crown Prince Cigarettes, which we are glad to find, fully answer their objects and wants. They have comparatively within a very short time found a very large scale. There can be no question but that they are genuine.” Thus it was catering to the needs of the elite Europeans in the city, that these companies were making a good business, in the twentieth century⁴¹

Gun manufacturers, in the city also had a thriving business, their consumers being both Indian and European. Manton and Co., located at 13 Old Court House Street, Calcutta, advertised their “Special Shot Guns” which were thoroughly sound and reliable,

⁴⁰ *The Statesman*, 7 January, 1905.

⁴¹ *The Statesman*, 28 January, 1900.

12, 16, 20, and 28 bores, Rs 275 cash in case with implements.” But a more detailed advertisement was being given by the gun makers namely Lyon and Lyon, located at 16 Chowringhee, Calcutta. They advertised a wide range of fire arms. “The New Pocket Revolver, The Young America- 32 calctge, nickel plated Rs 19, The Young America with pearl handle – Rs 22, The British Bull Dog 450 C.F. – RS 25, The Cyclist and Self Ejector 5 shot- 32 calcatge pearl handle Rs 30. The Smith and Wesser Ejector pattern, 38 calcatge, nickel plated pearl handle.⁴²

There were other products manufactured according to the needs of the elite Europeans in the city to satisfy the needs of their leisure time. C. Lazurus and Co., located at 60 and 61 Bentinck Street, manufactured billiard tables and accessories. Their advertisement claimed “The Standard Indian Billiard Table, made entirely in Calcutta by thoroughly seasoned timber, is declared by clubs, hotels and private individuals stationed in every town in India, Ceylon, Burma, China, the Straits and Japan, to be the best table for the east, perfect in design, accurate in construction, moderate in price. A reputation of 80 years has been maintained against all competition.”⁴³ F.C. Osler and Co. was a dealer in cutlery, selling various types of electroplated spoons and forks, glass salad bowls, plates and dishes. Their items exhibited in their advertisement varied from week to week.⁴⁴ Van Houten’s chocolates also earned a fame in Calcutta in the twentieth century. They advertised their variety and quality, “It ranks among chocolates as Van Houten’s Cocoa does among cocoas: it is unequalled, wholesome, nourishing and digestible. Give it a trial. Chocolate for eating sold in these following sizes, Croquottes, Drops, Square, Tablets and Bars.”⁴⁵ Cuberthson and Harper, located at 10 Government Place, Calcutta manufactured saddles, harness, boot, port manteaus , trunks and bags.⁴⁶ Messers Incall and Silk, Calcutta, manufactured a special kind of lamp, ‘The Water Lamp.’ Their advertisement stressed on utility, “ The water light by Messers Incall and Silk are selling this smallest and most powerful, self contained light in cylinders of three sizes. It consists of a changed metal cylinder, which in use is merely placed in a bucket or in any quantity of water, within 30 seconds gives the most brilliant illuminating gas known.

⁴²*The Statesman*, 7January, 1900.

⁴³*The Capital*, 13 October, 1904.

⁴⁴*The Capital*, 12January, 1905.

⁴⁵*The Statesman*, 3 January,1900.

⁴⁶*The Capital*, 12 January, 1905.

It is self igniting and inextinguishable in wind and water. The smallest size 5”x 10’, costing of Rs 3-8, will burn with a uniform light for one hour. The largest size 8” x 20” costing of Rs 10-8, burns for six hours. The manifold uses to which such lights can be put by engineers , builders, contractors and dockyards are obvious. For marine and harbor purposes these lights have proved themselves invaluable. For successfully picking up a man or a boat at sea in a dark night, a water light would often be the one thing needful.⁴⁷

Auction was also a noteworthy aspect of European life in Calcutta. The event of auction, provided ample opportunity for the Europeans to socialize apart from engaging in the transactions. G. O. P. Alson and Co. at 70 Bentinck Street, held furniture auction every Wednesday and Saturday. They hired out furnitures and claimed to have a large stock of new and second hand furnitures.⁴⁸ B. Henry and Co. was a cycle dealer in twentieth century Calcutta and they advertised their cycle in the following lines, “Nothing succeeds like success. B. Henry and Co., Importers of high grade cycles only, the pioneer cycle repairers in the east. Branches at Park Street and Lower Circular Road, head office at Dhurmtalla Street.”⁴⁹ Partridge and Co, excited the Calcutta population with wordplay in their advertisement ..

“PPPPPPPPPPPP!

Partridges for pills, plasters, patent etc...

Prescription prepared with pure pharmaceutical products, prices pleasing. A trial solicited. Partridge and Co, practical English chemists, 21 Chowringhee Road (corner of Lindsay Streert), Calcutta.” H. Price and Co., (established 1894) at 10 Grants Lane, office at 81 Bentinck Street, Calcutta was an agency that provided domestic helpers. They advertised in these lines, “wanted orders for high class and A1 certified domestics i.e cooks, general servants, English speaking and thoroughly experienced sea going ayahs, artisans, workmen and labourers of every description as well as European and Eurasian nurses etc. Pucca arrangements for local and mofussil employers under careful European and Eurasian supervision.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷*The Capital*, 16 November, 1905)

⁴⁸*The Statesman*, 5 January, 1900.

⁴⁹*The Statesman*, 3 January, 1900.

⁵⁰*The Statesman*, 3 January, 1900.

Thacker Spink and Co's advertisement was the most expressive in character and contained elements of racism. Their advertisement claimed "All who would like to purchase an artistic little Christmas novelty for themselves, and to send home a distinct Calcutta souvenir to their friends, would do well to call up at Messers Thacker Spink and Co's establishment without delay. Friends in Europe can supply them with neat little collections of the miniature China ware vases and urns, and cups and jugs having on them the coats of arms of the respective towns where the souvenirs were purchased. Calcutta now can be added to the list. For one rupee and less, you can possess the Calcutta coat of arms and its motto, on a neat little China vase and put it where the symbol and its message can always meet the eye. You can send them to your friends to let them see that Calcutta is not so altogether a barbarian city as Sheriff Campbell Smith supposes it to be, but is reaching out, although a long way off as yet towards a higher civilization."⁵¹

In this chapter, I have made an attempt to draw a sketch of the kind of life, the Europeans used to lead in the city at the turn of the twentieth century. But this story owing to the paucity of sources, gives an above all picture of the elite Europeans only, among whom life seemed to be comparatively unperturbed, amidst of various disturbances. But from the available sources, it seems that there were certain sources of anxieties too, that had crept in the city environment, and that had adversely affected the Europeans, in some ways. At the turn of the twentieth century, there was an outbreak of an enteric fever among the Europeans on the steamers, that had been lying at the Kidderpore Docks. Seventeen cases of such enteric fever, had taken place at the docks and this fever was assumed to originate from the European Crews of the steamer Fort Salisbury. The patients were removed to the Presidency General Hospital, where two of the cases proved fatal.⁵²

The turn of the twentieth century also saw poultry famine in Calcutta, that had left some smaller impact on European life in the city. The prices of poultry in New Market at Calcutta had risen within a very short span of time. The prices of curry chickens had risen from ten pice to three annas each and the price of larger fowls had

⁵¹*The Capital*, 27 October, 1904.

⁵²*The Statesman*, 10 May, 1900.

also risen in proportion. The poultry men in the bazaar held the activity of the Society For Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (S.P.C.A) responsible for this crisis. Most of the poultry supply in Calcutta, during this time came from Gualando by Eastern Bengal State Railway (E.B.R). They were sent down in a large wicker work coops, each coop generally contained 80 chickens, larger fowls were less in number. The Eastern Bengal State Railway under instructions from the S.P.C.A, had refused to book coops, containing more than twenty chickens. Poultry dealers, therefore, who wished to send eighty chickens, after this refusal of the E.B.R, had to send them in four coops, which meant additional freights . Considerable difficulty was therefore experienced by the bazaar men in getting supplies, that were getting reduced day by day and the prices were consequently rising. Many large dealers of chicken in Calcutta, were suffering as a result of this intervention of the S.P.C.A. The European populace of the city were suffering too as they lacked chicken and eggs in their palettes. The Indians, not yet very much familiar with these items in their diet, at the turn of the twentieth century the Europeans in the city, were its chief consumers. So this poultry crisis in the city, had rendered their lives to some extent problematic and this was definitely a cause of anxiety to them.⁵³

There was a great complaint in Calcutta during this time regarding scarcity of good cooks, and letters were appearing in the daily newspapers on this very subject. This scarcity of good cooks in the city, was assumed to be the result of the spread of European cookery, in well to do Indian households. Complaints were made that the cutcha cooks (unskilled) were spoiling good dinners in Calcutta, spreading indigestion. So the Europeans and the well to do Indians who often copied them, were in great need of good cooks.⁵⁴ Although these events were of lesser importance, but its above all significance cannot be ignored, for it had some impact on the city life of the Europeans in Calcutta. These were smaller sources of anxieties that had crept in their city life.

This chapter, thus explores the kind of life to which the Europeans had acclimatized themselves, in the colonial city of Calcutta, at the turn of the twentieth century. By this time, a well defined European public sphere had emerged in Calcutta, in which European ladies were seen to become active. Displays of accomplishments were an

⁵³*The Statesman*, 11 January, 1901.

⁵⁴*The Capital*, 22 December, 1904.

important part of their work as custodians of European etiquette and middle class form.⁵⁵ Official and semi official events among Europeans, that were celebrated with pomp and pleasure, became plenty in the city. About life in Calcutta, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Lord Hardinge in his autobiography wrote- “The four months that I had spent in Calcutta had been very happy and full of interest. We had visitors with us all the time and incessant functions of every kind. Still, it was all new and everything went well. For recreation there was plenty of golf, but I very soon found from experience that the early morning ride on the race-course, the general custom in Calcutta, was not a good preparation for a hard day’s work, while an evening ride or a game of golf was a pleasant relaxation after a long day at the desk.”⁵⁶ Although the kind of life Hardinge enjoyed in Calcutta was no match for ordinary Europeans in Calcutta, still there was no dearth of entertainments for them in the city. The business of the Europeans based at Calcutta at the beginning of the first decade of twentieth century, went on mostly as before. It was with the advent of the boycott programme that sales of certain imported items in Calcutta met with a bit depression. The period 1906-07 and 1908-09 saw depressions in imports of certain manufactures like tobacco, liquor, cotton goods and apparels, among all of which that in tobacco seemed to be a permanent one.⁵⁷ In 1908-09 the consumption of Liverpool salt decreased in Bengal but a rise in import of salt from non English sources was seen. In fact this depression in consumption of Liverpool salt continued till 1911-12. Boycott was of course an influencing factor in this fluctuations of demand but certainly not the only factor.⁵⁸ So although the sales of very few of their imported items met with certain periodic depressions in Calcutta, yet the business of Europeans went on as before in the first decade of the twentieth century. Except for some minor impacts, there was no drastic impact on European world of commerce. For the Europeans settled in the colonial city of Calcutta the onset of twentieth century definitely marked a transitional phase. From commercial point of view the colonial business class had undertaken few newer ventures (trade with Argentine

⁵⁵Allender, Tim, *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820-1932*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2016, p.32.

⁵⁶Hardinge, Lord, *My Indian Years ,1910-1916: The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penhurst*, Burtler and Tanner Ltd, London, 1948, p.22.

⁵⁷Sarkar, Sumit, p.117.

⁵⁸*ibid*, p.120..

Republic and Somaliland Protectorate) during this time. The turn of the century also witnessed an emerging real estate business in Calcutta in which major participants were Europeans. In fact the city during this time experienced a change in European building pattern also. Most of the houses in the neighborhood of English paras like that in Middleton and Camac Streets were demolished in the first half of the twentieth century. No longer the market could afford the luxuries of big rooms, that was prevalent in nineteenth century. As the chief fear of disease had become a source of anxiety in the city, this was a time when houses came up with numerous tall windows and doors to provide the maximum possible cross ventilation in a house. Tall ceilings and numerous air passages provided the residents with a sense of mental and physical openness.⁵⁹ Nineteenth century plan of English houses in the city attached extreme importance to private spaces that blocked air circulation, thus was abandoned. Twentieth century English houses in the city were fashioned in such a way so that large gatherings of European people could be accommodated. This exclusiveness was maintained throughout. The social life and social relations of the Europeans in the city were guided by the principles of strict racial segregation. The advertisements in English owned newspapers also conforms to this same principle, expressing European exclusiveness of the advertised products. This sense of superiority was definitely a product of political dominance that gave English life in Calcutta its paradoxical and insular character.⁶⁰ European life underwent certain socio organizational and cultural changes in the first decade of the twentieth century. The changing role of females and the change in taste, as reflected in the colonial advertisements indicated certain mutations in the daily life of the colonizers.

⁵⁹Chattopadhyay, Swati, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny*, Routledge, Oxon, 2005, pp. 118-119.

⁶⁰Mukherjee, Rudrangshu, p. 51.

Chapter - 6

Transfer of Capital in Press

This chapter aims to investigate the contradictory perceptions surrounding the capital transfer from Calcutta to New Delhi through a micro-analysis of colonial records, chiefly dealing with the Indian press. Though the press reports entered the colonial records in a filtered and selective form, they reflected the shades of local opinion and positions related to the transfer. The aim of this chapter is also to unravel how other issues related to the city, pertaining to daily life, appeared in these records at the moment of transfer.

Calcutta was the seat of the Government of Colonial India until 1911 and the commercial capital of the British Indian empire down to the First World War. Once Bengal became the centre of English colonialism in the subcontinent, Calcutta and its hinterland rapidly emerged as the nucleus of British economic interests in the country. The prominent position that the city came to enjoy under the Raj was demonstrated by the concentration of industries in its suburbs, the volume of shipping activities carried out through its port and the vast hinterland given over to the production of tea, coal and jute, controlled chiefly by the Scottish managing agency houses.¹ The city also developed as the melting pot of eastern and western cultures. When the Raj sought to impart western education, Calcutta was the experimental site: the new western educated middle class rapidly made Calcutta the cultural capital of the subcontinent.

In the political realm, the early years of the 1910s were of momentous significance. They were marked by the rejoining of West and East Bengal

¹Bagchi, A.K, 'Wealth and Work in Calcutta, 1860-1921', Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta the Living City*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1990, Vol I, p. 212.

in 1911 and the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1912. When Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, announced the controversial partition of Bengal in 1905, bhadralok populations of Calcutta spearheaded the Swadeshi Movement and other segments of the city joined; in 1911, the goal of the movement was realized when the British government announced the annulment of Bengal's division. The year 1912, as Suranjan Das has pointed out, again altered the balance of Bengali bhadralok morale. The transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi indicated the British determination to evade future challenges to its authority.² In 1911, King Emperor George V announced the government's decision at the Delhi Durbar to move the capital from Calcutta to Delhi. Although the move to Delhi was made to take the wind out of the sails of anti-colonial Bengali politics, there was little doubt that Calcutta's status was much reduced by the move. This seemed to be the temper of the king's conciliatory speech in Calcutta:

'The changes in the administration of India, resulting from the announcement made by me at the great Durbar at Delhi, will affect to a certain extent Calcutta. But your city must always remain the premier city of India. Its population, its importance as a commercial centre and great emporium of trade, its splendid historic traditions- all combine to invest Calcutta with a unique character, which should preserve to it a pre-eminent position.'³

As Suranjan Das has remarked, the transfer of the capital in 1912 dried up major sources of Government jobs and patronage, causing erosion of the bhadralok's role in colonial administration. Simultaneously, this altered situation unfolded at a time of general

² Das, Suranjan, 'The Politics of Agitation: 1912-1947', Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta the Living City*, Vol:I, p. 15.

³Datta, Partho, *Planning the city, urbanization and reform in Calcutta*, C. 1800-C. 1940, Tulika Books, Delhi, 2012, p. 201.

stagnation of bhadralok economic entrepreneurship.⁴ To Rajat Ray, although Calcutta continued to be the governing centre of the British empire in India until 1912, even after the transfer, Calcutta remained the nerve centre of the economic connection between Britain and India. While explaining the transfer's impact on Calcutta, Ray noted that Bengal's reaction to the package deal of 1912 was somewhat mixed. Some of the Calcutta notables, who were large urban property-owners in the metropolis, and those dependent on the service of the Government, regarded the transfer of the capital and the consequent decline of the land revenue and loss of employment as too large a price to pay for the annulment of the partition of Bengal. There was also a feeling that nationalist organizations based in Calcutta, especially the Bengal Congress, would lose much of their weight in all-India affairs as a result of the shift. Calcutta Municipal politics, in which the leaders of the Bengal Congress, had first made their mark, had been invested with countrywide importance in consequence of the fact that the city was the seat of the Government of India till 1912. Despite the obvious change in the city's status, Ray remarks that too much importance could not be attached to the impact of the transfer on the politics of Calcutta and Bengal. Calcutta was still vital to the wider imperial interests of British rule in India. After it ceased to be the governing centre of the Indian empire, it remained the focus of concentration for British economic interests. Of the joint stock European rupee capital employed in India in 1914, more than 80% was invested in Calcutta. Even after 1912, therefore, Calcutta's municipal politics continued to have a 'supra-

⁴ Das, Suranjan, 'The Politics of Agitation: Calcutta 1912-1947', Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta The living City*, Vol. I, p. 16.

local importance'. Since the stakes were high, a fierce battle went on for control of the city affairs.⁵

The decision to transfer the capital and abandon Calcutta was taken hurriedly. In a letter to the Earl of Crewe, Secretary of State for India, sent from Simla to London on 25 August 1911, Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India pointed out that it has 'long been recognized to be a serious anomaly' that the British governed India from Calcutta, located on the eastern extremity of its Indian possessions. He then turned to more pressing reasons to move away from Calcutta, which for 150 years had served as the British capital in India. The India Councils Act of 1909, a legislation passed by Britain's parliament known as the Morley -Minto reforms, had allowed Indians to stand for legislative council position for the first time. For years, the British had ruled from Calcutta, the commercial hub of India which the East India Company, in the eighteenth century, had developed into a colonial city. Hardinge argued that the rising importance of the elected legislative bodies meant that Britain needed to find a more centrally located capital.⁶ But Hardinge's subsequent point to Crewe explains why the British were in such a rush to get out of Calcutta. The Viceroy alluded to burgeoning opposition to British rule in Calcutta that was making it less than a hospitable home. Britain had faced a rising tide of calls to extend a measure of self-rule to India since the last nineteenth century. That movement became most violent in Calcutta, the commercial and literary centre of the country. In 1905, the British had partitioned Bengal, a massive and powerful province cantered on Calcutta into two portions in an attempt to weaken this opposition to their rule. The decision only inflamed nationalist sentiment, leading to a call for a boycott of British

⁵ Ray, Rajat, *Urban roots of Indian nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflicts of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 63 - 67.

⁶Comrade, 16 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

goods and, eventually, bombings and political assassinations in the city streets.

The plan of transfer, which King George announced at the Imperial Durbar, a gathering of Indian princes in Delhi, was a closely guarded secret before it was formally unveiled. It was acclaimed by those in Delhi but met with hostility from many other quarters, especially in Calcutta. The old city of Delhi which had been the capital of Mughal India, was selected to accommodate the British. Probably Hardinge had championed Delhi for its geographical position as the centre of North India; the aim of colonial rulers was to shift to a planned new city adjacent to the old one but fulfilling the needs of an imperial administrative apparatus.

Lord Curzon, who had taken the decision to partition Bengal criticized the decision of the transfer of capital. In Curzon's view, Delhi was located far from other important centres of British India, including Madras and Rangoon. He pointed out that the Mughals, long resident in Agra, had only made Delhi the capital in the expiring years of their regime. Curzon, while viceroy, had seen Delhi as a place to confer honors to India's princes. In 1903, he had organized an extravagant durbar in Delhi. But Curzon and other imperialists, had also tried to build up an independent imperial heritage and tradition of the British empire. That was why Curzon ordered the building of an imposing memorial to the late Queen Victoria in Calcutta, a city which the British had built into a colonial metropolis. In the end the Victoria Memorial was inaugurated in 1921, a decade after Calcutta had ceased to be the capital of British India.⁷ British colonial capitalists, largely located in Calcutta were also furious over the secrecy with which the transfer was made. The commercial classes viewed with apprehension the removal of the Government from all contact with

⁷*Comrade*, 16 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

mercantile and manufacturing interests. However, records show that their grievances were mitigated in the subsequent years, especially those of the First World War, when super-profits piled up.

In this chapter, a micro-level study of the city of Calcutta is undertaken during the two years (1911-12) immediately marked by capital transfer. The First Chapter deals with the response of the local and other sections of the press in Bengal and India on the issue of transfer. The acceptance of this transfer among the greater populace of Calcutta have also been enquired into. This chapter also deals with the social condition of Calcutta during the transfer- its population, life style, question of races and communities, urban planning and the setting up of Calcutta Improvement Trust and other related issues. The Second Chapter treats various aspects of the city's daily life as revealed through colonial records on the local press. It delves into the spheres of education, municipality, sports, health as well as the world of commerce in the city and investigates to what extent these aspects of the city's life were affected by the transfer of capital. Reports from local newspapers have also been taken into account to investigate the daily happenings in the city. The visit of King Emperor George V was a landmark event in Calcutta towards the end of 1911. Through an analysis of the primary sources on these events and occurrences, an attempt has been made to explore the middle and upper class perceptions of the colonial public sphere.

The transfer of capital and local responses

The years 1911 and 1912 witnessed an unprecedented event in the history of the city of Calcutta, for which it was not at all prepared. The British Government of India in 1911 decided to shift the nucleus of their power from Calcutta to Delhi and accordingly in 1912, the capital was transferred. The transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi, as Suranjan Das has remarked, indicated the British determination to evade future challenges to its authority.⁸ But how was this transfer of capital taken by the greater populace of Calcutta? What was the response of the local press to the scheme of the transfer? What was the material and political condition of Calcutta during the shift of capital? All these questions form the theme of this chapter.

The Indian and local press and the transfer of the capital

Nayak (15 December, 1911)⁹ welcomed the shift from Calcutta to Delhi. But it requested the Governor General to reside in Calcutta for at least two months every winter. The paper did not believe that the removal of the capital would do any harm to Calcutta. In *Nayak's* voice we thus see a loyalist overtone as it supported the British decision on the transfer of capital.

A moderate opinion was held by the *Beharee* (15 December, 1911).¹⁰ In commenting on the transfer of the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi, *Beharee* was quite aware that there would be considerable difference of opinion. It cautiously held that the step in the long run would not prove so menacing as it then did. In the opinion of this paper, the trade, commerce and industries could not suffer to any great extent. As the capital of a great presidency and a great sea port the paper predicted that Calcutta would continue to be the second town in India in matters of trade

⁸ Das, Suranjan, 'The Politics of Agitation: Calcutta 1912-1947', Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed). *Calcutta The Living City*, Vol I, p. 15.

⁹*Nayak*, 15 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁰*Beharee*, 15 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

and commerce. *Beharee* thus consoled the citizens of Calcutta that Calcutta would persist in retaining its importance even after the loss of its position as the capital city of the empire.

Comrade (16 December, 1911)¹¹ stated that the Imperial announcement related to the transfer of the seat of the Indian Government from Calcutta to Delhi had created a sensation throughout the country. The correspondence between the Indian Government and the Secretary of State regarding the matter had begun in August, but so strict had been the secrecy maintained that probably not more than a dozen persons knew about the change before it was announced. Excepting in Bengal where it touched certain vested interests too closely, the transfer of the Government seat to Delhi was received with considerable satisfaction in every other part of the country. Calcutta had made it possible for the Bengalis to loom beyond all proportions in all Indian affairs, and it was no fault of the Indian Government if it viewed public questions affecting the whole of the country sometimes in a false perspective and consequently blundered. In Delhi while perpetuating a great Imperial tradition and by finding an appropriate capital for a great empire, the Government would find the necessary detachment for the imperial conduct of the Indian affairs.

Prasun (22 December, 1911)¹² was happy to hear that Delhi was to be the capital of India. In its opinion, the fact of Calcutta being the metropolis was a thing for Bengal to glory in. But it did not mean that the interests of Bengal alone was to be considered in a matter like this. *Prasun* also reported that the Anglo-Indian press of Calcutta was most unhappy at this change and was apprehensive to the loss of trade. But such fears, appeared to *Prasun* to be

¹¹*Comrade*, 16 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹²*Prasun*, 22 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

groundless, judging from the commercial prosperity of Karachi and Bombay.

Thus the Indian press, or at least sections of the press which were concerned with the matter, did not seem to be overly worried about the consequences of the transfer. They did not raise a hue and cry that was expected of them in this context. Instead they criticized the European press since they opposed this transfer. *Jasohar*(16 December,1911) ¹³labeled the Anglo- Indian press as hypocrites who were bothered about the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi only because the interests of the Anglo- Indian shopkeepers were most likely to suffer by this scheme of transfer. *Sulabh Samachar* (22 December, 1911)¹⁴ also held similar views.

The objection of the European press was shared by those segments of the local press in Bengal which believed that the public sphere of the city would lose its wider significance and influence as a result of the transfer. They feared that the colonized intelligentsia, first formed in Bengal would lose not only its importance but also its livelihood. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (26 December,1911) ¹⁵marked a departure from many of its contemporaries. In its opinion Bengal was about to lose its prestige by the transfer of the Imperial seat of the Government, after the lapse of 150 years, to a city which was very far from it. The paper feared that the measure would not only affect the political status of the whole Bengali nation but also challenge the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Bengalis belonging to the bhadralok class. *Hindu Patriot* (15 December,1911)¹⁶ also belonged to the same group of exceptional newspapers who feared that with the transfer of capital, the worst would befall the city and the region. The paper claimed that the removal of the capital of India to Delhi

¹³*Jasohar*, 16 December,1911 *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁴*Sulabh Samachar*, 22 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁵*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 26 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁶ *Hindu Patriot*,15 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

from Calcutta was a serious blow to the prestige of Bengal and the question was one which was very delicate and difficult to tackle. It remarked that the opinion in Bengal was very strongly against it. *Hindu Patriot* anticipated a possible degradation of Calcutta. *Indian Mirror* (16 December, 1911) ¹⁷ questioned why the seat of the Government of India was being removed to Delhi. It wondered: 'Why Calcutta and its suburbs with Barrackpore and Howrah could not be retained as the seat of Government of India?' The paper remarked that Calcutta was a British made capital and it could not be abandoned in favour of Delhi. The paper recommended that Dhaka could have been a better place for the Governor of Bengal to reside in. Thus *Indian Mirror* while discouraging the proposal of capital transfer from Calcutta to Delhi, offered certain prescriptions for and criticized the British Government of India.

Muhammadi (5 January, 1912) ¹⁸ was the only paper to mention the impact on the impoverished Calcuttans when it said, even if in a sectional tone, that the removal of headquarters from Calcutta would cause immense loss to the poor Muslims who were stationed at Calcutta and were employed in the city as tailors, pressmen, compositors, duftrees, petty clerks, draftsmen, khansamas, baburchis, syces, coachmen, masons, carpenters and so forth. The local Muslim press thus seemed to be concerned with the transfer, like sections of the Hindu bhadralok press, on issues related to livelihoods. They therefore differed with the interests being put forward from North India by the Urdu press, such as the *Comrade*.

The local European Press

The European press in Calcutta was up in arms against the change when it was first announced. The non-official white community

¹⁷*Indian Mirror*, 16 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁸*Muhammadi*, 5 January, 1912, *Report on Native press*.

in the city as a class very powerful and their press was always ready to express and uphold their social interests. However, once the decision loomed on them as irrevocable and they realized their interests would remain unhampered, their tone, though not too enthusiastic, changed. Although they opposed the transfer proposal at the initial stage, they later came to realize that their economic base and political influence over the Eastern region of India will remain unhampered.

From 1912, they were singing a different tune. In the New Year, the *Capital* (4 January, 1912),¹⁹ as the mouthpiece of colonial capital, observed after the transfer had taken place that the shift of capital from Calcutta to Delhi would not affect Calcutta too much. The aim of this removal was to concentrate power and decision in the person of the viceroy and to relieve him from interminable absorption in secretariat details. The *Capital* opined that the removal of viceregal court from Calcutta did not mean decline of local trade but it meant opening up of Delhi as another market. It would also lead to a reduction of house and land values in Calcutta. The *Statesman* (11, January, 1912)²⁰ on the other hand noted that the transfer of Government capital from Calcutta to Delhi had already been taken very seriously by certain Calcutta papers and this was only natural. It remarked that if it was a delight for Delhi which was to be made the capital, in the same way, it was a disappointment for Calcutta to lose that position. But the paper admitted that no one, well acquainted with the work of Government of India and of the Government of Bengal, could fail to recognize the wisdom of removing the seat of the former Government from Calcutta and leaving the Government of Bengal to do its work, as every other local Government did. To the paper it seemed quite ridiculous to suppose that commerce in Calcutta was

¹⁹ *The Capital*, 4 January, 1912, vol 47, pg 28.

²⁰ *The Statesman*, 11 January, 1912, pg 8.

to be in any way affected by the change especially as there was to be a Governor in the city, upholding local and personal interests; it begged for a show of 'loyalty' and 'calm'.

The issue of capital transfer

Thus the issue of transfer did not raise extreme discontent among different segments of the press. The issue opened up certain political, economic, regional and parochial concerns but did not become a source of burning dispute and controversy. Bhavatosh Dutta has observed that the annulment of the partition in 1911 preoccupied the Bengalis so much that they did not pay much heed to the transfer of capital.²¹ This was certainly true for the Bengali bhadralok press. The 'settled fact' of partition when became 'unsettled'; the colonial Hindu Bengali intelligentsia was so overjoyed with this fact that the transfer of capital from Calcutta did not attract much attention from the Calcutta populace and in the Calcutta press.

The condition of Calcutta on the eve of the transfer of capital also showed why material realities did not provoke an outrage over the move. From the Census report of 1911, we learn that the growth rate of Calcutta's population was only 5.7% in 1911 which was about 18.6% lower than that of the previous decade. Calcutta's population during this period showed a centrifugal tendency, spreading out to Howrah and to all suburban municipalities except Cossipur and Chitpur. In 1911 Calcutta there were about 634 persons per square mile. This seems to suggest that the industrial belt surrounding Calcutta was expanding rapidly.²²

Owing to the migrating tendency of the population that would have earlier headed towards Calcutta, the suburban areas made considerable progress. But what led to such large scale migration from Calcutta to its suburban areas? It was probably the clearance

²¹ Dutta, Bhavatosh, *SaatSatero*, K. P. Bagchi, Calcutta, 1986, p. 57.

²² *Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta, 1901.*

of bastis (slums) in Calcutta and the consequent dispossession of the poor, the improved suburban traffic service and the development of large scale industries in Calcutta's neighbourhood.

Calcutta during this time had a cosmopolitan population, classified by colonial census-takers according to religion, gender and race. There were 2 females to every 5 male immigrants. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Animists populated the city. Half the population in the city in 1911 were composed of immigrants from outside, among whom Hindus predominated, there being 5 of them to every 2 Muslims. A small section of Buddhists who settled in Calcutta during this time, were Chinese. There were about 1919 Jews in contemporary Calcutta. Three fifth of these were Jewish people born in Calcutta and one fifth came from Arabia. In 1911, Calcutta accounted for 55% of the Europeans and allied 'races', 77% of the Armenians ,71% of the Anglo-Indians of Bengal.²³

So taken were they by spurious colonial anthropological definitions of race, the colonial census-makers observed:

"Blue patches on the skin are an infalliable proof of Mongolian descent. Such patches are quite common in Bengal. Both Hindus and Mussalmans high castes and low castes, aboriginals and others have them. The most reliable results were obtained in the Eden Hospital in Calcutta in 1911. Observations were made by the resident surgeons. There 61 out of 192 babies or nearly one third had blue patches at birth. They were usually noticed on the lower part of the back and over the hips. Their dimensions varied from the size of a rupee to the size of an adult's hand. The colour was always light blue. Out of 61 children, 11 were Eurasians, 10 were Kayasthas and 1 Jewish child. The remainder were

²³ *Ibid.*

Brahmans, Goalas, Telis, Kibartas, Gandhabaniks, Napits, Kumhars, Tantis, Bagdis, Indian Christians and Mussalmans.”²⁴

Though the population shrank in 1911, the industrial suburbs absorbed large segments of the poor and they did not represent the desperate social force in the city hostile to the idea of transfer. It would seem that as members of the unorganized sector, making a livelihood and surviving in the face of poverty were their primary concern at this stage. Job opportunities continued to exist in and around the city. Trade, commerce and industry did not decline. According to A.K. Bagchi, the Europeans controlled the most profitable manufacturing, planting and banking capital in eastern India, using Calcutta as their base. It must be remembered that most of the bigger enterprises were controlled by registered companies, the majority of which had Europeans as directors. These companies employed a much larger number of persons on an average than an ordinary establishment. In 1911 for example out of the 105 registered companies, 94 had European as directors, 4 had a combination of European, Eurasian and Indian directors, and only 7 had Indian directors.²⁵

There were about 495 enterprises in contemporary Calcutta to which 53471 employees were attached. About 14,840 workers among them were attached to the jute mills in Calcutta. There were about 11 chemical works in Calcutta in 1911.

Among them, Bengal Chemical Pharmaceutical Works founded by the scientist, Prafulla Chandra Roy was the most dynamic Indian enterprise, with roots in the preceding Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. There were about six soap factories, three stationery factories, one

²⁴*Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta*, 1911.

²⁵Bagchi, A.K., 'Wealth and Work in Calcutta 1860-1921', Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta The Living City*, Vol I, pp. 219-220.

card board and one perfumery factory in contemporary Calcutta. Calcutta had 99 printing presses during this time to which 1200 employees were attached. Most of these industries were established as an outcome of the swadeshi upsurge that had crept into Bengal since 1905. Many of its owners were trained abroad who gained enough knowledge in the art of running such industries. The Swadeshi movement and its aftermath directly boosted this trend. Swadeshi enterprise, which had its beginning with the Anti Partition movement in 1905, manifested itself in the city's life. The years preceding 1911-12 saw a nationalist upsurge touching Calcutta's politics, education, trade and commerce etc. Calcutta had witnessed its first organized labour movement during Swadeshi period also. Swadeshi, which made Calcutta its breeding ground, came to a pause at the turn of the decade. The Partition of Bengal was annulled in 1911, and this was probably the reason why the Swadeshi movement which had a vigorous start, lost its grip by the time of transfer. However the movement did not come to a total collapse. Throughout 1911-12 Swadeshi leaders like Maulavi Liakat Hossain and others presided over anti-partition meetings throughout Calcutta (mainly at Beadon Square and College Square); Swadeshi fairs were also held, although at a much smaller scale than before. *Nayak* (19 August, 1911)²⁶ reported that the Swadeshi Mela was opened on 7 August 1911. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (29 February, 1912)²⁷ reported that a conference of Swadeshi manufacturers and dealers came off at the Indian Association rooms. There were several well known figures present. It was resolved to form a National Trades Association with Babu Krishna Kumar Mitra as Honorary secretary. The Swadeshi trend thus did not fade away from the city as a whole but continued to maintain a minimal

²⁶*Nayak*, 19 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁷*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 29 February, *Report on Native Press*.

political existence and influenced economic as well as cultural initiatives.²⁸

There were about 9000 people who were employed as sweepers or scavengers in the city. There were about 1862 law practitioners in the metropolis. Out of 120 barristers in 1911 in Calcutta High Court, 22 were Europeans. About 110,000 Calcuttans during this period were dependent on domestic service. Over a quarter of a million of Calcutta's inhabitants in this period derived their living from industrial occupation and close to 200,000 from trade.²⁹ As A.K. Bagchi has pointed out, trading could be undertaken by almost any caste. In 1911, the Brahmins and the Kayasthas formed a third of the traders and outnumbered the members of all the mercantile castes such as Agarwalas, Gandhabaniks, Subarnabaniks and Telis taken together. However traders could designate both the haughty merchant princes or magnates of British business houses and banks, and the lowly peddler hawking a basket-load of wares on his head. In between came a whole range of shopkeepers, moneylenders and bankers, spread all over Calcutta. As such there was no large scale loss of job opportunities owing to the transfer of capital from the city.³⁰

The transfer of the capital and the establishment of the Calcutta Improvement Trust

Finally, a strategic administrative move regarding urban growth, alongside annulment of the Partition and continued economic prosperity, managed to silence the detractors of the partition who mostly occupied the upper echelons of colonial society. In 1911, when the King Emperor George V announced his decision at the Delhi Durbar to move the capital to Delhi, the Calcutta Improvement Bill was

²⁸ Sarkar, Sumit, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, P. 126-150

²⁹ *Census of the Town and Suburbs of Calcutta*, 1901.

³⁰ Bagchi, A.K., 'Wealth and Work in Calcutta 1860-1921', Sukanta Chowdhuri (ed.), *Calcutta The Living City*, Vol I, p. 216.

being debated in Bengal Legislative Council. This coincidence suggests that the creation of the Improvement Trust was a sop to the loss of the status the city had enjoyed as the capital of the Empire. The creation of the Calcutta Improvement Trust (C.I.T) in 1911 indicated that for the first time a consciously planned intervention was being formulated for an Indian city that would encompass much more than sanitation and conservancy. While explaining the goals, C. H. Bompas, the first president of the C.I.T, in the Bengal Legislature in 1911 said :

‘Calcutta is suffering from two maladies. It is cramped, and there are no means of access to suburbs. There are no channels for the circulation of the population. One of the principal works of the Trust will be to remedy that evil and to provide a cure for that malady. The Trust is to provide main thoroughfares which will render rapid transit possible, and will enable the population to spread over a greater area than it occupies at present, thereby removing congestion and overcrowding. But besides these, there are certain plague spots certain unhealthy areas which need to be exercised.’³¹

The promise of gentrification and property-development underlining his words were like music to the ears of local entrepreneurs.

Thus, the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi was a preplanned proposal of the British Government but to the influential sections of the local population, from Europeans to members of the Indian intelligentsia, it came as a ‘bolt from the blue’. Loyalist opinions supporting the move existed in and outside Bengal but voices of outrage could be heard also. But the European and local Indian antipathy to the proposal of the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi

³¹ Datta, Partho, *Planning the City: Urbanization and Reform in Calcutta C.1800-C. 1940*, p. 201. p. 233.

showed a downward graph. Except for a few articles in the native newspapers, no major protest was seen against this step; nowhere did the British Government face the kind of opposition that was seen during the anti -partition movement in 1905-06 and its aftermath. The overexcitement which pre-occupied the bhadralok intelligentsia at the annulment of partition in 1911, alongside continued economic significance of the city which mattered to all sections of urban society, made the transfer of capital a relatively less noticed event.

Chapter - 7

Everyday Issues during the Era of Capital Transfer

The aim of this chapter is to investigate aspects of daily life in the city of Calcutta which concerned the Indian middle-class and European public and were reflected in the press at a time when the city was losing its position as the capital of colonial India. It deals with education, municipal, sports, health, commercial and miscellaneous news centering on the city and its suburban areas. They prompt certain questions: to what extent were aspects of everyday living among the middle-classes and European ruling classes of the city and the region affected by the capital transfer? What did they reveal about social conditions in the city and beyond at the time? What was the attitude of the local newspapers to the British Government and vice versa? These are some of the themes that will be delved into. By tracing the micro-level developments in these spheres, an attempt is made to understand how the modernity of the colonial urban public sphere showcased hierarchies and discriminations rooted within the system of colonial rule.

The local press versus the colonial government

From the nineteenth century onwards, loyalty and opposition in the Indian press towards the government had been a source of concern to British authorities. While they regarded their authority as legitimate, the journalists often thought otherwise. Repeated and virulent criticisms in the press, made the government arm itself with deeply censorious press acts. The government also actively encouraged, through direct financial assistance, the development of pro-British public opinion in the public sphere rife with critical views and actions. This was revealed by independent-minded journalists. In the post-Swadeshi era, this was very much evident and 1911 was not an exception to this current. On the loyalist relaunching¹ of

¹Charu Mihir, 30 January, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

SambadPrabhakar, a Bengali paper dating back to the nineteenth century, under Government patronage, and edited by Rai Bahadur Narendranath Sen, *Charu Mihir* expressed its doubts regarding the intention of the Government in patronizing such papers. It wrote: ‘What is the object of the Government in pursuing this policy is yet unknown. Does the spread of loyalty constitute one of the objects of the publication of such newspapers or are these papers being published with a view to counteracting (the evil effects of) “the venom” that is vomited all over the country by the native owned journals?’ The strain of opposition could also be found in the condemnation of press regulations that undermined papers not dependent on government patronage. *Barisal Hitaishi* (6 February 1911) wrote against the suppression of *Daily Hitavadi*: ‘It may be easily imagined how gloomy the prospects of other papers are when a journal of the status of *Hitavadi* has failed to furnish securities. If the Press Act remains in force for some time, all the shining lights, as the poet puts it, will go out one by one, so that at length *Sulabh Samachar* edited by Rai Bahadur Narendranath Sen will shine alone, though only like a firefly in the gloom of night.’² These reports indicated the dual role played by the colonial Government regarding the publication of newspapers from Calcutta during this period.

Education as a site of debate

In Bengal, the content of education had become westernized in the nineteenth century and education was seen as the entry-point to civil professions by the Bengal intelligentsia. The Government’s policies towards education and indifference / mismanagement therefore frequently attracted attention and criticisms. In 1911, the newspaper pages devoted to education ranged from criticisms of the university’s exam syllabus to education rights of young revolutionary prisoners. Calcutta University’s overt loyalism came to be criticized. *Advocate of*

²*Barisal Hitaishi*, 6 February, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

Assam (19 February 1911) was astonished to find the exclusion of the critical writings of Edmund Burke from the curriculum for the B.A. examination of the Calcutta University, and the substitution of ‘Cowper’s Letters’ with Carlyle’s, ‘Heroes and hero worship’ in its place. The paper interpreted this as a defensive gesture on the part of the government and felt: ‘“Burke’s works have been in the hands of our students for almost a quarter of a century, and the question of their unsuitability was never raised before either by the authorities, the teachers, or the taught. In view of the circumstances of which the Government seem to take rather an undesirably serious view, the reading of Burke was absolutely necessary for the future generation.”’³

A striking news which pervaded the public sphere of Calcutta during this period was the Viceroy Lord Hardinge’s frequent visits to some of the student messes in the city. The mess system and the student community were identified as sources of sedition and recruitment ground of revolutionary nationalist groups. The Viceroy’s overture was aimed at winning over segments of the educated youth who were displaying signs of hostility towards British rule. *Assam Bani* (2 March 1911) reported: ‘the lively interest in the welfare of students displayed by His Excellency the Viceroy, who was reported to have recently paid a visit to some students’ hostels in Calcutta, was without a parallel in the history of British rule, and reflected great credit on His Excellency.’ The paper concluded by saying that Lord Hardinge was indeed ‘a worthy representative of His Majesty, the King Emperor, who always took a very keen interest in the welfare of his subjects.’⁴ The positive aspect of such visits was also pointed out by *Jyoti* (2 March 2011). The paper had ‘no doubt

³*Advocate of Assam*, 19 February, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴*Assam Bani*, 2 March, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

that high Government officials would be influenced by the noble example set by His Excellency and would be more sympathetically disposed towards students' and 'hoped that, as a result of this example, Government policy with regard to them would be considerably modified.'⁵ Such loyalist praise, accompanying the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Viceroy did not lead to the political persecution of students by the colonial government or the tendency among some of them to join revolutionary groups. Hardinge himself became a target of revolutionary nationalists and died from a symbolic bomb attack in New Delhi immediately after the capital shifted there.

At a time when the top administrator of the colonial state was trying to improve the government's relations with the student community, the harsh and overtly loyalist position of the government-run Calcutta University towards ex-revolutionary youth generated controversy. *Barisal Hitaishi* (6 March 1911) referred to the refusal of Calcutta University to admit Susil Kuma Sen, one of the accused in the Alipore Bomb Case who was acquitted by the High Court, to the Matriculation Examination, and remarked that on the eve of his departure to England, Lord Hardinge was pleased to observe on one occasion that 'a little kindness shown to disaffected young men would repay itself a thousand fold by the spread in India of a warmer feeling of loyalty and devotion to the Empire.' The paper went on to say: 'His Excellency also expressed the hope that unrest would disappear under the influence of sympathy, kindness and tact. The course adopted by Calcutta University in regard to Susil Kumar's case does not, however, seem to conform to the policy laid down by His Excellency.' The paper wondered 'how Susil Kumar would manage to earn his livelihood in future? Would he not find his

⁵ *Jyoti*, 2 March, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

prospect in life utterly gloomy? Will he have to commit suicide or take to the life of an ascetic to atone for his disloyalty? True it was that even Lord Morley had described young men who take part in political agitation as “our enemies”; were then such men to be envied when they endeavour to earn a modest livelihood for themselves?’ The paper professed loyalism but held that criticisms of the government’s actions often proved beneficial to the rulers and the ruled, which prompts it to say a word or two in regard to this particular case. It argued that since offenders like Susil Kumar were insignificant in terms of influence or authority, the university should have displayed magnanimity in his case by following the spirit expressed by the Viceroy.

The student admission policy of the Calcutta University was also criticized for its bureaucratic structure. *Muhammadi* (23 June 1911)⁶ chastised the university authorities regarding the extraordinary delay in the publication of results of the intermediate examination, which according to the paper, inflicted a good deal of hardship on Mussalman students, who were generally very poor. According to the paper, many of these students had intended to get admitted into the Medical College and Engineering College, but by the time the results were out, the last date for admission into these colleges, had expired. The paper angrily asked the Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University, who was responsible for delay to furnish those poor students with ‘the wherewithal to maintain themselves for a year’ since they had to wait for a full year before they could be admitted into the Medical College or the Engineering College. While these actions of the Calcutta University were being severely criticized, individual colleges and their achievements as centres

⁶*Muhammadi*, 23 June, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

of higher learning were lauded. The Sanskrit College of Calcutta, for instance, was praised by some of the contemporary newspapers. *Siksha Samachar* (5 July, 1911) was 'exceedingly glad' to notice that the Calcutta Sanskrit College 'was making progress under the management of the Principal Mahamahopadhyay Satishchandra Bidyabhusan. *Hitavadi* (23 June 1911)⁷ also expressed a similar view.

A rumour floating around the educational sphere of Calcutta in 1912 was the possible abolition of the Shibpur Engineering College. Since it was the only recognized institution teaching technical and industrial education, its survival was seen as crucial in the middle-class press. *Pratihar* (9 February 1912) held: 'If the Shibpur Engineering College was abolished, the Bengalis would be practically prevented from studying Engineering, for few of them would have the means and opportunity to study it at Roorki.'⁸ The hunger for technical education and the need to set up local industries had been growing in the region since the nineteenth century and were fuelled by the constructive programme of the Swadeshi Movement. The wider context of this rumour indicated the deep and inherited distrust towards a government that had always been antagonistic towards the development of local entrepreneurship and the economic and political competition it could pose to British owned commercial and industrial enterprises. It was also directed against the British Government, suspected of trying to destroy the national education program which by this time had become a reality.⁹

The issue of transforming the middle-class along fully-fledged 'modern'/bourgeois lines underlined most heated discussions on

⁷*Hitavadi*, 23 June, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁸*Pratihar*, 9 February, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

⁹Sarkar, Sumit, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, pp. 126-127.

education including those on corruption within and government neglect of certain institutions. They were often related to the twin issues of community identity and middle-class self-advancement. This was evident from the way *Muhammadi* (12 April 1911)¹⁰ drew public attention to the state of affairs in the Calcutta Madrassah, the pioneer institution of Muslim learning in the city. *Muhammadi* considered the interest of the Calcutta Madrassah to be in danger in the hands of a few mean minded and arrogant teachers who were gradually becoming emboldened in their corrupt practices, by taking advantage of the indifference of the Director of Public Instruction and 'the love of flattery and feeling of delicacy' on the part of the Principal of the institution. The higher authorities were also charged with indifference in the matter. The paper made the serious charge that question papers for annual and final examinations were being sold for ten rupees each and finding their way to the offices of Muslim newspapers. The protest of these papers in the matter were proving useless. The paper warned the colonial authorities that it had to keep in mind that the subject would receive attention of Mussalman Educational Conference and the Muslim League and might be, if necessary, be brought before the Civil Court.

It is clear from these reports that education and higher learning and the opportunities offered to the middle-classes of the region remained a thorny issue and a lasting source of anti-government criticism.

¹⁰*Muhammadi*, 12 April, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

Voices of social conservatism and communal tension

Various incidents taking place in Calcutta during 1911-1912 also generated interest and controversy in the pages of newspapers. They reflected an entrenched streak of conservatism among the Hindu *bhadralok* intelligentsia despite liberal reforms of the past century. *Biswavarta* (21 April 1911)¹¹ published a report on an incident of 'Sutee' in Calcutta, and said: 'the Deputy Commissioner of Police has done a distinct service to the Hindu community by allowing the relations of the Sutee to cremate her body. The entire Hindu society should remain grateful to this high minded Englishman for the sympathy and generosity he displayed on such a critical occasion.' The report revealed the persistence of an ultra-conservative patriarchal sentiment among high-caste Hindu Calcuttans who were still opposed to gender reforms that made their presence felt in nineteenth century Calcutta. Thus, so many years after the abolition of the Sati system a widow could be murdered and the incident reported in the heart of the city without much opposition.

The conservative mentality of the Hindu Calcuttans was also reflected in the following news put up in the column of *Siksha* (13 July 1911)¹²: 'According to Hindu belief, if the bones of a deceased person were thrown into a sacred river or the sea, it blessed the departed soul and the reverse produced the opposite result. It was therefore painful to learn that the bones collected at the burning places of Calcutta were thrown away along with the filth of the city. Some satisfactory arrangement needed to be made for their disposal.' *Bangavasi* (16 July, 1911)¹³ also held similar views.

¹¹*Biswavarta*, 21 April, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹²*Siksha*, 13 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹³*Bangavasi*, 16 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

It felt 'adequate steps were to be taken to prevent the deposit of the sacred ashes of the funeral pyres of Hindus among heaps of filth. The arrangement that had the effect of paining and rendering uneasy thousands of Hindus, required to be discontinued without delay.' The paper recommended: 'Let the Viceroy, the officiating Lieutenant-Governor, the Chairman of the Corporation of Calcutta, and the Commissioner of Police, bestir themselves in the matter' as 'they only voice the opinion of lakhs of Hindus.'

A sense of Hindu conservatism and a middle-class puritanical streak, indirectly connected with experiences of racist discrimination, could be detected in a report of *Hitavadi* (27 October, 1911).¹⁴ Referring to the advertisement by Messers McLaren of Calcutta of a whisky labeled 'Kali whisky', *Hitavadi* (27 October, 1911) said that it had a strong objection to the printing of the images of gods and goddesses on cigarette boxes and wine bottles, or naming such articles after religious deities. The paper wondered if this was not calculated to wound Hindu feelings. It questioned how Christians would react if one were to name ganja or any other intoxicant after the name of Jesus.

Hindu conservatism and communal bhadrakal attitude towards Muslim lower classes were also evident from the report of *Nayak* (7 July, 1911),¹⁵ where a correspondent remarked: 'Khansamas of Europeans in Calcutta often made travelling by tram-cars in the city extremely unpleasant for Hindus by carrying food for their masters in the cars. Needless to say that the kinds of food which Europeans take generally are considered unclean and untouchable by Hindus. With such food the Khansamas sit by the side of Hindus in

¹⁴*Hitavadi*, 27 October, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁵*Nayak*, 7 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

tramcars and often purposely made the plates touch their bodies. If any Hindu passenger remonstrated with a Khansama for this, he is generally abused and insulted. Is there no remedy for this? The authorities of the Tramway Company were requested to look into the matter.'

Regarding the sanitary condition of the city, *Suvarnabanik*(3 June, 1911)¹⁶ complained of 'the public nuisance caused by the hide godowns, situated in Chitpore Road, Coolotola Street, Surti Bagan, etc which were responsible for the extremely insanitary condition of those localities. Apart from the offensive smell which came out of the godowns, especially during the rainy season, they had turned the localities into hot beds of plague and other epidemics. The paper, therefore, suggested that these godowns should be removed from the city as soon as possible.' Thus as far as the general health of the city was concerned, we see the Hindu press to be overly concerned with insanitary conditions in Muslim majority areas.

The Muslim press also occasionally retaliated in kind. *Muhammadi*(15 March, 1912)^{17,18} wrote that it had received many letters in which the writers complained on the basis of their experience that dealers in ghee at Tiretta Bazaar and Barabazaar in Calcutta, adulterate the staple cooking item with the fat of serpents and all sorts of dead animals as also with 'bloomless oil'.

Theatre and censorship

Theatre united sections of the conservative Hindu and Muslim press in a clamour for state intervention and censorship while

¹⁶*Suvarnabanik*, 3 June, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

¹⁷*Muhammadi*, 15 March, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

revealing communal undercurrents. Under the Dramatic Performance Act of 1878, Bengali theatre was censored and regulated. One of the restrictions imposed was on the hours of performance. *Nayak* (5 July 1911), with puritanical and loyalist zeal, declared:

‘In contravention of the rule that no public theatre in Calcutta should hold performances after 1A.M, without the special sanction of the Chairman of the Calcutta Corporation, the theatres in Beadon Street have for sometime past been holding performances till even 4 or 4.30 A.M. The fines which they have to pay for such violation of law are too small in comparison with the profit they make thereby and, consequently fail to act as a deterrent. The attention of the City Fathers is drawn to the matter. It is suggested that the maximum amount of fine in such cases should be greatly increased and that a theatre found guilty of violating the law on three successive occasions should be deprived of its license for holding public performances.’

Referring to the prohibition of the performance of the drama entitled ‘Ahamori’(ah; how nice) by a notification in the *Calcutta Gazette, Muhammadi* (1 September 1911) ¹⁹ observed:

‘The officer, through whose negligence or fault such an immoral or defamatory piece was permitted to be enacted on the public stage should be seriously taken to task. The Calcutta Theatres are often found to stage dramas, the purpose of which

¹⁹*Muhammadi*, 1September, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

seems nothing but to vilify Mussalman rulers and emperors and to lower all Mussalmans in the estimation of the public. Moreover, the principal playwrights often pander to the vitiated taste of the public. In this way the performances held in Calcutta theatres often deeply wound the feelings of non Hindu communities. The attention of the Lieutenant Governor is drawn into the matter.'

While the Indian Press decried censorship imposed on newspapers, moral and communal positions often led to advocacy of theatre censorship. The two positions were not seen as contradictory. Hindu bhadrakalok playwrights caricatured Muslims in a communal vein and the Muslim press criticized this tendency; communal attitudes therefore strengthened the authoritarianism of the government in a cultural sphere that was one of the foremost sources of anti-colonial opinion.

Complaints on infrastructure

A source of permanent complaint, voiced by Europeans as well as Indians, was the lack of adequate civic infrastructure. However, while the European opinion was concerned only with areas over which they held sway, the Indian press often raised wider issues that concerned the colonial city as a whole. Regarding the state of roads in the business quarter of Calcutta, the *Capital* (31 October, 1912)²⁰ observed that the Corporation of Calcutta had decided to surface Council House Street, Dalhousie Square, North, and the unpaved portion of the Lyons Range with tar macadam. There had always been an opinion, the paper pointed out, that wood was the best and most durable material for Calcutta thoroughfares. But the Corporation men understood that its

²⁰*Capital*, volume 59, October-December, 1912, p.

cost was prohibitive and so it could not be introduced. During the past years or so the citizens of Calcutta have watched with interest the gradual introduction of tar macadam, which by then have appeared to have got beyond the experimental stage. The Calcutta citizens accordingly welcomed the decision of the Corporation to lay it in the streets named. But they thought that a further extension of it was very necessary. The Bengal Chamber of Commerce strongly recommended to the Corporation that the following streets should also be surfaced, namely Dalhousie Square, West, Charnock Place, and Clive Street to at least as far as the Canning Street intersection. If these were done, a fairly extensive proportion of the street area in the business quarter could be greatly improved, and in view of the constantly developing traffic there could have been no doubt that the improvement was urgently necessary.

While the colonial capitalists were concerned with their own physical well-being at the centre of the city, *Basumati* (5 August 1911)²¹ remarked on the state of mental health visible in the roads and pavements: 'it is a pitiful sight to behold male and female lunatics in large numbers on the streets of Calcutta. The arrangement that these unfortunate creatures are to be let alone so long as they remained quiet, and are to be removed to a lunatic asylum only when they became violent is one that would furnish an appropriate theme for a Comedy of Moliere. It is hoped that the officiating Lieutenant Governor would cause steps to be taken to do away with this pitiful spectacle.' As far as the general health of the city was concerned, *Hindu Patriot* (2 March 1912),²² referred to the spread of tuberculosis in Calcutta. It proposed the

²¹*Basumati*, 5 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

²²*Hindu Patriot*, 2 March, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

formation of a commission to investigate the problem, and devise immediate means to check it. The journal hoped the Government and those of its medical men who were anxious for the preservation and development of the nation, will do their best to enlighten the people by means of lectures, pamphlets, magic lanterns, etc. It mourned that poverty, coupled with superstitious ignorance of laws of sanitation were decimating the 'unfortunate land'. The paper highlighted the class character of the diseased and the lack of health-care but stopped short of holding the government responsible for its deliberate neglect of the impoverished and their medical needs.

The Indian press also drew attention to racial discriminations in the maintenance of civic facilities. *Hitavarta* (26 October 1911) ²³ held that only a God could escape without being besmeared with dirt after a visit to Barabazaar and other roads in the native quarter. The contrast between roads of the European and native quarters led the paper to attribute the unsatisfactory condition of the latter to the indifference of the representatives of that quarter at the Corporation, and to suggest that the people would do well to select at the next election, men who attended to the good of their wards instead of being 'ornamental figures'. The disrupted filtered water supply also become a recurring problem to Calcuttans during this period. *Moslem Hitaishi* (8 September 1911)²⁴ observed:

'the frequent irregularities in the supply of filtered water in Calcutta are not only disgraceful to the Calcutta Corporation, but highly troublesome to the rate payers. The supply sometime stops for even eight or ten hours, and as the system of

²³*Hitavarta*, 26 October, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

²⁴*Moslem Hitaishi*, 8 September, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

constant supply of water has led to the discontinuance of the practice of storing in; such a stoppage cannot fail to cause the utmost hardship to the residents of the city. About a fortnight ago, the supply was stopped at Kareya from eight in the evening to four or five in the morning of the next day. The suffering that is caused to the local Mussalmans is indescribable. Again on the 29th August last the supply was stopped at Kareya at noon. This being the time of Ramjan when Mussalmans observe strict fast during day time, water is indispensably necessary for them in the afternoon and night; consequently the suffering caused by the stoppage of its supply is found to be intense. Is there no means of preventing such stoppage of water supply? Cannot the ward Commissioners bestir themselves in the matter with atleast a fraction of the zeal with which they bestir themselves for collecting votes at times of election? Notice should be given by beat of drum atleast twelve hours before the stoppage of water supply in any ward.'

As Rajat Ray has pointed out it was probably a weak representation of the Muslim community in the Calcutta Corporation which aggravated the problems linked with lack of civic infrastructure in certain neighbourhoods.²⁵

²⁵ Ray, Rajat, *Urban roots of Indian Nationalism: Pressure Groups and Conflicts of Interests in Calcutta City Politics, 1875-1939*, p.31.

Commerce and industry

While the Indian press complained about lack of civic and medical infrastructure afforded to Indians, the Europeans, it would seem had very little to complain about. *Capital*, the voice of colonial business monopolies, regularly reported on the city's profitable commercial activities under European ownership with a tone of general satisfaction.

The *Capital*(10 October 1912) in its report on the tea market remarked that though the quality of tea on offer was not of the best standard and sales were lower, buyers, especially from Russia, were available and large quantities were sold even if the volume was less than the amount sold the year before.²⁶The *Capital*(23 May 1912)²⁷ also reported on the value of the export trade from Calcutta to foreign countries during 1911-1912 as amounting was almost 86 Crores of rupees. Of this, jute and jute manufactures represented only Rs. 35 Crores, grain and seeds Rs. 17.34 Crores, tea nearly Rs. 9 Crores. The value of the coal exported was Rs 77 Lakhs but the quantity included a large revenue to the railways and port trust, public rather than private bodies owned by the government. The three great items of import into Calcutta were cotton goods, metal and sugar. These represented 65% of the total. Oil amounted to 3.5%, machinery and millwork came to 2.9%, railway material to 2.5%, hardware and cutlery to 2.4%; the value of these seven items constituted upto 76% of the total. Of the cotton goods imported, Great Britain produced and exported 94% of their value; of the machinery 87%, of the railway plants 96%; of hardware 63%. This system of one-way free-trade, devised to keep the profit coming out of a captive colonial market for British machine-made finished

²⁶*Capital* , Vol.49, October-December 1912.

²⁷*Capital*, Vol 48, April –June 1912.

industrial products, made the *Capital* observe with a note of self-satisfaction: 'There is not much complain here and no case for tariff reform.' The *Capital* (31 October 1912)²⁸ also reported happily that the colonial infrastructure was being fine-tuned to suit the needs of colonial capital. It observed that the Calcutta Port Commissioners had 'finally woke up to their responsibilities to the import trade, from which for so many years they have derived an enormous profit. It had been reported that at a recent meeting a note was submitted by the Vice Chairman on the very inadequate accommodation at the jetties and an estimate was approved for providing an additional 30,820 square feet of covered space at a cost Rs 41,260 to be charged to capital. So far it was so good.' This statement clearly showed it regarded the colonial authorities as partners in their private enterprise and an arm of European owned businesses.

A vigorous defence of European private property was also mounted even when the enterprise concerned had a public purpose. The *Capital* (18 July 1911)²⁹ published the following news and views:

'A man and his servant were fined Rs 10, a few days ago at the instance of the Calcutta Tramway Co. on a charge of sticking bills on the electric wire posts of the Company. It was hoped that this sentence would serve to open the eyes of others who made free with other people's walls and posts for the purpose of advertisement, to the fact that they were liable to suffer the penalties of the law. Advertising by means of glaring coloured boards was one of the evils of the contemporary

²⁸*Capital*, Vol 52, 31 October, 1912.

²⁹*Capital*, Vol 51, 18 July 1912.

civilization in many a European city and rural districts too. In Calcutta the evil had not, by then attained to large proportions, but those who practiced it, had little or no respect for private property. On many a compound wall small tablets of startling hues striked their mercenary vale without the permission of the owners of the wall. If all the people whose walls were so desecrated, followed the example of the Tramways Company our streets could have obtained a better appearance in future.'

Spectacles

Spectacular or unusual events attracted the attentions of the middle-class public and press. Calcutta during 1911-12 testified to this tendency in the responses to a historic football victory and the royal visit. In describing the football match between Mohun Bagan and East Yorks, which was to decide the winner of the I.F.A Shield, *Telegraph* (5 August, 1911)³⁰ was pleased to see that the victory of the former was well taken by the English population of Calcutta since it was a fair contest, 'fairly and gallantly fought on both sides in a friendly spirit, without anything like race, hatred and rancor finding any place in the hearts of the combatants. Those who had been looking forward to a bombardment of Fort William by Bengal athletes, as also those who had been bargaining for a military revolt against peace and order, were equally disappointed.' The paper concluded by saying that the game throughout was most exhilarating and square, and there was nothing like 'ill-motive' on either side. Thus, as far as the sports of the city during this period was concerned, the victory of Mohun Baagan was not projected

³⁰*Telegraph*, 5 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

as a racial debacle by Europeans, at least in public, since they could not afford to do so. However, Indians saw it differently and gave a nationalist dimension to the event.

The landmark event of Calcutta in those years was perhaps the Royal visit. While the visit of the imperial figureheads was at a planning stage, voices of disquiet on the future of Empires could not be suppressed. *Dacca Gazette* (6 February 1911), published an article ‘on the authority of a Calcutta astrologer named Lalit Mohan Jyotirbhusan of 28 Shibtoila Street’ who ‘among other matters mostly agricultural, commercial and sanitary, predicts that all the monarchs throughout the world are likely to have a rather inauspicious time of it during the coming Bengali year. The monarchs of Europe are likely to suffer great distress.’³¹ His millenarian predictions from Calcutta at a time of heightened tensions and rivalries in Europe came a bit early and showed he had read the elements of the present to forecast the blood-soaked future a little too hastily.

We get a glimpse of this event from many of the contemporary newspapers which welcomed the visit but took the opportunity to criticize the colonial authorities in direct and indirect ways. *Muhammadi* (12 January, 1912)³² combined a sudden surge of loyalism with unease over the looming capital transfer. It wrote: ‘the history of Calcutta during Their Imperial Majesty’s stay in the city should be written in letters of gold. Their Imperial Majesties charmed the public by their tender treatment of all people, and the public gave ample evidence of unstinted loyalty to them. In the midst of all this joy, one is sting with a sharp pain when it arises in one’s mind that Calcutta will in future be practically

³¹*Dacca Gazette*, 6 February, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

³²*Muhammadi*, 12 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

deprived of seeing it's Viceroy, not to speak of seeing the sovereign.' The writer concluded on a gloomy note that henceforth Calcutta will slide downwards.

Amrita Bazar Patrika(15 December 1911)³³ described the preparations in Calcutta on the eve of the Royal visit by drawing attention to built-in discriminations along racial lines and repeated the demand for adequate civic infrastructure in the Indian neighbourhoods:

‘The European quarter of the town is receiving every attention from the Civic Fathers, commensurate with the importance of the occasion. But what of the northern quarter - nay, all those localities which are occupied by the Indian subjects of Their Gracious Majesties? Not only does the journal find no effort on the part of the municipal authorities to improve them in any way, but the condition of roads, lanes, etc, is wretched, to say the least of it.’

Bangavasi (30 December 1911),³⁴ in a consistently loyal tone, referred to the signs of rejoicing apparent everywhere in the city at the impending visit and glorified Job Charnock over the immense change ‘for the better which has come over the humble town of which he laid the foundation’ and winded up ‘with an expression of hope that, if necessary, the personal intervention of the King Emperor will secure to the meanest of his subjects a greater opportunity to get a sight of his person than the arrangements now may provide.’ It attached the demand for free speech by concluding that if the government was thinking

³³*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁴*Bangavasi*, 30 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

of offering 'boons' to the subjects on this occasion, the paper would suggest the abolition of the Press Act to be one of them.

Sulabh Samachar (29, December 1911)³⁵ in connection with the Royal visit wrote on a bitter note: 'We notice that not even all members of the Reception Committee have been invited to Princep's Ghat ; small subscribers have been ignored. The press too, has been similarly treated, selected representatives only having been invited. Want of space may be a real difficulty, but at least space for all press representatives should have been found.' *Nayak* (1 January 1912)³⁶ jokingly held that while 'oriental etiquette expected the King Emperor, on the day of his entry into Calcutta, to halt for a moment before the Victoria statue along the route of the procession to show reverence to his illustrious grandmother. But unfortunately such ideas does not occur to western people.' The paper thanked 'the authorities responsible for the entertainment of the school children on the maidan, on the day of the King's arrival, for their good arrangements. Everything passed off without a hitch. The presents given to the boys on the occasion will be treasured by them. And when His Imperial Majesty next shows himself to the public, he might wear a 'pugree' instead of a hat which largely screens his face from the gaze of his loving subjects.' The *Nayak* (4 January 1912)³⁷ criticized the local colonial bodies for they 'cannot find anything worth exhibiting before the King Emperor in the fireworks and torch light tattoo which came off on the maidan the other day.' It also dealt an indirect blow to forces of

³⁵*Sulabh Samachar*, 29 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁶*Nayak*, 1 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁷*Nayak*, 4 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

law and order in the city by observing sarcastically: 'The crowd which assembled on the occasion was a record one, but because of the absence of officious constables everything passed off without a hitch.' The *Nayak* (8 January 1912),³⁸ however, took the opportunity to make sectarian observations on those not of orthodox Hindu persuasions: 'The only places which were not illuminated on the 6th instant, were the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj building and the shoe maker's shops at Thanthania. The Mussalman quarters of the city also were not much decorated. The Mussalmans may have been displeased at the annulment of the partition of Bengal. But why was not the Brahmo Samaj building illuminated?'

Referring to the enthusiastic ovation given to the royal couple by the Bengalis, *Hitavadi* (5 January 1912)³⁹ couched the reality of race relations by praising the monarch on glowing terms:

'The manner in which the King Emperor has deported himself towards his Indian subjects is so charming and endearing that a new era will be inaugurated in India if the Anglo Indians took their cue from His Imperial Majesty in this respect. His Imperial Majesty has proved that his Indian subjects are not inferior in position to his other subjects; he has brought love and sympathy where there were envy and hatred; he has poured the water of peace on the fire of unrest. It, therefore, rends our heart to think that Their Imperial Majesties will soon leave this country. Victory, victory to Their Imperial

³⁸*Nayak*, 8 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

³⁹*Hitavadi*, 5 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

Majesties, May God grant them health, prosperity and long life.'

Mahamaya (10 January 1912)⁴⁰ also praised the monarch as an individual and related, 'as an instance of the nobility of the King Emperor's heart, how, on the occasion of his visit to the Calcutta zoo, His Imperial Majesty personally interfered and prevented Lord Hardinge from warning off some Bengali visitors to the gardens from a too close proximity to the Imperial person.' The paper concluded that though the royal couple had left the Indian shores, the happy memory of their visit was to survive. It felt 'In spite of the wide physical distances intervening now between them and their Indian subjects, their hearts are now close to one another.' 'Wishing God speed to Their Majesties', the *Marwari* (10 January 1912)⁴¹ described 'the sad look of the town on the morning following the departure of Their Majesties from Calcutta, so gay and brilliant during their stay.' It echoed the view that the love of the monarch towards his native subjects bore no comparison. Ironically the celebratory and tragic notes that had crept in did not fully address the fact that the royal visit had been occasioned by the Delhi Durbar, an expensive and grandiose spectacle to celebrate the shift of the imperial capital to Delhi from Calcutta.

The press and the public sphere during 1911-12 displayed an array of critical and laudatory attitudes towards colonial authority. They also revealed that aspects of everyday living had crept into the present from the past and were likely to persist. The wider picture of the times was no doubt underwritten by the transfer of capital and the long-term prospect of Calcutta's declining importance in the imperial map. However, in the public

⁴⁰*Mahamaya*, 10 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴¹*Marwari*, 10 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

arena and in the short-term, everyday life was unaffected by this reality.

Crime, Policing and Law in the Era of Capital Transfer

Our narrative traverses down the streets of Calcutta. In contrast to the earlier sections which explored middle and upper-class perceptions of the colonial public sphere as expressed through the press, this section seeks to explore the working of the wider colonial society by examining the scope of crime, police activities and working of the courts. It is argued that while the transfer of capital was taking place, a set of social or anti-social patterns that covered the interface between colonial law and order and everyday life of common people in the city continued as before. However, certain incidents also occurred that were specifically related to the transfer.

Crime

The contemporary press regularly reported major and petty crimes. While the loyalist press denounced revolutionary nationalism as violent ‘anarchism’ which violated the colonial order, the press in general wanted the colonial law and order machinery to prevent petty crimes which harmed the interests of propertied Indians. Through these reports what emerges is a picture of repression and insecurity as well as anti-colonialism among sections of the middle-class youth and chronic poverty which pushed some of the poor or less well-off people towards crime.

Gaura Dutta (27 February, 1911)⁴² informs us of the ‘foul murder’ of Srish Chandra Chakrabatti, a head constable attached to the Calcutta Criminal Investigation Department. The paper expressed

⁴²*Gaura Dutta*, 27 February, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

deep regret that no effective check had been put 'on the murderous proclivities of the perpetrators of such outrages, who were, as the paper claims, nothing but ghouls in human shape.' The colonial police, an essential organ of the colonial administrative apparatus, was a target of popular discontentment and the head constable's killing had a political dimension since it was committed by revolutionary nationalists. Referring to a recent bomb outrage in Calcutta, *CharuMihir*(7 March ,1911)⁴³ observed that society never encouraged anarchists.It reported that most of these 'anarchists' were young boys who did nothave the sense to decide what would or would not be benefit the country. The paper held the opinion that these boys were secretlyworking for the ruin of the country, like thieves and robbers. While both the papers condemned revolutionary terrorism, they did not see the state as a source of authoritarian terror of the imperial variety.

More mundane and small-scale acts of a criminal nature pre-occupied the press. From goondaism in central Kolkata to the news of kidnapping, cheating and gender violence found their way into the papers. *Bengalee* (30 June, 1911)⁴⁴ drew attention to the reappearance of hooliganism in Bara Bazaar, and invited the Commissioner of Police to put an effective stop to it. *Suvarnavanik*(27 May,1911)⁴⁵ reported that some kidnappers had appeared in Calcutta and they had already spirited away three children. The paper asked the police to keep a sharp look out and also advised the parents to be careful about their children. In drawing attention to the 'daylight robbery' carried on at the New market regularly by public vendors of commodities or shopkeepers , who sold their wares by weights or measures,

⁴³*Charu Mihir*, 7 March, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁴*Bengalee*, 30 June, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁵*Suvarnavanik*, 27 May, 1911,*Report on Native Press*.

Indian Echo (14 July, 1911)⁴⁶ quoted the case of a gentleman, who was 'shamefully cheated'. In view of this and similar occurrences, the journal suggested that a weight and measure department needed to be created and an inspector and his assistants could do away with false weights. The shopkeepers in contemporary Calcutta also were not beyond the grip of petty crimes like cheating the customers or at least accusations of such acts. An old Calcutta proverb, holding up the image of the city as: 'jal, juochuri, mitthye katha, ei tin niyekolikata' (fraud, forgery and falsehood—these three make up Calcutta), seem to have persisted in public concerns.

Dainik Chandrika (11 August, 1911)⁴⁷ referred to two incidents of alleged attempted molestation of women by a Eurasian on the platform of the Sealdah Railway Station in the course of a single night, and remarked that the incidents were really of an astounding nature, for none but a mad man was capable of making such an attempt at such a place. The paper expressed surprise that no policeman came in spite of the clamour that was made. The paper demanded an enquiry into the matter. *Sanjivani* (24 August, 1911)⁴⁸ highlighted the activities of goondas at the Kalabaganbasti in Calcutta. According to the writer, who claimed to be a man who had 'suffered', petty thefts were everyday occurrences there. He writes: 'No one's umbrella or bicycle is safe amongst the budmashes of the basti.' If a thief was caught, twenty others set on him and released the culprit. Even women helped the criminal and forcibly took things from people. The writer bitterly complained that the *bhadraloks* who inhabited the area were afraid of

⁴⁶*Indian Echo*, 14 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁷*Dainik Chandrika*, 11 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁴⁸*Sanjivani*, 24 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

doing anything against them. The 'budmashes' were organized. They had their *sardar* who kept horses and carriages. If any person who had been robbed could detect the item taken, the *sardar* returned his property. The correspondents was returned to him in this way and he was driven for sometime in an excellent rubber tyred carriage belonging to the thieves.

Thus Calcutta during this period, registered the persistence of organized crime born of poverty. Among criminals from the impoverished lower classes, if the correspondent was to be believed, certain codes of survival and honour persisted. They took from the rich and helped themselves but occasionally returned the goods through their leader. These Robin Hoods of Calcutta were definitely a continuous threat to the local inhabitants particularly the upper and middle classes, who, in contrast to them, had more. A deeper look into this event, as mentioned in the column of *Sanjivani* (24 August, 1911) does reveal to us the fact that crimes in the slum areas of contemporary Calcutta were a form of class conflict where the upper classes of society were attacked by the poverty-stricken lower classes. As Suranjan Das has pointed out the slums in contemporary Calcutta were inhabited by poor Muslims while stately buildings were erected by the rich Marwari traders and often under the Calcutta Improvement Trust's development programme at the expense of the slums.⁴⁹

Certain acts were not criminalized by law but interpreted as social crimes. The relationship between poverty, gambling and extortion was highlighted in the press. They revealed the insecurities and material hardships that visited common people, especially the urban working class and the lower middle-classes. Unprotected by the colonial system and a hierarchical society, they tried to earn money by gambling or borrowing and thereby face ruin and violence.

⁴⁹Das, Suranjan, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, p. 62.

Nayak (23 November, 1911)⁵⁰ reported cases of gambling that ruined poor people and went unpunished since they were tolerated by law. It emphasized the 'serious' growth of the cotton gambling habit in Calcutta, which involved speculating on the prices, and called for its early suppression. It reported that even women and boys were sometimes found playing, to their ruin. The names of certain areas were attached to particular kinds of gambling, among which Bara Bazaar deserved special mention. Since this form of gambling was legal and connected with speculations characteristic of colonial capitalism, the lure of money enticed even the poor and the disempowered, including women and children, to engage in them and thereby lose their savings or earnings. *Satya Sanatan Dharma*⁵¹ (26 October, 1911) said, in its Calcutta Notes that the Calcutta market was dull. Its sales were decreasing. Open gambling known as opium, cotton, ring or picture games was rife everywhere. It was not illegal and so illiterate people could not be protected from them. The paper remarked that there was hardly any 'respectable' man who was not sorry to see poor people thus robbed but the situation was hopeless.

Extortions by the Kabuliwalas, migrant traders and moneylenders who were themselves a part of the cosmopolitan city working-class and the urban underbelly, on the lower middle-classes and the poor were also a recurring problem. *Basumati* (28 October, 1911)⁵² wrote that 'the Kabuli oppression' was increasing in Calcutta. Two Kabulis were sentenced to imprisonment for having assaulted a woman. In another case, three Kabulis were fined, and in another, one Kabuli had been bound down. The paper demanded to know why the Government did not strike at the root of Kabuli oppression in Bengal. We learn from newspapers that Mr Halliday, the

⁵⁰*Nayak*, 23 November, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵¹*Satya Sanatan Dharma*, 26 October, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵²*Basumati*, 28 October, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

Commissioner of the Calcutta Police, ordered all Kabulis to be deprived of their lathis and this order was to be carried out. But inspite of this measure, Kabulis were reportedly seen carrying big lathis in Calcutta streets. The paper highlighted the harassment of Kabuli moneylenders but like the colonial state, did not question the practice of moneylending itself. By holding a section of migrant moneylenders and traders as a major source of oppressive extortions on borrowers, the paper did not speak of other sources of extortions that visited ordinary people on a daily basis, namely the wider oppressions of the colonial capitalists and the urban rich of Indian origin.

Policing

The colonial system, including policing and the law and order machinery drew their share of criticism. Papers accused them of harassing innocents, of not doing their duty and of grave misconduct and corruption. *Nayak* (30 August, 1911)⁵³ sarcastically asked its readers if anyone knew of a Hari Singh. The paper wrote that Hari Singh was a great man. He had apparently been let off by the Calcutta High Court judges after being accused by the police of illegal gambling. The paper also remarked that the Calcutta Police had fallen in love with Hari Singh and constantly watched his movements. Recently he was arrested in the Calcutta race ground on a charge of being drunk and disorderly, but was subsequently released. Two or three hours after this incident he was re-arrested, and a Mahajan stood bail for him. After that he was prosecuted on a certain charge under orders from the Deputy Commissioner of Police. In this connection, Hari Singh was kept confined on the ground floor of the Police Court like an ordinary prisoner. The newspaper reported that the case was subjudice. The paper questioned why the police hadn't prosecuted him? If he was guilty then the police might have punished and deported him. But when there was no charge against him, the

⁵³ *Nayak*, 30 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

paper questioned why his house was searched many times and why he was being arrested anywhere and everywhere.

The increasing political violence waged from anti-colonial quarters that were taking place in Calcutta, during 1911-12, worried the police force as well as sections of the press. From the report of *Nayak* (24 June 1911)⁵⁴ we come to know that a certain detective officer, of the Calcutta Police had gone almost mad out of fear for his life. Another officer in Calcutta was reported to be in a state of great nervous tension. Many other policemen were also reported to be in a same plight. But if this was the condition of the policemen, the paper wondered how they would be able to catch the 'anarchists'? The paper was of the opinion that peace could not be restored unless a radical reform was made in the police and abler men were recruited into the service. The paper, displaying a loyalist tone in this context, demanded more policing and repression.

However, it also tried to prove the opposite by publishing letters on police harassment. The activities of the nationalists were under the continuous vigilance of the colonial police force in the city and led to complaints. The nationalist leaders often accused them of persecution. *Nayak* (9 July, 1911)⁵⁵ published a letter written by Maulavi Liakat Hossain in which the writer said that he was 'intensely harassed' by the detective police on charge of holding swadeshi meetings and leading Swadeshi processions. He mentioned a case in Koomartuli where two detectives greatly disturbed him by joining his procession. One of them, he narrated, mixed with the company of singers on the pretext of singing with them and made some of the singers leave the party by whispering something into their ears. The writer was told by one of the singers that the man had been threatening him with danger if the

⁵⁴*Nayak*, 24 June, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵⁵*Nayak*, 9 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

singers continued to be in the procession. The writer asserted that it was the duty of the detectives to watch everything but their role of interference in Swadeshi meetings and processions was questionable. According to him, it was the detectives and others like the who sometimes created unrest and disturbance.

Sanjivani(27 July, 1911)⁵⁶ focused on the corruption amongst the policemen of Calcutta during this period. A ‘respectable man’ wrote in the paper that every month some Calcutta Police constables came to his shop for having money order forms filled up for them. These constables got Rs 10 or Rs 12 per month from the Government, but they sent home Rs 30 every month. The writer reported that carriages running from Kalighat to Calcutta and bullock carts plying in Barabazar, Hatkhola, and other business quarter of the city, had to pay 1 pice to the beat constable for each trip . The writer requested the Commissioner of Police to enquire into the matter. The personnel of the colonial army, who were seen as an extended arm of policing, were not trusted as bearers of the legal order either. *Nayak* (25 December, 1911)⁵⁷ reported that in a soldier’s tent on the Calcutta Maidan a seller of Kala madhu (plantain honey) was robbed of six bottles of the article by ten or twelve soldiers. They divided the contents of the bottles amongst themselves but on being asked for the price by the seller, they told him to depart at once and even sprinkled some water on him. The notice of the authorities was drawn to the matter.

Religion and communal tensions also brought the issue of policing to the fore. The Calcutta Police’s interference with religious observances was questioned by *Bangavasi*(16 July, 1911)⁵⁸. The paper

⁵⁶*Sanjivani*, 27 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵⁷*Nayak*, 25 December, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁵⁸*Bangavasi*, 16 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

remarked that the order of the Calcutta Police prohibiting sankirtan or procession on the day of the Ratha Yatra festival, of that year, after 10 P.M was actually an interference in religious matters. It questioned whether the order was issued with the sanction of the Viceroy and the Lieutenant Governor. Communal tensions and their suppression united and divided the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* press in their interpretations of events. *Rangpur Darpan* (5 July, 1911)⁵⁹ noticed that the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal had rewarded with a present of money in cash, two inspectors of the Calcutta Police for the ‘good work’ they did in connection with the suppression of the last Bakr- Id riots. The paper was satisfied with policing measures and remarked that to reward the deserving and punish the guilty brought the policy of administration into conformity with the rules of justice. Thus the policy of rewarding the police earned praise. *Nayak*(28 June,1911),⁶⁰ in contrast, with a characteristic Hindu communal approach, felt less policing and protection of rich Marwaris were at the root of troubles. It reported that Mr Halliday, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, had been called to Simla. The paper suspected that it was in connection with the last Bakr-Id riots in Calcutta, that Mr Halliday had been summoned. The paper wrote that it was rumored that on receiving a petition from the Marwaris who were robbed during those riots, the Secretary of State for India, ordered an enquiry. However, having itself engaged in rumour-mongering, the paper also pointed out, that the truth of such rumours was questionable. The paper tried to show rich Marwari traders as victims and their poor Muslim neighbours as victimizers. The mention of a case of communal tension is also seen in *Samay* (7 July, 1911)⁶¹ which showed that gambling, poverty and eruption of sectarian violence were inter-connected. The paper

⁵⁹*Rangpur Darpan*, 5 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶⁰*Nayak*, 28 June, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶¹*Samay*, 7 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

requested the Commissioner of Calcutta Police to enquire into the recent assault and loot committed by certain Muslims in Cross Street. It was alleged that the refusal of the Marwaris to pay money won by the Muslims in 'rain gambling' was the cause of this disturbance. Suranjan Das has pointed out the antagonistic relationship between Marwari traders and Urdu-speaking Muslims in the Burrabazar-Chitpur-Harrison Road area had erupted in Calcutta during the 1910 Bakr Id riots. After the Bakr Id riots many of the rich Marwaris had dismissed their Muslim syces, coachmen, etc as a result of which many of these poor Muslim workers were deprived of their livelihood. Once again in 1911 under the CIT's land clearance programme many of the Muslim slums were cleared off and large mansions were built in their places the rich Marwaris. Such incidents bred social conflict and formed the root of Muslim-Marwari antagonism.⁶²

The distance and dislike between the police and the public led to declining responses to the recruitment drive of the city police force. *Sulabh Samachar* (4 August, 1911)⁶³ published the Commissioner of Calcutta Police's report to highlight the problems facing the police. In his report Mr Halliday pointed out that the number of desertions from the ranks of the force was going up every year and recruitment, too, was becoming increasingly difficult. He wondered why there was this disinclination to accept service in the police. According to this report it was to be attributed to the disfavour with which the public viewed the police. People were always on the look-out to find its faults and never praised it for the 'good works' they did and still professed to be anxious for a reformed police force. Mr Halliday in his report pointed out that people showed strong disapprobation if anyone known or connected to them entered the police, 'the fact of his being in

⁶² Das Suranjan, *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-1947*, P 62.

⁶³ *Sulabh Samachar*, 4 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

the police was in itself sufficient to lower him in the public estimation'. According to him, this 'indiscriminate habit of looking down on the police', made the police reforms impossible by keeping away educated men from the service. Mr. Halliday's report, as reported in the press, thus revealed the fact that ordinary citizens, including educated middle-classes of contemporary Calcutta maintained a certain distance from the police. To them, the colonial police force was an oppressive apparatus. The relationship that existed between them and the police was a blend of fear and distaste.

Apart from wider political and social issues, the inconvenience caused by police regulations on a daily basis increased the gap between the police and the public. From *Bangavasi* (12 August, 1911),⁶⁴ we come to know about the new traffic regulation of the Calcutta Police adversely affected common people and their enforcement could lead to harassment. The paper felt that the rule against persons walking on or along a carriage way in any street where there were footpaths, ought not to have been made so stringent. The rush of people on footpaths often obliged people to take to the carriage-way. The footpaths were often blocked by peddlers' stalls, bags and boxes belonging to tradesman, according to the paper, which obliged people to leave the pavements for the carriage way. A writer to the *Bengalee* (5 September, 1911)⁶⁵ invited attention towards a case where a constable on duty in the Strand Road arrested one Khagendranath Chatterjee of Behala since the 'unfortunate man' was returning from the Hindusthan Bank after having cashed a cheque of Rs 20, and because he was staring at everything on the road. He was arrested but subsequently discharged on giving an account of himself. The writer concluded by

⁶⁴*Bangavasi*, 12 August, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶⁵*Bengalee*, 5 September, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

asking who was responsible for the harassment of an innocent man.

The racist harassment inflicted by Calcutta Police on innocent bystanders on the eve of the King-Emperor's visit, was reported in the press. *Hitavadi* (8 December, 1911) complained that the police prevented native gentlemen dressed in Dhoti from walking along the Red Road. The paper reported that the police regulation required people who walked along that road to be decently dressed. It questioned whether the Dhoti was less decent than the half naked dress of the Scottish Highlanders or football players who were freely allowed to walk along that route. Referring to an alleged incident on the Maidan published by *The Statesman*, in which certain Indian ladies were roughly handled by the police on the day of the King Emperor's departure from Calcutta, *Basumati*(13 January,1912)⁶⁶ remarked that it was needless to say that people had been astounded to hear the report of this inhuman and cowardly conduct. The paper requested Sir Fredrick Halliday, on behalf of the entire Bengali community, to enquire into the incident. Reports of such misconduct on part of the Calcutta Police was also published in the column of *Samay*(12 January,1912).⁶⁷ Cases from personal knowledge were written in the paper in which police used their sticks freely on the crowd assembled on the Maidan to see the King-Emperor. On the day of the royal arrival, some people were pushed by constables near the Government House gates; some European constables were seen, thrashing with sticks, the crowd near Princep's Ghat. The paper remarked that there might have been something in the conduct of the crowd to try the temper of the police but inspite of that, the Indians were not cats and dogs to be treated with with such ignominy. Thus a section of the Bengali press criticized the

⁶⁶*Basumati*,13 January,1912, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶⁷*Samay*,12 January,1912, *Report on Native Press*.

brutality of the colonial police on the public and by focusing on incidents of racist humiliation, demonstrated the unbridgeable gap between the colonizers and the colonized.

Courts and Justice

Courts, the epitome of colonial law and order, were perceived as arbiters of justice but necessarily its source. Complaints on their slow functioning, racist interpretation of law and miscarriage of justice were common and revealed yet another aspect of the way colonial subjects perceived colonial governance. Sometimes, the press praised judges who were seen as protecting Indian interests and were seen as a bulwark against police repression.

Barisal Hitaishi (10 April,1911)⁶⁸ referred to a case in which a young man from a *bhadralok* background, Khagendra Nath Das of Bakarganj, was accused of sedition. He was prosecuted under Section 109 of Criminal Procedure Code and was required to furnish securities for good behaviour by the Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta. The paper praised the Magistrate for having observed in the course of his judgement that his sympathy was with the accused. According to the Magistrate, had this young man been properly guided, he might have turned out to be a useful member of the society. Fortunately as the boy was very young, the Magistrate hoped that there was still time for improvement. The paper praised the judge for being lenient and remarked that the Magistrate had realized that unnecessary repression defeated its own purpose. Contemporary Calcutta witnessed a hitch between the two administrative apparatus of the colonial Government-the police and the court. The press sided with the Court against the police. *Bengalee*(14 July,1911)⁶⁹ published a news of the *Times* newspaper's attack on the judges of the Calcutta High Court on

⁶⁸*Barisal Hitaishi*, 10 April,1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁶⁹*Bengalee*, 14 July,1911, *Report on Native Press*.

the ground of their having dispensed justice in strict and unflinching accordance with the law in the Howrah gang case, untroubled by any thought of how their judgement might affect the credit of the Indian police. Against this attack of the *Times* on the judges of the Calcutta High Court, *Bengalee* (14 July, 1911) replied that a more brazen act of contempt of the court would have been difficult to contemplate, and hoped that the Government would take steps to bring this blatant mockery of justice to its senses. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (15 July, 1911)⁷⁰ while commenting on the same issue, stated that it was the police who made a muddle of the Howrah gang case and yet the High Court was blamed for it. In conclusion it wrote that the *Times* had at last constituted itself as an organ of the Indian Police and that it had fallen so low as to abuse the learned judges of the Calcutta High Court for their sake.

Racial discriminations before Law in the colonial setup were also reported. Referring to the Cowan case in the Calcutta Police Court, *Nayak* (16 January, 1912)⁷¹ remarked one Mr Cowan evaded the 'sunset' rule of the Permanent Settlement quite boldly because he was an European; he escaped with a fine of Re 1 only. *Bangavasi* (27 January, 1912)⁷² wondered if a sentence of six months imprisonment and a small fine for an European accused of coolie killing was sufficient. The principal accused, one P. Williams, was charged before Mr Keays, Presidency Magistrate, Calcutta for having kicked a coolie to death.

The administration of the judiciary was a source of criticism and praise among the Indian propertied classes. Speedy resolution of court cases was much desired by the upper and middle class public.

⁷⁰*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷¹*Nayak*, 16 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷²*Bangavasi*, 27 January, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

Hitavarta (6 July, 1911)⁷³ referred to a Bill that was introduced in the House of Commons which empowered the Secretary of State for India to increase the number of judges in the Calcutta High Court. The paper hoped that the Bill would soon be passed into law. *Noakhali Sammilani* (10 April, 1911)⁷⁴ in view of the contemporary congestion of cases in the High Court of Calcutta, suggested that additional judges were needed to be appointed in order to dispose of the pending cases. *Hitavadi* (15 March, 1912)⁷⁵ reported, with a note of satisfaction that new arrangements had been made by the authorities for trying juvenile offenders in the Calcutta Police Court. *Hitavarta* (21 April, 1912)⁷⁶ observed that the proposed removal of the Police Court from Lal Bazar to the Military Secretariat Building in the Esplanade would cause much inconvenience to the litigants of Bara Bazar.

These wider concerns and opinions voiced in the press, revealed how colonial law functioned in paradoxical ways while upholding colonialism as a system. At the same time, a specific anxiety gripped the public imagination. It came in the form of a rumour concerning the judiciary. Yet, the underlined tension stemmed from the shift of capital from Calcutta to Delhi. A rumour was afloat that Alipur would cease to be the headquarters of the 24 parganas district. The rumored abandonment of Alipur first came up in the *Sanjivani* (28 March, 1912)⁷⁷ which reported that all civil and criminal court's work at Alipur was to be divided between Barrackpore and Diamond Harbour. The paper protested against such a possibility and wrote that a removal of headquarters from Alipur would cause great inconvenience to the public and inflict serious loss

⁷³*Hitavarta*, 6 July, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷⁴*Noakhali Sammilani*, 10 April, 1911, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷⁵*Hitavadi*, 15 March, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷⁶*Hitavarta*, 21 April, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷⁷*Sanjivani*, 28 March, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

on Calcutta. Another rumor concerned the future of the Calcutta High Court itself. *Indian Empire* (13 February, 1912)⁷⁸ reported it was rumored that there was to be a split in the Calcutta High Court and that Bankipore was to have a separate High Court. *Bengalee* (23 April, 1912)⁷⁹ finally ended the rumor and published that the Calcutta High Court would remain under the Government of India. It added in a loyalist vein that it was glad that the Government of India had responded to the wishes of the local community in this matter.

The rumours of a complete loss of status for Calcutta through the truncating and removal of the judiciary were thus put to rest. Their circulation, however, proved that a segment of the city-dwellers and the regional public were worried that Calcutta would not only lose its significance as the capital of the British Empire in India, it would also lose the colonial institutions which had vested it with its distinct identity as a centre of colonial authority from the times of the English East India Company.

The working of the law courts and rumors surrounding them, the functioning of the city police department and escalating crime drew in and involved the rich and the poor alike. They reflected the inequalities and oppressions that underlined daily life in the city and were ignored by the colonizers and the privileged Indians. The latter complained about the colonial law and order machinery or sided with it in accordance with the social interests guiding them. Having said this, the gap between the colonizers and the colonized were also revealed through these spheres. They reflected an atmosphere of insecurity and anxiety in the city, compounded by the bigger picture of Calcutta's loss of status as the capital city of colonial India.

⁷⁸*Indian Empire*, 13 February, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

⁷⁹*Bengalee*, 23 April, 1912, *Report on Native Press*.

The shift of capital was a complex process to which the responses from the different quarters of Calcutta varied. Those who were concerned with possible material debacle awaiting the city in the future, gradually came to terms with the transfer. Massive protests were not registered in Calcutta against the transfer of capital as was to be seen during the anti partition movement of 1905-06. This was partially because of the lack of enthusiasm among the Bengali political leadership: the annulment of the partition in 1911 could be claimed by them as a victorious moment; consequently, they devoted little attention in the local or regional political spheres to the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi. The policy of transferring the capital met with opposition from a section of the British colonizers themselves. The colonial capitalist lobby regarded Calcutta as their creation and was thus unhappy at the idea that the seat of British power will be removed from the foremost colonial city of the Empire. Lord Curzon was one of the representative voices of this strand of European opinion.

The fear of economic prominence of the region with the loss of political status, also voiced by the European lobby, proved to be short-lived. Economically, as mentioned, Calcutta continued to be the commercial capital of India till the end of the First World War. Though Bombay became the centre of high finance after the war, the monopolistic Scottish managing agency houses and trading capital based in Calcutta succeeded in maintaining comfortable profit margins till the coming of the Great Depression.

Certain developments in Calcutta in the post partition period (1905-11) came to have direct or indirect connections with the transfer. One such development was the formation of the Calcutta Improvement Trust

in 1911. It can be argued that the establishment of this body at the time of transfer also allayed the fear of impending urban decay through loss of funds in certain quarters. The daily life of Calcutta during 1911-1912 demonstrated that the transfer did not leave its mark on common people; their conditions remained largely untouched by the transfer. It was evident that certain aspects of everyday living inherited from the past were likely to persist. While the transfer was taking place, the interface between colonial law and order and everyday life of common people in the city continued as before. The press and the public sphere during 1911-12 displayed an array of critical and laudatory attitudes towards colonial authorities. They also revealed that opinion was divided on Calcutta's declining importance in the imperial map. However exceptional incidents, specifically related to the transfer itself, found their way into the public sphere represented by the press. Attendant issues of racism and police high-handedness received critical attention.

The working of the law courts and rumours surrounding them, the functioning of the city police department and the discrepancies in the urban material infrastructure reflected the inequalities and oppressions that underlined daily life in the city. These were ignored by the colonizers and privileged Indians. The latter complained bitterly about the colonial law and order machinery or sided with it in accordance with the social interests guiding them. The gap between the colonizers and the colonized were also revealed through these spheres. They reflected an atmosphere of insecurity and anxiety in the city, compounded by the larger picture of Calcutta's loss of status as the capital city of colonial India even if the transfer did not generate any militant political or social protest.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twentieth century Calcutta indeed underwent a phase of transition. In some aspects this was dynamic and in other aspects the changes were slow moving and showed signs of continuities. This is reflected in my chapters. Calcutta was a satellite city developed by the colonial rulers to serve their own interests. They had no real intention to develop the city on principles of public welfare or by keeping the welfare of all their subjects in mind. Diseases, burden of heavy taxation, suspicion of ordinary and political crimes made life of ordinary people insecure. All segments of the Indian population in the city were affected by the policies of the colonial government. The urban poor were hardest hit by such policies. They were exploited and suppressed through evictions and other means and under pressure had to take recourse to crime and were criminalized and hounded by colonial law in the process.

Crimes like petty theft, dacoities, gambling and murders marked the everyday life of the city. In many cases crime in the early twentieth century city was found to be patriarchal in character. The series of murders of prostitutes, attests this fact. Contemporary literature shows how gambling became a deep rooted social phenomenon. The system of colonial policing was geared towards containment of its crime rather than remove its social roots. The judicial machinery was often perverted according to the needs of the ruling class.

The time frame of this research encompasses a critical period in the city's history. At the onset of the twentieth century, daily life in the city was moved by the currents of political events. For the first time the city came to be influenced by political radicalism. As a result of this the Bengali middle class *bhadraloks* of the city became political criminals in the eyes of the colonial rulers. They were suspected of increasingly getting involved in militant anticolonial activities. An inevitable result of the mutual distrust between the sections of the colonised and the colonial rulers house searches and arrests of middle class gentlemen came to characterise the daily life of the city for the first time. The city streets saw political protests and murders of government servants. That city politics could take a militant anti colonial turn initially surprised the British rulers. This kind of political turmoil had never been witnessed by the city before. Violence and counter violence became a striking feature of the city's everyday life and politics.

The first decade of the twentieth century also saw the spread of diseases of various kinds which took a huge toll on the city population e.g. Plague that were manifest for the

first time during this period. Older diseases like cholera, tuberculosis etc. continued to affect the health of the city. Had the colonial rulers given attention to public health and hygiene of their subjects, these diseases could have been successfully eradicated. Limited resource allocation, under developed laboratories, lack of initiative on part of the city's upper and middle classes to extend health care facilities among urban poor had rendered Calcutta a disease ridden city. The female mortality rate was especially high. Lack of hospitals for women, dearth of women doctors and above all shortage of funds intermingled with other social issues had resulted in higher death among women. Although from the mid 18880s under the auspices of the Dufferin Fund, a few women's hospitals emerged across the Indian subcontinent, but they were removed from the city. The colonial rulers kept the deadly diseases confined to the Indian quarters only.

At the turn of the twentieth century there were certain urban infrastructural developments. These developments touched the rich and poor among Indian inhabitants in different ways. Though these developments sought to offer improved facilities to the city population in reality they benefitted the European sections of the city populace only. The Indian propertied classes were under a heavy burden of direct taxation. So the infrastructural developments in the first decade of the twentieth century were resented by the Indian rate payers of the city. There was a continuous urge among them to form a rate payer's association which would act as a platform to channelize their grievances against the colonial rulers. The beginning of the twentieth century saw massive disruption of the city's urban order. Many new roads, parks and tanks were constructed at the sites of demolished *bastis*. This period saw large scale demolition of the city's slums without any proper rehabilitation offered to the slum dwellers. They were forced to take shelter outside the city. The urban poor were largely removed from entire areas owing to the urban policies of the colonial government. So the infrastructural developments that took place never helped at helping the impoverished majority. In contrast the European section of the population could reap benefit from the improved infrastructure and municipal facilities.

The early twentieth century was also a phase of transition for the European community living in the colonial metropolis. By this time a well defined European public sphere had emerged in Calcutta. European ladies were seen to become more active in this sphere than in the previous century. From a commercial point of view the colonial business class had undertaken new ventures during this time. The city also saw an emerging real estate business in which the Europeans were the major actors. Driven by the fear of diseases, the European building pattern also underwent certain structural changes in the first

decade of the twentieth century. The social life and social relations of the Europeans in the city were guided by the principles of strict racial segregation. The advertisements in English owned news- papers also conformed to this same principle, striking on racial exclusivity of the advertised products. This sense of superiority sprang up as an invariable result of European political dominance. European life in Calcutta underwent certain socio organisational and cultural changes. The changing role of white women and the change in taste for consumer products, as reflected in colonial advertisements indicated certain mutations in the daily life of the colonizers.

Finally, the transfer of capital from Calcutta to New Delhi (1912) at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century gave a death blow to the prestige of Calcutta it had long enjoyed as ‘ the second city of the British empire’. Although no major impact of the transfer was felt in the everyday life of the city in an immediate sense, yet the long term impact on the city became evident in the following decades. The shift of capital was a complex process. The responses from different quarters were varied. Certain developments in Calcutta in the post- partition (1905) period came to have a direct or indirect connection with the transfer. One such development was the establishment of the Calcutta Improvement Trust in 1911. The formation of this body at the time of transfer allayed the fear of impending urban decay through loss of funds among the rich. Overwhelmed by the issue of annulment of Partition, Calcutta did not register militant political or social protest in the immediate pre or post transfer days.

The first decade of the twentieth century definitely was a phase of transition for the city and the people alike. The physical profile of the city underwent massive changes during this decade. The life style of the people also underwent certain changes. Grievances against the colonial rulers began to accumulate within the minds of the propertied classes of the city, whose interests were adversely affected by the policies of the government. Those whose interests remained untouched by the government policies, remained loyal to the ruling authorities or were silent. The elite or middle classes of the city remained more or less indifferent to the problems of the urban poor. The city in the first decade of the twentieth century saw increasing deterioration of the living condition of the urban poor . But it was on their labour that the city survived and expanded. Yet this reality was largely ignored.

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